

# Animal Studies: Kafka's Animal Stories

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**Abstract:** Kafka has not tended to feature in accounts of the ecocritical canon. However, there are two important grounds for examining his animal stories in this volume. On the one hand, they introduced radical innovations in the use of animals as literary symbols. And on the other, they have inspired thinkers and writers since the 1970s with their destabilisation of accepted notions of human distinctiveness from non-human animals. Kafka challenged the common understanding of human identity by foregrounding our animality and drawing attention to the agency of animals. The chapter first traces the emergence of Animal Studies as a dynamic trend in contemporary cultural studies, before examining the stories "Metamorphosis" and "A Report to an Academy" as examples of Kafka's zoopoetics and zoontology respectively. It concludes by reflecting on the contribution of literary animal writing to cultural ecology.

**Key Terms:** Animal Studies, Kafka, zoopoetics, zoontology, anthropomorphism

Franz Kafka, who lived in the city of Prague as a member of the German-speaking Jewish minority, is usually thought of as a quintessentially urban author. The role played by nature and the countryside in his work is insignificant. He was also no descriptive realist: his domain is commonly referred to as the 'inner life', and he is chiefly remembered for his depiction of outsider situations accompanied by feelings of inadequacy and guilt, in nightmarish scenarios reflecting the alienation of the modern subject. Kafka was only known to a small circle of when he died of tuberculosis, aged 40, in 1924. However, his enigmatic tales, bafflingly grotesque but memorably disturbing because they resonate with readers' own experiences, anxieties and dreams, their sense of marginality in family and society, and their yearning for self-identity, rapidly acquired the status of world literature after the Holocaust and the Second World War.

Kafka was a Modernist: his work reflected and responded to the disorientation and anxiety of his generation in the face of the loss of the seeming certainties of the late nineteenth century. Traditional moral frameworks had been undermined by the decline in established religion and the Nihilism of Friedrich Nietzsche, faith in human rationality was eroded by Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious, and trust in enlightened, emancipatory politics and the onward march of civilisation was shattered by the outbreak of the First World War. Already before these unsettling developments, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution (formulated in *On the Origin of Species*, 1859 and *The Descent of Man*, 1871) had cast doubt on traditional notions of the uniqueness of human beings as a species and their right to use other animals as they wished. Nietzsche's blend of Rousseauist cultural

criticism with Darwinian evolutionary theory was an important influence on the thinking of Kafka's generation. For Nietzsche, the evolution of human consciousness did not signify progress or improvement of the species, it was rather a symptom of the decadence of the organism that accompanied its transition from unadulterated, feral existence to domestic society. Consciousness functioned as an epistemological substitute for the repressed and atrophied animal instincts. His conception of animals as instances of the originary state of humanity, lost in a modern life dependent on the mediation of experience through language and dominated by an excess of rationality, found its way into the fiction and poetry of the period.

The image of animals living in the 'Open' in Rainer Maria Rilke's Eighth *Duino Elegy*, for instance, is grounded in the notions that human consciousness is an obstacle in the way of a larger, less rational way of knowing, and that it may be possible to imagine if not to retrieve such fullness of vision, by seeing the world through the eyes of non-human animals, and by depicting it in a poetic form of writing using suggestive images rather than abstract concepts. Some of Nietzsche's followers (Robinson Jeffers and Ernest Hemingway in the United States, D.H. Lawrence in Britain) idealised 'healthy' animality and expressed a fascination with wildness. In Germany, the Expressionist Gottfried Benn longed to be freed from individuation by regression to a primitive pre-conscious state. Traces of this attraction to animal vitality are present in Kafka's letters, diaries and stories. However, his understanding of animals and what it is to be human, and his use of animal figures as vehicles for the expression of ideas and mental states are more complex and of greater relevance for us today than what Philip Armstrong has called Lawrence's and Hemingway's "redemptive therio-primitivism" (Armstrong 2008, 143), with its fatalistic assent to the supposed Dionysian innocence of animal violence and human cruelty.

