

Revisiting the ‘Problem’ of Anthropomorphism through Ceridwen Dovey’s *Only the Animals* (2014)

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When I am playing with my cat, who knowes whether she have more sport in dallying with me, than I have in gaming with her? We entertaine one another with mutuall apish trickes. If I have my hour to begin or to refuse, so hath she hers. (Montaigne)

Thinking from the perspective of animals, as performed by Ceridwen Dovey in her short story collection *Only the Animals* (2014), is often unfairly dismissed as crude anthropomorphism – an unsophisticated act reserved for children’s stories. This paper defends narrating from a non-human animal perspective, not as a radical act, but as a move to reinvigorate our conceptions of human-animal relations. It would be remiss to deny the limitations that anthropomorphism entails. Even so, imaginative visions of the lives of non-human animals need not be completely rejected as facile. Rather, we can understand a continuum between human and non-human animals through the empathy-building involved in animal mediations. The imaginative experiments of Dovey’s *Only the Animals* have some implications for us as human animal subjects. The stories are exemplars of human and non-human ontologies together and apart, continuing some thoughts on animals and representation in J. M. Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello*.

Formal patterning is key to Dovey’s rendering of animal perspective. The stories often reverse the human gaze on the animal present in canonical writings: this focus on perspective offers an opportunity to question human/non-human opposition and to evoke momentary human and non-human animal subject co-formation. But the repeated threads also offer insight into the ensuing paradoxes that reside within human/animal relationships. Broadly, these concern

the paradoxes of love versus abhorrence and understanding versus incomprehension: communication and affect are always central considerations of agential animal representation (Tiffin 5).

The narratives in *Only the Animals* are linked by three motifs. First, a now-deceased animal – an animal soul, as it were – narrates a chronological memoir of their life events, including intimation of their own death. Second, each of these animal stories intersects with a famed literary style or author, some more traceable than others. Henry Lawson's camel, Colette's cat, Franz Kafka's chimp, Himmeler's dog influenced by Gunter Grass and Hermann Hesse, a mussel channelling Jack Kerouac, a pet tortoise owned first by Tolstoy, then Virginia Woolf and finally George Orwell, an elephant life embedded in simulations of African oral storytelling, a dolphin epistolary to Sylvia Plath, a bear framed in fairy tale and a deceased parrot all feature. Third, is the unifying principle of setting. All stories are situated in major human conflicts or war zones: nineteenth-century colonial invasion of Australia; First World War France and Germany; Second World War Germany and the Pearl Harbour attack in 1941; the Cold War space race in the 1960s; the Mozambique civil war in the late eighties; Bosnia in the early nineties; Iraq in 2003; and Lebanon in 2006. The chronological stories evoke a century of unrelenting acts of human violence and expose the impact of this violence beyond the human domain. Dovey exploits the short story form, presenting multiple, intersecting voices to enhance the presentation of animal lives. In framing such lives as posthumous autobiography, Dovey foregrounds a lingual and spectral quality that both complicates and enables animal agency.

These three tropes: animals, war and the literary may, at first glance, seem incongruous. But as Tom Tyler states, the 'majority of [human] encounters with animals are not immediate but are *mediated* . . . we meet most animals by means of *representations*' (3–4, emphasis in the original). Dovey is making the connections between animals and stories overt through textual self-referentiality. In creating agential, empathic animal narrators engaging with authors of past animal fiction, Dovey's work pivots around the two concepts central, as Helen Tiffin has argued (47), in destabilising both human exceptionalism and complex use of anthropomorphism: emotion and language. The provision of language to animals implies an interrogation of the limits of realism central to other Australian 'animal writers', such as J. M. Coetzee. Dovey's recent book length essay on the significance of Coetzee's writing to her own life and work foregrounds his postmodern, non-realist reflexivity as key to lay 'bare the way the fictional selves are constructed . . . to critique the enterprise of empire' (*On J. M. Coetzee* 24–25). This paper reads Dovey's deployment of textual self-referentiality and overt intersection with Coetzee's work in *Only the Animals* as a reflexive writing form that works to critique another representational

dispossession: that of anthropocentric realism. As Leigh Dale suggests, Dovey places her ‘spotlight . . . on the cultural and theoretical questions raised by the conjunction of death, animality and the problem of telling stories’, an exploration of the animal energised through an intense intertextual self-referentiality (36). In arguing this, I am aligning my reading with a broader defence of anthropomorphism within literary animal studies as an empathic stylistic. Reflexivity is crucial to *Only the Animals*, whose often second-person narrators meditate on human conflict zones with varying degrees of understanding, but do not define their own existences through militarised or competitive terms. Instead, their subjectivity is defined through and interwoven with various others: human and non-human. The inclusion of war settings ironises myths of human exceptionalism and superiority, reducing the vaunted worth of the very competitive and scientific discourses which render animals through ‘a militarized economy that structures life as a struggle in a war zone of competitors [and] enemies’ (Despret 34). *Only the Animals* stages human/non-human animal relationships in locations where the non-human animal is so often silenced. Despite their obvious contrivance, the stories expose the complicity, dependence, mutually-informing identities and, simultaneously, distance between human and non-human animals. Each story imagines an animal’s benign (and impossible) attempt to make sense of human violence and of animals’ continued existential urge in response to and beyond human acts.