Although animals do not feature prominently in Kafka's novels (*The Man Who Disappeared*, *The Trial*, *The Castle*), there are few literary authors in whose overall work they play such a central role. As Donna Yarri notes in her "Index to Kafka's Use of Creatures in his Writings" (Lucht / Yarri 2010, 269), nonhuman and cross-human creatures appear in all his longer stories and about half his shorter ones. "Metamorphosis", in which the travelling salesman Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning to find he has been transformed into a giant beetle or cockroach, and "A Report to an Academy", a lecture by an ape telling how, after his capture in West Africa, he managed to evade spending the rest of his life as a circus animal by learning to act and speak like a human, will be familiar to many readers. But Kafka wrote other equally thought-provoking animal stories. ("The Burrow", "Josefine, the Singer, or the Mouse People", "Investigations of a Dog", "Jackals and Arabs", and "Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor" are among the more important.) Apes, moles, mice, dogs, birds, horses, jackals, a panther and other animals are encountered in the pages of the twelve-volume critical edition

of Kafka's stories, novels, letters, diaries and notebooks. As well as these 'ordinary' animals, he also depicts transformations (from human to animal and from animal to human), imaginary hybrids, and some bafflingly indeterminate creatures, such as the strange bouncing balls in "Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor", and Odradek in "The Worries of a Head of Household".

Kafka was a vegetarian. He believed killing animals and eating meat was immoral, once writing in a letter: "My paternal grandfather was a butcher in a village near Stakonitz; I have to not eat as much meat as he butchered" (cited in Kriesberg 2010, 36 from Kafka 1953, 59). He had to put up with the disapproval of his family, for whom meat eating was a sign of wealth and status, and a matter of religious and cultural importance, because of the ritual slaughter setting kosher meat apart from normal European practice. We know from his diaries and letters that he abominated hunting, and was an opponent of conventional zoos (identifying with the caged animals). But he was not a hobby naturalist or a writer of realist animals stories based on sustained observation of their behaviour, exploring the animal mind with the imaginative empathy of Ernest Thompson Seton, Jack London, or Henry Williamson.

In much of his work, animals rather serve as vehicles for the expression of human subjectivity, exemplifying the very appropriation of animals as images for human attributes against which nature writers have tended to work, with their experiments in articulating animal modes of seeing and being in the world. Kafka's approach is by contrast a largely allegorical one, drawing on different forms of animal symbolism, and using animal figures to depict human experiences and feelings. Transposing the action from the human beings in his novels to animals in his stories generalises individual actions, facilitates critical detachment from them, and signals through the obvious fictionality of the text the need for readers to interpret it. Kafka's animal narratives are mechanisms of estrangement, allowing reflection on his personal situation, that of Jews, modern man, and humanity in general. However, they differ from traditional animal fables and animal writing for children in important respects. First, the animals depicted tend to be ugly and threatening, rather than the cuddly creatures and companion species of children's literature, the familiar ones of fables and folk tales, or the charismatic megafauna of environmental writing. And no less strikingly, they resist reduction to any single coherent interpretation. Multivalent, hermeneutically open-ended symbolic structures, Kafka's stories hold out the promise of a hidden logic, but must always in the end be understood in a context of unresolved contradictions and simultaneous partial validity, for they condense meaning in obscure, discontinuous and morally ambivalent narratives.

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On the one hand, they introduced radical innovations in the use of animals as literary symbols. And on the other, they have reverberated over the last three-quarters of a century, nourishing voices destabilising common conceptions of human distinctiveness from non-human animals and hegemonic understandings of our relationship with non-human animals and nature. For although most of his animals invite reading as figures onto which human concerns are displaced, Kafka nevertheless anticipated central contentions of the new thinking about animals which has emerged over the past generation. He challenged accepted notions of human identity by foregrounding our animality, and drew attention to the agency of animals. Recognition of Kafka's importance as a precursor of contemporary critics of speciesism and an influential innovator in matters of animal representation has come from both philosophers (Deleuze and Guattari's choice of Kafka as a model for their project of unsettling the human-animal divide, in "Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature"; Derrida's references to "Kafka's vast zoopoetics, something that [...] solicits attention, endlessly and from a novel perspective" in "The Animal That Therefore I Am") and writers (J.M. Coetzee's tribute to him in the story "The Lives of Animals").