The review responses to Dovey’s fiction raise the issue of anthropomorphism in relation to the accuracy of the collection’s depiction of animal interiority (see, for example, O’Brien and Cadman). As Sam Cadman states: ‘Here each animal protagonist is an unashamedly literary, anthropomorphised invention, with physical and behavioural characteristics of its species grafted on’ (54). Animal autobiography has been depicted as a kind of paradox, threaded with a sentimentalism that can characterise animal protection discourses yet perpetuate anthropocentrism and the centrality of language (Hansen 207). Sentimentalism and anthropomorphism are tinged with a similar critique, of irrational, excessive connectedness, on the one hand, and, conversely, depriving animals of a distinct existence, ‘potentially absorbing and thus again annihilating animal presence’ (Tiffin 43). In literary animal studies and ecocriticism, anthropomorphism is recognised as problematic for the aforementioned reasons, but there is also considerable discussion of its use as a strategy to enable animal representational presence (Herman, *Narratology Beyond the Human* 5–6). Val Plumwood presents compelling arguments for a nuanced use and reading of anthropomorphism. She argues that the pejorative connotations of anthropomorphism and sentimentality are deployed more to police the human/animal boundary (Plumwood, *Environment and Culture* 17) than to protect animal distinctiveness and

presence and, importantly, can be used to evoke a sympathy and agency far preferable to the ignoring of animal subjectivity that the refusal of anthropomorphism entails (Plumwood, *Eye of the Crocodile* 66–68). Philip Armstrong sees literary works as often containing ‘traces’ of the material human animal relationship that eschew both the privileging of the human possession of rationalism and the destabilisation of the Cartesian reduction of the animal to ‘mindless automaton’ (7–8). Such studies deploy a sophisticated definition of anthropomorphism that questions the device as a necessarily reductive allegory for human concerns. As Kenyon-Jones suggests: ‘If it is impossible for humans to reach or represent the ‘real’ animal anyway, is science (with its claim to objectify animals) likely to bring us any closer to them than art (which can at least attempt to treat them as subjects)?’ (7). Armstrong supports Kenyon-Jones’s suspicion of empirical and scientific dismissal of anthropomorphism, noting that the pejorative connotations of the term emerge from ‘anthropocentric and ethnocentric understandings of what agency is’ (3). To be compelling from a critical animal studies perspective, the significance of animal lives beyond human imperatives must be foregrounded. Dovey’s anthropomorphic animal autobiographies are an articulation of the animal beyond human designs. Her writing evokes an animal agency to present, as Armstrong would put it, the ‘material influence of the non-human animal upon humans, and vice versa’ (3), challenging the primacy of Cartesian reason and its accompanying literary expression: realism. Through such critical positioning, Dovey’s animals can be read as reflexive authors of their own material lives and past interactions with humans. In speaking from the grave about their experiences in war torn settings they evoke a corporeal materiality, demanding empathic response to their suffering and subjectivity which is predicated on the overt acknowledgement of the necessity of fictional representation. These are no saccharine or allegorical animals.

This is because none of Dovey’s animals are what Greg Garrard calls crudely anthropomorphic, a kind of Disney or Beatrix Potter style simulation of human moral fables (154). Only two, in an allusion to Kafka’s chimpanzees, wear clothes. And these two do so only with considerable irony. Hazel, a chimpanzee, states of her trainer’s exercises: ‘What use is this body to anyone? . . . Calisthenics, she calls them, for a new body. I do what she says, for the ginger biscuits. They make my shit dark and hard’ (48). Corporeal immediacy trumps human cultural tropes. Hazel, trapped in starvation conditions in Germany, 1917, reflects: ‘My ears are pierced with metal studs to make me beautiful. I can pull on stockings without laddering them. But there are no longer any stockings to be had’ (57).

All Dovey’s animal narrators have this capacity for complex thoughts, used

to observe and critique human behaviour with ironic reflection. In so doing they arguably meet Karla Armbruster's criteria regarding the literary representation of animals: accuracy has less significance, she argues, than the human conceptions of animals signified in the representation and the material consequences of that mode of thought (cited in De Mello 10). Simons agrees, admitting a clear distinction between representation and reproduction: 'How can we dissociate ourselves from ourselves and enter an animal world? Of course, we cannot but we can imagine and speculate' (7). Such caveats trouble realism's capacity to present agential, empathic animal subjects.

As Catherine Parry suggests, the realist novel form has a vested interest in concealment of its own artifice and in making opaque certain animal sufferings at the hands of humans (10). Because we (humans and animals) do not share language, writers risk presenting animals in narrative modes that reinforce a Cartesian image of 'mindless flesh' (Parry 135). Through her analysis of Yann Martel's *Beatrice and Virgil*, Parry argues that narrative realism can be 'a process of taxidermy – the drawing of skin over voids, dissimulations, and edges . . . consolation and concealment . . . of the real horror of pain' (139). It is vital that Dovey's narrators are fabular animals, presenting animal interests through a call to empathy and a suggestion of relationality. The 'consolatory thinking', in Anat Pick's terms, that would excuse and obscure the exploitation of animals (11) is disrupted and the narrated 'I' in each story is not an empty vessel to carry an anthropocentric signified.

Armstrong suggests that the critique of such allegorical animals is central to literary animal studies and calls for a pursuit of the textual animal beyond 'projections' of human interests and 'designs' (2). Simons pre-empts Armstrong's representational ethics, arguing that the key to evoking animals' interests is to accept that 'reproduction' of true animal experience is beyond us; suggesting instead a focus on anthropomorphism's ability to articulate human/non-human likeness and relationships (disempowering and positive) (139). In Dovey's work the human and animal characters exist in tandem in ways that are not always consciously articulated by both parties. The animal narrators are, for all intents and purposes, 'revenants', compelled to tell their stories of connection, misunderstanding, indifference and betrayal at the hands of human beings.¹ As Simons argues, relationality can allow closer approximation to animal sentience, subjectivity and agency (117). And the representation of sympathy (animal to human, human to animal) via anthropomorphism is a literary device to desta-

¹There are dangers in a relational argument, as Fudge (*Animal* 80–84) has established, the dominant representation of dog figures in film and literature, for example, is a form of relationality invested with anthropocentric assumptions of human mastery. 'Good' dogs adore the master, happily co-existing in a dominion duality. There is some acceptance of such relationality in Dovey's canine representation.

bilise Cartesian dominance (Armstrong 12–14). Relational anthropomorphism, then, simultaneously concerns and questions the authentic presence of the represented animal evoking an empathetic, relational figuration.

Animals and Metaphor

Metaphor and allegory are central to the question of the animal agency that is possible in anthropomorphic representation. Animals can disappear in the service of humans; they provide sustenance but in the process their lives (and suffering) are made invisible, ‘absent referents’ lost in the production of material ‘meat’ to employ Carol Adams’s framework (20–22). Our vocabularies and representations work similarly to erase the animal, making animals ‘human surrogates’, didactic tropes to explore human follies (Tiffin 36–37). This process also operates to reinforce the human/animal distinction at the heart of animal exploitation, as Tiffin points out: ‘in phrases such as “to die like a dog” or to be treated or categorised “as an animal,” the implication is always that it is acceptable to treat animals but not humans in these ways’ (37).

In presenting human animal relations between two participating subjects (not a subject and a metaphor or absent referent), Dovey is complicating the problem of allegory as it occurs in much other fiction. A collapse of the allegorical use of the animal with the anthropocentric often occurs in fiction. Talking animals are infrequent entities, assumed to be the stuff of satire and children’s story. And yet, as Tiffin argues through the 1995 film *Babe*, when animals talk there is opportunity to cross genre boundaries and expectations. *Babe* impacted US pork sales precisely because of the explicit connection between cute little talking pigs, pork, and the permeable distinctions between pet, farm animal and human (Tiffin 40). Dovey is conducting a similar blurring of pet, guide, service provider, food and protagonist to trouble the presumptions of allegory in anthropomorphism.

Dovey raises both the literary and the spectral animal to examine the potential of fiction to evoke and enable human animal kinship, thereby alluding to another important Australian novel on ideas of the animal: J. M. Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello*. While there are no animals – anthropomorphised or otherwise – directly present in *Elizabeth Costello*, its eponymous character, ‘a trader in fictions’, explores animal representation against lived experiences of animals in a modernity characterised by extreme violence (195). Coetzee’s transposition of his own Tanner lectures (1997–1998) into *Elizabeth Costello* suggests that a ‘fictional environment’ is a productive site to discuss animal suffering and human sympathy (Deen Schildgen 323). *Elizabeth Costello* inhabits similar terrain to Dovey’s *Only the Animals*: both figure the possibility of ‘represented’ animal as a transmitter of ideas about animal rights, and both texts connect

with Kafka's 'Report to the Academy' as a way into these debates. As Fiona Jenkins argues, Costello's intertextual allusions to animals and animal stories all evoke an empathic, yet strange kinship:

Costello herself in speaking of the ram, of the corpse, of the frogs and of Red Peter, is placed not as 'I' but as a hybrid body; she poses herself between life and death, resisting the demand to be one thing or another by asking 'what is it like to be?', thus exercising the calling of the writer as she understands it from Kafka (26).

Dovey's text shares with Coetzee's novel a textually self-referential focus on the act of imaging the self into another's existence.

Elizabeth Costello attempts to challenge an audience of university scholars and students to the realities of animal deaths through metaphor. First, she reverses the holocaust allegorical connections to animal butchery suggesting instead that: 'The crime of the Third Reich, says the voice of accusation, was to treat people like animals . . . Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty and killing which rivals anything the Third Reich was capable of' (65). Second, her address debunks the privileging of language and reason as determinants of anthropocentrism. She uses Kafka's Red Peter, a chimpanzee who chronicles his life of human abuses and misunderstanding, simultaneously as an allegory for her own vulnerability as aging female author, urgently running out of time to present her message (62, 70) and as allegory for Kafka himself as 'Jew performing for German gentiles' (62). In deploying such allegories, she deliberately extends a third reading, Red Peter beyond allegory, as 'speaking testimony' not just for human concerns but for the animal he is. To conduct this reading Elizabeth must understand herself and the chimpanzee Red Peter as like animals:

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

Elizabeth Costello is, in part, concerned with how the profundity of the horror of the lives of animals both disturbs and compels the capacity to articulate beliefs. As Jenkins argues, *Elizabeth Costello* resists notions of a stable (and exclusively human) 'representational power of language' (18). Instead, Elizabeth Costello as character stands as an attempt at a deeper empathy, glimpsing 'what it is like' to be another entity or animal: dead, dispersed or both (18).