In the following I first trace the emergence of Animal Studies as one of the most dynamic trends in contemporary cultural studies. I then consider in turn Kafka's zoopoetics (his deployment of animals as literary figures) and zoontology (his reflection on the nature and status of animals), examining the stories "Metamorphosis", "Investigations of a Dog", and "A Report to an Academy" and touching on other examples of his symbolic use of animals, and his probing of assumptions of human exceptionalism. Given the vast extent of the secondary literature on Kafka, my use of it has necessarily been selective. Although cultural animal studies has only emerged as a field with its own concepts, theories and questions in the last twenty years, Karl-Heinz Fingerhut's book on Kafka's animal figures, which as published as long ago as 1969, and Margot Norris's ground-breaking study, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination* (1985) remain important sources. I conclude by reflecting on Kafka's zoomorphic legacy, the role of animal writers in negotiating change in our perception of the place of humans in the world, and their contribution to cultural ecology.

## The emergence of cultural animal studies

In the introduction to an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural collection of essays, Aaron Gross describes Animal Studies as a "discourse" that "cuts across fields in the human and life sciences – a discourse that has been paralleled by increasingly sophisticated discussions of and more robust concern for animals in popular culture" (Gross 2012, 4). Academic enquiry has then emerged, in disciplines ranging from biology to history and cultural studies, in the context of a new critical awareness among Western publics of the threat of extinction for

many species, and the suffering, mental as well as physical, of many domesticated animals. Both phenomena are, as Gross comments, consequences of the reduction of contact with animals in everyday life in the western world, the hidden industrialisation of their slaughter for food, and their vestigial remaining presence as family pets or objects of spectacle. Animal Studies is a radically multidisciplinary project. In the humanities alone, it unites field-specific enquiries in anthropology, art history, children's literature, continental philosophy, gender studies, media studies, postcolonial studies, religious studies, sociology and other disciplines. Philosophical, historical and cultural Animal Studies focus respectively on consideration of animal rights and ethics, accounts of our shifting understanding of animals and relationship with them, and analysis of the literary and visual representation of animals. These fields of enquiry have, however, overlapped in practice, with animal historians such as Keith Thomas and Harriet Ritvo drawing on literary sources, and studies of the literary, filmic and artistic representation of animals integrating elements of history, philosophy, cultural anthropology and sociology alongside semiotics and literary/ generic textual analysis.

The current phase of research into textual and visual depictions of animals, their meaning in different cultures, and the cultural history of anthropomorphism began in the 1990s, and experienced an explosion of interest in the twenty-first century. Cultural animal studies today has a number of different roots. (I am indebted in the following to the overviews by Marc Lucht ["Ch. 1. Introduction", in Lucht/ Yarri 2010], Kari Weil ["Ch. 1. A Report on the Animal Turn", in Weil 2012], and Greg Garrard ["Ch. 7. Animals", in Garrard 2012].) The first is the animal rights movement. The Australian philosopher Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975) drew the attention of an international public to the brutality and immorality of factory production of meat, and kick-started animal rights in much the same way Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) had drawn activists to environmentalism in the previous decade. Singer rejected René Descartes' conception of animals as mere machines, from which human beings are set apart by reason, language and sense of self. Citing the early nineteenth-century Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, who had suggested that cruelty to animals was analogous to slavery, he argued that animals suffer pain, and that this entitles them to moral consideration. Singer popularised the term 'speciesism' (discrimination against animals, coined by analogy with racism) for the thinking in which our treatment of animals differently from humans and our systematic, institutionalised killing of them are grounded.

Singer's work triggered new scientific research into the mental and linguistic abilities of apes in the Great Ape Project, which has worked to prove that many species possess the basic capabilities necessary for subjectivity, self-consciousness, rational agency, and the capacity to learn and transmit a language. New findings in research into animal intelligence have undermined the notion of a simple distinction between primates and human beings.

This research, which underpinned the argument that primates should be considered kinds of humans and enjoy corresponding rights (and led a New York judge to grant a landmark writ of Habeas Corpus for two chimpanzees in April 2015, in a case brought by the Nonhuman Rights project), has been a second root of cultural animal studies.

A third, separate stream feeding into cultural animal studies has been the Postmodern/ Deconstructionist project of decentring the human agent. This philosophical undertaking began in 1980, with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's conception of 'becoming animal' in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* as a fluid, instinctual and non-conceptual form of subjectivity, which paralleled feminist and postcolonial theorising of the body and the subaltern. What Deleuze and Guattari envisaged was less a transformation of humans into animals than an erasure of the boundaries of human identity through recognition of species' irreducible interdependence, an emancipatory movement from being to becoming, in which the subject no longer occupies a realm of rigid stability but is deterritorialised, liberated and released into a 'nomadic' mode of existence.