Dovey actualises Elizabeth's Costello's assertion that fiction enables an interspecies empathy so that if she 'can think [her] way into the existence of a being that has never existed, then [she] can think [her] way [like Kafka] into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom [she] share[s] the substrate of life' (80). Dovey's extension of Kafka's vision is titled: 'Red Peter's Little Lady: Soul of a Chimpanzee. Died 1917, Germany'. The epistolary story is an imagined sequel to the events in Kafka's Red Peter's life and extends Kafka's brief allusion to a female chimp intended as his chimp narrator's partner, here named Hazel, in ways that continue to intervene in the 'theorising of animal subjectivity through literary experimentation' (Dale 37). This Red Peter, himself an intertextual allusion, recalls reading Martin Buber in bed with his human lover Evelyn during the affair that occurs before the time of narration. In this story, Hazel is far less developed in her modelling of human traits and language than Red Peter. A third, less active correspondent is Hazel's human trainer (and Red Peter's past lover: Evelyn Oberndorff). This vignette stages the limits of human empathy of the kind Costello articulates and the non-human animal response. Anthropomorphism becomes tragic in this story, in part through its epistolary structure, which allows a written appeal between a human and non-human subject (this direct interaction is not present in the other tales from the 'grave'). The trope of species relationality is heightened to evoke taboos of interspecies desire through intimation of a prior affair between Red Peter and Evelyn and Red Peter's repeated written advances to Evelyn to renew the relationship, advances that meet fever pitch by the stories' end: '[d]on't let us miss our chance, darling! Unlock this cage, let me out, let me into your bed!' (71). Such correspondence refuses exclusive representational rights to the human subject and the desire presented dissolves the very foundations of human/non-human separation. Dovey's choice of autobiographical form intimates a 'me who can be known' (Herman, *Narratology Beyond the Human* 190). And it refuses the failings of sympathy that Elizabeth Costello rages against. The denouement of the story is an unanswered letter written from a locked cage. This letter makes clear Red Peter's love for Evelyn, his disgust in the olfactory traces of Hazel and intimates Evelyn's intent to reduce Red Peter to a food source. In so doing, Dovey's story re-enacts, as David Herman identifies, the fraught relationship between Kafka's original chimp's past and future selves, the logical progression of Kafka's anthropomorphic experiment (*Narratology Beyond the Human* 192). In rejecting Hazel, Red Peter fails to see her increasing sophistication and is, in effect, repressing his own status as animal in training. Dovey depicts Red Peter failing to fully grasp that his own repression is what makes him most human, yet his corporeal status is what will forever exclude him from such a repressive human community (Herman,

Narratology Beyond the Human 192–93).

The animals in Dovey's stories serve not as mimesis of visceral creatural interiority, but rather, as an intellectual questioning of human animal relations and the limits of human reason, language and sympathy of the kind explored in the very differently structured novel *Elizabeth Costello*. The key difference lies in the representation of the anthropomorphised speaking animal subject. The short stories are what Simons would call 'strong anthropomorphism' (116), as opposed to fabled and trivial forms, trivial forms akin to what Garrard (154) would call crude anthropomorphism. Simons's definition of strong anthropomorphism is one that explores 'how the non-human experience differs from the human or to create profound questions in the reader's mind as to the extent to which humans and non-humans are really different' (118). This is stronger than apostrophe (Simons 4, 7, 88) where a human character addresses the animal, in which the animal is elevated but still mediated and compromised by human perspective. The process of apostrophe is critiqued by Elizabeth Costello through her examination of Ted Hughes's poems. She concludes that poems like 'The Jaguar' celebrate a kind of ecological primitivism, 'the record of an engagement' with an embodied energy that is part of human myths, 'human economy in which the animal has no share' (96). For Elizabeth Costello, Hughes's form of apostrophic address fails to recognise the mind or sentience of the animal subject. Hughes's poems conjure the animal not as addressee at all, but as mere object.

One of Dovey's animal narrators concurs with Costello on the limitations of Hughes's representation. The story 'A Letter to Sylvia Plath: Soul of a Dolphin. Died 2003, Iraq' is an indirect parody of Hughes, an animal address to an absent and unknowable human subject. Dovey's apostrophe reverses the direction of human to animal address and she, unlike Hughes, maintains the intimacy common in apostrophic love address and homage. The dolphin narrator, named 'Sprout' by the 'dumb naming policy' (210) of the US navy, is deeply empathetic to 'Dear Ms Plath' (203). This story is self-reflexive, even intra-textual: '[t]he other animals who have told their stories here are not as burdened by previous and often foolhardy attempts at cross-species communication as I am' (203). Through this textual self-referentiality, Sprout locates similar issues with Hughes to those posed by Elizabeth Costello:

I had admirably 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. I saw right through his mythologising process, the animal as symbol of the poet getting in touch with his deepest, wildest, most predatory instincts . . . Go forth, fish and fuck

yourself stupid, and you can thank me afterwards. We're all animals after all! . . . men . . . do tend to weave an intricate justification around any wrong doing. (204–05)

Dovey is repeating Costello's exploration of the limitations of animal ventriloquism. The intertextual relationship with *Elizabeth Costello* as a text is deepened when the dolphin alludes to her friendship and discussions with the soul of Elizabeth Costello herself, directly quoting the earlier novel to capture the fictional dolphin's conversations with the earlier fictional character (Dovey 207). Dovey's dolphin letter to Plath implies a push against the limits of realism as necessary to an empathetic animal representation. Its textual self-referentiality and posthumous dialogue between constructed characters articulates the form of 'kindness, in its full sense, an acceptance that we are all of one kind' (Coetzee 106) that Elizabeth Costello proposes. For Sprout is compelled to write to Plath out of what she felt was 'the deep connection to you as a fellow mother' (Dovey 207) as well as Plath's 'enormous creaturely satisfaction in [her] own body' (Dovey 208). This is, again, consistent with Simons's notion of strong anthropomorphism, in that the human/nonhuman relationality (as opposed to difference) works to evoke empathy.

As Juliana Schesari writes, we will always exist in language and mediation, thus it is not so much animal behaviour that needs creative and critical exploration but the relation between humans and animals: 'the modalities and ethics of human-animal interaction, the "economy" of the animal within human cultures' (4). Dovey's focus on the complexity, misunderstanding, love and repulsion in such relationships is continuous with the thought experiments evident in *Elizabeth Costello*. She contributes to a range of emergent fictive experiments to represent animal presence (rather than animals as metaphor) and to philosophically reflect on and question human exceptionalism through her inter-textual allusions and textual self-referentiality. The creation of the constructed anthropomorphic non-human voice invokes a preoccupation with speakers who perceive their identity as mutually formed with human subjects yet recognises the violence and repression implicit in human and non-human animal relations.

The Erosion of the Human/Nonhuman Distinction

The questioning and exploration of the human/animal distinction entrenched in all human epistemology is crucial to Dovey's narrative. The second story imagines the life of Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette's feline companion accidentally abandoned on the Western Front in 1915. The epigraph is a quote from Colette and reads: 'O crossing of looks! Bond that the animal tries to tighten and that man always undoes' (17). Indeed, from scientific to philosophical to religious

discourse, humans seek to separate and distinguish the human from the animal. As Jacques Derrida has observed, the history of philosophy in defining humans as the rational animal has by implication divested animals of all that is presumed to be proper for the human, ‘speech, reason, experience of death, mourning, culture, institutions, technics, clothing, lying, pretence of pretence [*feinte de feinte*], covering of tracks, gift, laughing, tears, respect’ (x). Even more than that, substances and behaviours (smells, ways of eating, excretions) associated with the animal often invoke the emotion of disgust (Kasperbauer 1), which produces in turn a sanctioning of the human/nonhuman boundary as unbroachable instead of constructed. In allowing her stories to be narrated by animal agents, Dovey is leaving the bond as one tightened rather than undone. And however fanciful her imaginings are, Dovey restores speech, reason, and experience of dying to her fictional animals.

One way this restoration is achieved is through stories of animals who aspire to human form either as an elevation from their supposed baser animalian selves or as a return from an enchantment. Such therianthropic ambitions include the canine brother of Hitler’s dog, the bear in the Bosnian zoo, taunted by a witch’s fairy tales, and Red Peter. In all cases, the desire for transformation is subjected to irony and exposed as a restraining delusion. In fact, the ‘animal’ desire to be human is a vehicle for reducing the vaunted worth of those characteristics presumed to make humans superior. Red Peter writes to his female counterpart, Hazel, advising her to:

Hem yourself in again, deny yourself whatever you desire, until the pleasure comes from denial itself, not the consummation of the desire. Only then will you be truly free, and closer to human. They – the humans, that is – seem to think that what sets them apart from other animals is their ability to love, grieve, feel guilt, think abstractly . . . They are misguided. What sets them apart is their talent for masochism. Therein lies their power. To take pleasure in pain, to derive strength from deprivation, is to be human. (51)

Human projections of ‘beastliness’ are reduced here to patent foolishness. The human presumption of distinction and separation is then subject to irony via the animals’ ultimate refusal to participate in a fairy tale desire for transformation. Most of the human characters completely misunderstand the depths and insights of the animal narrator: while the animal narrator is involved in a deep witnessing of the humans around them, the humans exhibit a shallow engagement with and observations of their animal companions. Some even momentarily parody the animal form. Kiki the cat’s testimony is an inversion of

Colette's *Dogs, Cats and I* (1924): Dovey's re-presentation of a favoured pet of the famed feline lover is here a cat lost in the trenches. Dovey's Colette, true to her historical referent, takes on the persona of a cat (for a performance) 'with whiskers and a black nose' (21) and writes narrative gossipy tales from the imagined perspective of her cat and dog. Kiki, the cat narrator, illuminates the falsity and hubris of these projections. Dovey is representing animals who are mocking human attempts to represent animals. There is a humorous textual self-referentiality in Kiki's satire. After all, Colette's project is not so different to Dovey's.

These slippery performances of species' masquerades (and performances of performances) erode the presumed distinction between humans and animals, exposing that divide embedded in human language as an excluding imperative. There are multiple moments in the stories where the animal narrators acknowledge the human/animal gulf and its transgression. The animals in the story constantly reflect on whether the humans they share space with are communicating with them. The camel camping in the desert with Henry Lawson reflects: 'Was he in fact talking to me? It was unclear' (4). At another point Lawson 'snapped his head around to look at me, as if I had said something' (10). Again, there is ironic humour in this, as we are hearing the entire narrative through the mediation of an imagined camel: the camel has, at a textual level, 'said something'. Kiki the cat is aware of what is being communicated directly through Colette's self-reflections and her observations of their life together.