Whereas Deleuze and Guattari's 'becoming animal' had little to do with real animals, their behaviour or lifeworlds, Jacques Derrida's landmark essay, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (French original 1997) stressed both the autonomy of the animal and human animality (his title revised Descartes' definition of the human as a thinking being, "*Cogito ergo sum*"), and challenged readers to reconsider their treatment of animals. Derrida was prompted by the gaze of his cat as he emerged naked from the shower to recast the Genesis myth, making it an animal (rather than a woman) that brings man to consciousness of his nakedness (and of good and evil). Animals are for Derrida the creatures through which we define our humanity. On the one hand, he castigates their subjection to a subordinate position, and the simplistic othering present in the homogenising generalisation, 'the animal': this engenders violence by positing a category of creatures which we can legitimately dominate, and against which there can be no crime. On the other, he rejects Aristotle's and Descartes' distinction of man from other animals by the ability to think, and claims that our self-recognition and thinking originate in the recognition that we are animals, and share the world with them. Meeting the look of animals, their gaze on us and the world, reveals our human limitations. By becoming attuned to animals we can overcome some of the limitations of our so-called 'rational' condition.

Giorgio Agamben's *The Open* (Italian original 2002) has continued this line of argument. Agamben critiques the othering of animals in the "anthropological machine" (i.e. the definition of humanity through its distinction from animals) of mainstream western philosophy since Augustine. He locates traces of a counter-conception of reconciliation between the estranged parties of humans and non-human animals in the writings of Martin

Heidegger, and to a lesser extent other thinkers, ranging from Ernst Haeckel, Jakob von Uexküll and Rainer Maria Rilke to Georges Bataille, Alexandre Kojève and Gilles Deleuze.

Meanwhile Posthumanist thinkers in the United States have pursued a parallel goal of decentring the human, with similar consequences for Animal Studies. Donna Haraway and Cary Wolfe have drawn attention to the absence of clear boundaries between human beings and machines on the one hand, and humans and animals on the other. Reviewing Derrida, Deleuze and other theorists in his book, *Animal Rites* (2003), Wolfe argues that a genuinely posthumanist approach to the question of the animal must go beyond merely extending utilitarianism and moral rights theory to (some) animals, and challenge the exclusionary logic which remains present in the work of Singer and others. In *When Species Meet* (2008), Haraway writes of the 'entanglement' of the human and non-human worlds, and the 'naturecultures' which have evolved from them. She highlights the 'co-construction' of the categories human and animal, arguing that human beings are part of a community of animals, with the human and the animal constituted through interaction in subject- and object-shaping encounters. The relationships of mutual attraction, manipulation and dependence between humans and domestic species are better understood, Haraway argues, as instances of symbiosis than of simple domination. Posthumanism demands that we recognise that there are other modes of perception of the world as well as the human, and that these can be sophisticated forms of consciousness.

A key point in Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am* is that whereas mainstream philosophers have tended to define humanity through its difference from the animal other and to emphasize the difference between humans and animals, "poets or prophets" (Derrida 2002, 283) have more often challenged this binary, inferred its responsibility for abuse of animals and environmentally damaging mindsets and behaviours in general, and sought to overcome it. In the same year that Derrida wrote, the South African Nobel Prize-winning novelist J.M. Coetzee gave two lectures in Princeton University's Tanner Lecture series on Human Values, which were published as a short story entitled "The Lives of Animals" (Coetzee 1999 – they were subsequently incorporated into his novel, *Elizabeth Costello*). His protagonist, a novelist called Elizabeth Costello who possesses autobiographical traits, gives an impassioned speech to an American university audience, articulating animal suffering in zoos, scientific research, and above all the production of food. Coetzee, who has read Kafka (in the original German) since he was an adolescent, published an academic study of one of Kafka's animal stories in 1981, and since written a second novel reflecting on our relationship with animals (*Disgrace*, 1999), has his fictional alter ego structure her public lecture around a sustained comparison of her situation with that of the ape, Red Peter in Kafka's story, "A Report to an Academy". Coetzee refers to Kafka as a pioneer in the literary depiction of and philosophical reflection on the human-animal continuum.

In the last ten years a series of scholars have directed attention to the existence of other literary representations of animals and our human relationship with them predating Coetzee's highly charged novella. Works examined include Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, stories by Edgar Allen Poe, Ivan Turgenev, Thomas Mann, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett, Kurt Vonnegut and Edward Albee, and poems by Rilke, Marianne Moore, E.E. Cummings, Stevie Smith, Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, Gary Snyder, and Seamus Heaney. (See Armstrong 2008; Rohman 2009; Weil 2012; also Gross/ Vallely 2012.) Philip Armstrong for instance examines four classical animal narratives (*Gulliver's Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Frankenstein* and *Moby-Dick*) and discusses their reworking by later novelists including Upton Sinclair, D.H. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, Margaret Atwood, J.M. Coetzee and Yann Martel, in ways reflecting shifting social and environmental forces.

Like other branches of Cultural Studies, cultural animal studies is concerned with the ways in which culture shapes individual experiences, everyday life, and social and power relations. Animals in literature are historically determined and culturally motivated constructions, by means of which conceptions of the human and the animal are negotiated. Cultural animal studies works both synchronically and diachronically. On the one hand, the image and status of animals is examined in different cultures, and how their distinguishing features reflect wider value sets. On the other, the origins and consequences of historical shifts in the representation of animals are identified. Attention is devoted to critically highlighting elements of prejudice and systematic misrepresentation of animal life in mainstream cultural texts and artifacts, and (as in this essay) to revealing challenges to our treatment of animals and the hegemonic conceptions of animal and human identity which they are rooted in, and traces of the autonomy and agency of which animals have been deprived.

Aesthetics and questions of form are a second field of enquiry for cultural animal studies. Examination of the animal question as an aesthetic issue is sometimes said to have begun with John Berger's essay, "Why Look at Animals?" (written in 1977). Focusing on the cultural rather than the physical marginalisation of animals in contemporary society, Berger argued that animals are universally used to chart our experience of the world. The first metaphor was probably an animal one, using the diversity of animal species to express social and psychological differentiation among human beings. However, he argued, there has been a decisive historical shift in the cultural meaning of animals, paralleling the change in our physical relationship with them since the eighteenth century. At the same time as they were reduced to a commodity as a foodstuff, a nostalgic view of animal innocence arose. A subset of animals has since served as pets, effectively as human puppets, whose function it is to confirm neglected (emotional, altruistic) parts of ourselves.



Berger drew two important consequences for the aesthetics of animal representation. Anthropomorphism, which used to be an expression of our proximity with animals, must now make us uneasy, he held, because we live in a world from which animals have largely been banished. It performs a compensatory function, which stabilises and only reinforces our estrangement from them. The marginalisation of animals has also been intensified by the fact that they have been depicted almost exclusively as passive objects of our human gaze. Berger castigated zoos as institutions originally intended to endorse colonial power, which cemented the one-way gaze of humans at animals. Despite his general condemnation of this aesthetic complicity in marginalising animals, Berger conceded that individual artists and writers have recorded and critically commented on the concealing of our proximity with animals which has been prevalent in capitalist culture. Artists today must, he inferred, take on the challenge of exposing the modern practices disguising the dualism of exploiting and revering which has been present in our relationship with animals since time immemorial.

Subsequent studies of animal representation and aesthetics such as Cary Wolfe's *Animal Rites* (2003) have developed and refined Berger's arguments. Wolfe criticises mainstream books and films for relegating non-human others "to the realm of senseless matter, inert organicity, brute instinct, or at best mindless repetition and mimicry" (133-134), and using animals as tropes in accounts of human aggression and sexuality. He notes, like Berger, that literary animals appear as subjects with their own agency in a subset of texts, which blend natural history with observation of animal behaviour, elements of travelogue, interviews and cultural history. Unlike Berger, however, he defends anthropomorphism, arguing that it can be handled as a technique acknowledging non-human agency. Timothy Clark writes similarly in his *Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, describing anthropomorphism as a space in which issues of "the nature of other animals, of language, of the human [...] intersect in fascinating, provocative and perhaps ultimately irresolvable ways" (Clark 2011, 194-5). Kafka's animal stories are more accurately described as *zoomorphic*, in that they present humans in animal form, than as *anthropomorphic* (endowing non-human animals or inanimate objects with human attributes). However, the distinction is problematic, not least because his writing reveals a fascination with the twilight zone between human and animal.