The human/animal tissues of connectivity are expressed through relations of love and loss. Complex intimate relationships, such as love triangles, pervade. The epistolary story of Red Peter (educated chimp), Hazel (chimp in training) and Evelyn Oberndorff (assistant animal behaviourist and trainer), is one such love triangle. Red Peter's devotion to Evelyn is expressed in his letters:

I fell in love with you the first moment I saw you, before I was fully human, and from across that gulf of understanding and experience, somehow, miraculously, you felt something for me in return . . . I wanted to be human so I might reach out across that chasm and touch you, be touched by you. You make me a better human, and I would like to think – dare I say it? – that I make you a better ape. (53)

Animal and human divisions are vexed in this reciprocal expression of love. There is even a confounding of erotic zoopleasure beyond crude, immoral bestiality or wild bestial appetites.² That Red Peter is forced to return to his cage

²There is not space to discuss literary zoo-erotica here, but for more on the complexities surrounding zoopleasure

moves readers: it is an entirely bathos-infused moment. This is not the only expression of love and loss in the collection. Kiki passionately follows Colette: the feline memoir of Kiki's life and death on the front is an homage to Colette. When Kiki loses Colette on the front and is left alone, the new physical distance and loss is merely an emblematic variation of the loss Kiki acknowledges as ever present in human/animal love: 'Colette is not always transparent to me emotionally, just as my needs are sometimes opaque to her' (24).

Narrative frames further the sense of a gulf that animals are compelled to overcome but can never fully breach. The story of the bear trapped in the Sarajevo Zoo in 1992 has an external narrative frame of a dialogue between a witch and a male black bear. The inner narrative frame is the story told by the starving, blind, female brown bear to the witch and the black bear. It is a fairy tale of a prince transformed into a bear, who lives his life in companionship with a Polish soldier, Karol. And within this story is another tale: a story Karol is told about a human princess trapped in a bear's body successfully enticing a king. The king in the story narrated to Karol later feels disgust at his own interspecies desire: 'For the rest of his days he lived the twin agonies of heartbreak and disgust: he never stopped loving her, nor loathing himself' (188). The use of a frame narrative fairy tale form is complex and layered. It is the raising of an idea, that of the problem of attraction and disgust in human/animal co-existences and the myths we enact to protect us from such paradoxes. It is also a metaphor for the troubling actuality of human/animal relationality, of the opposing demands we place on animals and the harm these paradoxes produce. In the second narrative frame, Karol is saved and defined by his relationship with the bear: 'Only the bear kept Karol human, or better than human – kept him just whole enough to remain kind. *I am because you are*, he said to himself over and over, looking at the bear asleep beside him. *I am because you are*' (195). This momentary recognition of an inter-species ontology, of mutual subjectivity, is later rejected by Karol when he learns of the death of his young son and wife. The 'fairy tale' frame becomes more transparently the backstory of the external narrative frame: a black bear in the Sarajevo zoo, 1992. But this bear has lost his memory of Karol and of cross-species intimacy and connection through the trauma of the war, his objectification in the zoo and his ensuing starvation. He also forgets that the storytelling brown bear is his wife. In fact, the black bear eats the brown bear, and then dies in an anagnorisis-laden moment, choosing silence on realisation of what he has done: 'life mates eaten in madness, bones within bones, beloved consumed at last by their lovers' (199). This amnesiac cannibalistic 'life mate . . . eaten in

see Monika Bakke (2009) or Juliana Schiesari (2012) for discussion of the various significances of fictional human/nonhuman libidinal relations among others.

madness' illuminates the paradoxes of human/nonhuman relations in a century defined by war and animal exploitation.

The Figure of the Animal Witness

Only the Animals is an explicit homage to writers who have used the animal voice. We are told in the novel that Virginia Woolf aligned herself with Nikolai Gogol and Leo Tolstoy as writers who 'dared to imagine themselves into the mind of an animal' (135). Dovey's text examines human concerns and what it means to be an animal *in relation* to human existence. The imagining of an animal's point of view immediately repudiates the mechanomorphic objectification of animals that so dominates our culture: 'Once we are talking about perspectives, we are talking . . . about a subject having interests that should be protected or fulfilled' (Despret 30). In focusing on writers, the stories imagine animals reciprocating human gestures of representation and mediation: they assert life and sentience as interconnected. Concurrently, there is an acknowledgement of the gulf between human and animal. This paradox is enabled through the notion of the animal witness. The animal witness is powerful: as Martin Buber suggests, an 'animal's eyes have the power to speak a great language' (96). The silent observation of an animal, as Derrida so famously observes, is alarming, shaming – exposing (4–6).

In the first story in Dovey's collection, Henry Lawson attempts to calm his haunted and intoxicated companion: 'Ignore the animals. They're our only and most loyal spectators' (12). This moment of irony introduces the theme of animal testimony. Like Derrida's cat, Dovey's feline witness, Kiki, returns the gaze on her human counterparts. As with all the stories, the testimony of observation is potent. Kiki performs the role of the sentinel, watching over her frightened sleeping soldier in his friend's arms in the trenches of the Western Front. Prior to that, Kiki's observation extends beyond the boundaries of subject and object; Colette is a defining source of pleasure, informing Kiki's selfhood: 'It's something I love to do with Colette: watch her sleep. If she wakes and catches me gazing on her, she offers me a treat, usually a moth caught between the window and the curtain' (39). The feline powers of discernment and judgement of humans are not simply passive, mere discourses of pet dependence. Kiki perceives the enmity extended by Colette's husband Henri, an instinct reflecting the historical actuality of Henri Gauthier-Villars's exploitative relationship with Colette³: 'I sensed his malevolence so strongly that my

³Colette remarried Henry de Jouvenel in 1912 and had divorced Henri Gauthier-Villars by 1910. Dovey's fictional Colette's new wartime groom, Henri, may be a conflation of these two husbands and can be read through the connections between patriarchy and animal exploitation made by many theorists (see for example Carol J. Adams 2015).

usually dry paws became wet with sweat, and I disappeared the way only a cat can' (18). Kiki's animal visceral instinct (sensing and sweat) is combined with a self-conscious human understanding of cat movement (disappearing as 'only a cat can').