A fundamental issue which writers and critics have grappled with is whether and how we can represent animal lives in human language and culture without illusion or distortion, since language and culture inevitably project a world understood according to our scale, interests and desires. Irony has been acknowledged as playing a key role in addressing this problem, as a means of making readers critically aware of our discriminatory othering of animals. By foregrounding the social construction of animals in a text, aggressively appropriating the non-human world and ensuring readers notice this, authors can remind us

obliquely that there is a more-than-human world out there which has been silenced and suppressed. As Clark puts it, in their representation of animals they can “stage” their own artificiality (191). Kafka makes skilful use of irony and satire in “Investigations of a Dog” and “A Report to an Academy”. However, before examining these stories a more general account of Kafka’s use of animals as symbols and identification figures is given in the following pages.

### Zoopoetics: Kafka’s animal symbolism and narratives

Karl-Heinz Fingerhut’s starting point in his study of animals and the functions they serve in Kafka’s writing is the universal tendency in human culture to use animals as concrete figures for abstract qualities. The association of a species with a particular form of human behaviour (the fox with cunning, for instance) is originally forged on the basis of the animal’s appearance or characteristic behaviour. Over time, however, these symbolic animals become cultural templates which can overshadow our physical experience of living with the actual creatures. While animal behaviour is recognised as analogous to that of human beings, animals are also traditionally viewed as other. This combination of similarity and difference makes the animal a vehicle for reflection of the human subject in fables, allegories and animal tales.

Using animals as characters was common in the Yiddish folk tales and Hassidic parables which Kafka read, and in this respect his literary practice was in keeping with his cultural heritage. In fact, he absorbed and adapted elements of animal representation from a wide variety of sources, including fables, fairy tales, and canonical literary works. Perhaps the closest of Kafka’s stories to the Aesopian fable, which is conceived from the conceptually formulated moral at the end and clothes it in realistic exemplification, and in which animal figures exemplify individual human frailties, is “Little Fable”, a tale of a mouse and a cat. Mice are normally associated with timidity and vulnerability, their species depicts and generalises a human type. Kafka’s short narrative appears to depict the relationship between ordinary citizens and the power elite in modern society. His mouse has, however, been read as standing for Jews in Europe, and the cat as a personification of the state, a divine force, and the vitality of the life force. Although Kafka’s stories are frequently referred to as fables, or animal parables (that is, stories in which the protagonists model forms of human behaviour and present them for ethical evaluation), they lack these forms’ concluding interpretation, hinting instead at multiple meanings, while withholding an unequivocal understanding. If his fables are thinking models, it is not in the sense of clothing a pre-existing truth. Rather he starts with a suggestive image, which often has dreamlike features. His animals are also not those normally encountered in either fables or children’s literature,

and the meanings they are invested with are more complex and ambivalent in nature. A further complicating feature of Kafka's animal stories is that they tend to use genre characteristics of the fable in parodistic intent, making the speaking animal's limited perception of the world evident through ironic stylistic effects.

Kafka did not then simply invent his narrative elements and animal figures: they are assembled from cultural tradition. However, he transformed them by suffusing them with personal meaning. His animals and their relationships with human and non-human others are never mere cyphers for humans in their social or political constellations, as in Kenneth Grahame's contemporaneous classic of children's literature, *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), let alone didactic vehicles for the internalisation of social norms, as in Waldemar Bonsels' *Biene Maja* (1904). Kafka was interested in totemism and the animal beliefs which lie at the origins of many religions. His stories retain traces of the pre-rational sense of the identity of an individual or group with a particular species of animal which is found in animal myths and folk tales.

Kafka's animals also contain elements of the animal's creaturely reality, which gives them a memorable vividness, and sometimes introduces a note of grotesque humour. However, he was not concerned with scientific accuracy: at one point in "A Report to an Academy" he mentions the ape's tail ("the crack wasn't enough to push a tail through" – Kafka 2007, 228), appearing to confuse monkeys (which have tails) with apes and chimpanzees (which don't). (The German word *Affe* that he mainly uses means both 'ape' and 'monkey'.) At another, he refers to Red Peter's Achilles' heel – although apes do not have one. This imprecision was a matter of conscious writing strategy, rather than accident: when writing "The Burrow", Kafka incorporated information on both the badger and the mole from entries in the popular illustrated work of natural history, *Brehms Tierleben* (see Wegmann 2011, 361). In "Metamorphosis", the creature which the semi-autobiographical figure Gregor Samsa turns into is referred to in similarly inexact terms: while it is normally thought of as a beetle or cockroach, the German word used is the generic term *Ungeziefer*, or 'vermin'.

All this suggests that Kafka's animals are primarily figures for the articulation of human affairs – his own subjective experience and its symbolic extension to related collectives. In his diaries and letters, he often relates the plight of an animal to his own feelings, for instance observing a beetle lying helplessly on its back and inferring it mirrors his psychological state, or describing himself as a mole, burrowing in search of self-knowledge (see Fingerhut 1969, 37-39). It is only a small step from the experienced, dreamed, and imagined identification with an animal which we find in Kafka's diaries and letters to his literary depiction of the despised but also pitied self in the form of an animal. Some of the animals in his stories appear to originate in his dreams: a recurring dream

involved his pursuit by dogs or other animals. On the one hand Kafka felt pity for suffering creatures, but on the other he feared animals and was disgusted by them. Horses, panthers and other powerful creatures are associated with vitality, naturalness, freedom and harmonious being in his writing, but the association is often accompanied by ironic detachment, and switches easily into fear – large animals recalling his overbearing father, and small ones prompting fears of his private space being invaded. Chris Danta has shown how Kafka's stories reveal a pattern of animals invading, displacing and decontextualizing the human (Danta 2013, 124-125). In a letter written in 1917 from Zürau, where he was convalescing from tuberculosis at his sister's home, Kafka provided a graphic image of the animal invading human space, describing mice which had scuttled around his bedroom the night before as "the most horrifying thing in the world" (Kafka 2008, 113).

In some stories, Kafka draws consciously on dream symbolism. He read Freud and was familiar with psychoanalytic dream interpretation as a way of explaining how unconscious thoughts and emotions are processed in the mind. His stories are filled with incidents which can be viewed as psychoanalytic phenomena, such as father/ son conflicts, unconscious desires, ego-conflicts, projections, sublimations, and uncanny reoccurrences of suppressed wishes in disguise. As in dreams, the self is split into different components and given form in figures, both human and animal. Kafka's animals sometimes correspond to familiar psychoanalytic symbols: the horses in "A Country Doctor" have for instance been convincingly interpreted as expressions of repressed sexual energy.

Fingerhut identifies four key complexes of animal symbolism which Kafka uses in referring to himself in his diaries and letters, and which reappear in his stories and fragments: the insect, the dog, the rodent or burrowing animal, and the bird. The giant beetle in "Metamorphosis" is Kafka's most famous creature: it is commonly read as an outward form corresponding to Gregor Samsa's situation regarding his family and society, as an objective correlative for his mixed feelings of wretchedness and resistance, and as an oblique reflection of the author's isolation as a Jew and an artist. Kafka similarly uses the dog as an unflattering identification figure: dogs are not seen as loyal companions in Jewish tradition, but as servile, cringing, petulant beings, stubborn, impertinent and lewdly sensual. His protagonist in the late story "The Burrow" combines, as already noted, aspects of badger and mole, uniting various images of burrowing and forest animals which appear in his diaries, letters and earlier stories. This portrait of a lonely, anxious inhabitant of an elaborate burrow has been read as a depiction of his relationship with his writing, and its (in)ability to meet his psychological needs.

Kafka's final complex of animal imagery includes the jackdaw, raven, blackbird and crow. He saw himself associated with the jackdaw through the meaning of his family name (spelled *kávka*) in Czech: his father's haberdashery shop used the jackdaw as a symbol.

Kafka's Hebrew first name, Amschel, was also understood by many eastern European Jews as a Hebraicised version of *Amsel*, the German for 'blackbird'. In the early story "Wedding Preparations in the Country", the autobiographically coloured protagonist bears the name 'Raban', echoing the German word for 'raven'. And we may presume that the 1500-year-old hunter from the Black Forest who died in a hunting accident but is condemned to an existence as living dead in "The Hunter Gracchus" serves as alter ego: *gracchio* is the Italian name of the Alpine chough.