Her embeddedness in human and animal ways of seeing is furthered through her role in Colette's literary production. This feline witness is introduced by the Tomcat to an army pony as 'Colette's true muse' (25). Most animals in the collection are very close observers, intimately involved with one or more humans and with other nonhuman animals. Some are at a greater remove (such as the sensuous mussel – channelling Jack Kerouac-like prose – and the elephant entrenched in her family group's oral narratives) but all are animal witnesses of human acts. The context of animals as existing in an ongoing witnessing of and communiqué with human characters who barely perceive this fact is poignant. And the poignancy is deepened by the fact that all the animal auto-biographers meet their deaths at the hands of human exploitation and conflict.

Animal Bodies. Animal Death.

Unlike dead humans, dead animals are, for the most part in modern industrialised society, conceived as an entirely new entity – detritus or meat. This equating of dead animals with meat necessarily erases any sense of the 'soul' of the animal, let alone an attribution of an animal's consciousness of its own death. There are obvious exceptions: some cultures' thanking of the animal spirit in the hunt is one case, and the recent growth of pet cemeteries and public animal memorials and commemoration another (Kean 238–39). But, as Derrida observes, awareness of death is something denied to animals in the Western philosophical tradition (2). The very organising principle of Dovey's collection relies on the animals knowing they are dead but remaining agents beyond that death. The violent wartime setting contests human exceptionalism through a shared vulnerability calling to mind recent critical discussions on the implications of the term 'creaturely': to be subject to the material environ, weather, time, and the weakness of the body, 'emphasizes the fundamental continuity between humans and other animals' (Herman, *Creatural Fictions* 3). The work is in this sense elegiac and, despite its hyper intertextuality and intellectual quality, this elegiac tone invites an emotional response. As Jay Johnston and Fiona Probyn-Rapsey suggest, 'What we mourn and grieve for is indicative of what is possible between the species in life' (xv).

Each of Dovey's stories imagines a sense of the moving and sacred in animal lives and death. Given the narratives are told from the grave, sentient lives are not just preserved and commemorated in the revenant tales of fabular animals;

animal suffering and the material reality of animal death is foregrounded. This is consistent with the genre of animal autobiography more broadly. Margo De Mello has suggested ‘suffering’ is a key theme uniting animal autobiography (8). In Dovey’s collection, the camel attempts to face Mecca as he dies, and refuses complicity in the deeds of Lawson and of Mitchell, descendants of the Hospital Creek massacre perpetrators (11). The elephant twins in Mozambique are raised on stories of elephant martyrs heralded in the cosmos and die trunk-in-trunk at the hands of starving villagers, themselves victims of civil war. The German Shepherd dog, cast out by a petty Himmler, sees animal spirits similarly betrayed by the inconsistencies of Nazi ideology in the forest (90–91). Dale’s feeling that some of the religious referents are ‘jarringly implausible’, impositions of ‘artefacts of human culture’ (38) onto animal subjects is fair. But Dale also admits that ‘how real is this? . . . is not a question in which Dovey is interested’ and that ‘style does matter . . . if we are to draw attention to animal deaths’ (39–40). Such textually self-referential storytelling becomes ‘a way of staving off the equal silence of animal and death’ (Dale 36). The significance of animals bearing witness and dying in a spiritual sense is ultimately already revealed in the collection’s epitaph, which is, in another link to this novel, taken from J. M. Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello*:

Each creature is key to all other creatures. A dog sitting in a patch of sun licking itself, says he, is at one moment a dog and the next a vessel of revelation. (Epitaph)

All Dovey’s animals exude a visceral insistence on the right to exist. This insistence commences in the early pages of the collection. In response to Lawson’s offhand statement that the camel is too peculiar to exist, the camel internally retorts: ‘But I do exist . . . I may have oval red blood cells, three stomach compartments, and urine as thick as syrup, but I exist’ (6). Sprout, the dolphin correspondent, reflects on her own advanced embodied perception as defining her existence:

Can you use echolocation to know exactly what curves the ocean floor makes in every conceivable direction? Can you stun the creature you would like to eat using sound alone? Can you scan the bodies of your extended family and immediately tell who is pregnant, who is sick, who is injured, who ate what for lunch? The tingling many humans report feeling during an encounter with us isn’t endorphins, it’s because we have just scanned you to know you in all your dimensions. We see through you, literally. (206)

Such reflections, as noted above, constitute a form of strong anthropomorphism. Sprout directly disrupts normative understandings of human exceptionalism through the use of questioning and second person narration. Her address situates the animal voice in dialogue with the human, blurring the human/animal boundary. Most importantly, the reimagining of zoological mechanisms as ontological experiences of subjectivity unmask the human as being in sole command of the gaze. Sprout's capacity to 'see through' human beings is a reversal of scientific discourses of analysis, of observer and observed. While, as has been argued, mimesis and authentic creaturely interiority is not central to Dovey's project, her disruptions of human exceptionalism do pay tribute to the corporeal experience of the animal. As Herman argues, *Only the Animals* marries 'human-centric and biocentric frames of reference' (*Narratology Beyond the Human* 193). As these animal 'souls' speak to us, we, as readers, are also exposed to the reality for animal bodies in a human conflict zone.

Once animal death is transformed and given an agent then animal suffering can also be exposed, inciting shock and empathy. These animal figures embody the experience of the injustice of being the collateral damage of war. In addition, some of Dovey's animals are implicated in the horror of being objectified as food, disturbing us as 'speaking meat' in Plumwood's terms, problematising 'the kind of prejudice that relegates the other to a sphere of radical otherness marked by rational deficiency, mechanistic reduction and exclusion from communicative status' (56). While none of Dovey's narrators are explicitly 'farmed' animals, several stories feature animals consumed as a recourse against starvation in war torn areas, and one, the ghost of a pig encountered by the German Shepherd narrator, occupies fluid entities in relation to human cruelty. The pig moves between the status of domestic companion, victim of atrocious farming conditions, and the subject of ritualised slaughter (89–91), alluding to the paradoxes and absurdities of who we care for and who we condemn in the animal realm. The camel tells us of the horror of his journey to Australia (5), an allusion to slave ships and pertinent to the live export furore recently raging in Australia. We see animals caged, suffering 'zoochosis', animals mutilated, animals frightened and often animals starving. There are many depictions of animals as collateral damage and as weapons exploited in human wars in Dovey's stories, including the missile carrying dolphin, the Nazi trained German Shepherd and the turtle sent into space during the Cold War. First World War mules have their vocal chords cut so their braying does not betray military positions (Dovey 27). These figures resonate with media representations of animal rights organisations such as *Animals Australia*, who have used combinations of shock and anthropomorphism as part of their oratory of persuasion, a strategy used world-wide in animal rights campaigns to engage empathy (De Mello 8). The

work then joins a long history of engaging empathy through narrative, to fill gaps in understanding of animal experience. Historical and social mistreatment of animals is, for example, present in children's literary animal auto-biography, including but not limited to Anne Sewell's *Black Beauty*⁴ and Michael Morpurgo's *War Horse*.⁵ Dovey's animals, however, are also distinct from such representations.

Primarily, the distinction lies in a consistent refutation of sentimental visions of animal victimhood. Instead her narrators revel in the completeness, even superiority of animal existence. Kiki, the cat, says of the mules: 'I identify with the refusal of mules to be anything they don't truly feel themselves to be. Humans tend to call this bad manners or lack of respect for authority, but I call it the highest form of authenticity' (27). Dovey's animals' engagement with the literary history of anthropomorphism ultimately disrupts anthropocentrism because the animals who are portrayed suffer but are not objects.

Dovey explicitly renders the bodily experience of the animals who are simultaneously immersed in their own corporeal world and witness to human culture, institutions and weakness. She offers a material embodiment, through her animal revenants, of the intellectual reflections on the limits of realism and the potential for agency in animal representation evident in *Elizabeth Costello*. *Only the Animals* is a ludic trialling of ways to represent animals, encompassing nonhuman corporeality, entwined human and nonhuman ontologies, human nonhuman intimacy, and taboo.

The reviewer Sam Cadman is partially correct to say that in 'neither design nor execution does *Only the Animals* attempt to transport human imagination into the phenomenological reality of animal existence' (54). All the stories are extremely human-focused. Kiki the cat has a deep aesthetic appreciation of the colours of autumn in Burgundy, Plautus the tortoise is enraptured by a Bertrand Russell lecture, and the deceased dolphin military operative gets advice 'up here' from the soul of a dead fictional character, Elizabeth Costello, for the purposes of constructing her own epistolary address to a dead writer, Sylvia Plath. But Dovey's collection, like *Elizabeth Costello* before it, does continue to give us pause to reflect on the nature of human/animal relations and the role lit-

⁴Anne Sewell's novel was supported by the ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), drawing heavily on the anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as part of a campaign against the bearing reign and other standardised cruelties in Victorian horse management (Archer-Lean 33).

⁵For an analysis of the layers of meaning and emotion presented through *War Horse* see Lynda Birke's discussion of both children's novel and the theatre production where she suggests the textual processes illuminate the paradoxes of human expectations of horses: comrades/passionate companionability/victims of atrocity and objectification as meat (130).

erary figuration has in this domain. Like Coetzee's work, Dovey's is heavy with literary allusion, and constructed through the performance of speaking subjects to debate and voice the meanings of these allusions. Unlike Coetzee, Dovey's primary mode is anthropomorphism: stylised animal auto-biography. This anthropomorphism is not crude nor anthropocentric. Realism and reproduction of animal entities is not the point, and these creatures are unashamedly fictive figures. They are sites for thought not mimesis: thoughts on the complexity of human animal relationships and an insistence on complex animal subject positions. All ten nonhuman auto-biographers and the other non-human animal subjects they encounter evoke degrees of human/non-human relationality, a kinship most of the human characters fail to understand. The work questions our presumptions around a human/animal distinction by exposing corporeal suffering and elevating and centralising animal death. The collection uses previous animal fictions and their writers as a trope to acknowledge some of the hubris in our literary imaginings, and to traverse the otherness that exists simultaneously with an understanding of animal and human togetherness. These animal witnesses remind us that animals are not mere objects of study, they are watching us, struggling across an impenetrable gulf we deepen and defend. Dovey suggests that it is we humans who have failed.

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