Kafka seems to take a perverse pleasure in his own abasement and humiliation by depicting himself as an animal. The ape, burrowing animals including rats and worms, the cockroach, and even the jackdaw are lost, trapped, feared, abominated and hunted figures, which approximate to Giorgio Agamben's notion of 'bare life'. In German and Austrian anti-Semitic political publications of the time, Jews were frequently referred to as rats, mice, insects and vermin. Hadea Nell Kriesberg concludes that Kafka took the reality of the ever-present possibility of being referred to as an animal, and pondered what it would mean to truly be one (Kriesberg 2010, 34). However, the insect is also more generally an image for Kafka's protest against a world in which the isolated individual (for instance the artist) becomes a form of vermin which would be best disposed of. The animalistic representation of his personal inner life invites reading as a coded account of the life experience of groups of others, and ultimately of the human condition. A closer look at "Metamorphosis" may help show how Kafka pushed the boundaries of animal representation with the fragmented, encrypted and multivalent transfer of his inner life onto an animal figure.

### "Metamorphosis"

"When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself changed into a monstrous cockroach in his bed." (Kafka 2007, 87) Thus begins "Metamorphosis", which Kafka wrote in November 1912, in the burst of creativity which followed his literary breakthrough with "The Judgement". It is a tale of shape-shifting from human to animal, concerned with the protagonist's psychological adaptation to the change, and its consequences for his family. The blend of wildest imagination (Gregor's turning into a cockroach) with realistic detail (the extended description of how, lying on his back with his many tiny legs waving uncontrollably in the air, he manages to get out of bed, and the contortions he goes through to turn the key in his bedroom door) makes the story simultaneously strange and familiar, uncanny and funny.

In traditional forms of therianthropy (the transformation of a human being into an animal) in myths, folk tales, children's literature and fantasy, the animal form can symbolise internal savagery (as in werewolf tales), or it can be a deceptive outward appearance concealing the

individual's inner goodness (as in "Beauty and the Beast"). In "Metamorphosis" it is both. *Ungeziefer*, or 'vermin', suggests a creature threatening to human health and wellbeing (because it is disease-carrying), and repulsively ugly. But Kafka may also have had the etymology of the term in mind: its original meaning 'unclean animals/ animals not suitable for sacrifice' hints at Gregor's impending failure to achieve recognition for redeeming his family through his self-sacrifice.

On the one hand, Gregor's transformation is a catastrophe, cementing his already existing social isolation and leading to his death. He describes his predicament (he cannot speak, and although he understands what others are saying, they do not realise it) as "incarceration" (Kafka 2007, 112) – it externalises and intensifies the alienation he has already been experiencing in the family, at work and in society generally. However, on the other hand Gregor can no longer be expected to go to work. His new body form releases him from the intolerable burden of having to support the family single-handed and pay off the debt incurred when his father's business failed. Gregor's transformation, however gruesome, appears as a form of dream reality, possibly even a fantasy wish-fulfilment. In dreams, insects such as cockroaches are commonly associated with uncleanness, and aspects of the self that need to be confronted. Guilt and debt are leitmotifs in the story, and although Gregor presents himself as a dutiful son, there are hints that he may have committed some sexual or financial misdemeanours. He half-accepts his transformation as punishment for a vaguely sensed delinquency, as well as a keenly felt personal inadequacy.

However, dream cockroaches can also be markers of tenacity and resistance. In Kafka's earlier, unfinished story, "Wedding Preparations in the Country" the protagonist, Raban longs for his clothed body to go into the country to fulfil his obligation to meet his fiancée, while he lies in bed, in "the shape of a big beetle, a stag beetle or a cockchafer, I think" (Kafka 1995, 78). This becomes partial reality for Gregor: his inner self can lie in bed in the form of a beetle, but in this case his body, representing his social self, does not go out into the world for him. His transformation into 'vermin' reflects his guilty conscience over letting the family down and becoming a lazy malingerer. A concretisation of his latent wish to withdraw from society, it corresponds to the mix of helplessness and aggression arising out of his inner turmoil of dissatisfaction with his career and place in the family.

At the end of "Metamorphosis", Kafka alludes obliquely to Christ's fasting and temptation through his depiction of Gregor's progressive rejection of the food provided him, which mirrored the author's own vegetarianism and asceticism. Kafka's leanings to ascetic self-denial bordered on anorexia, and one of his great frustrations was that his parents blamed his suffering on his vegetarianism and his writing, rather than his being unable to eat and write as he wished (see Norris 1985, 115-116). This may be reflected in the story, for as with the protagonists in other stories, there are hidden links between Gregor and his author.

'Samsa' resembles the pattern of vowels and consonants in 'Kafka', there is a proximity with the (albeit unspoken) word *Käfer* (beetle), and both approximate to the German word for cage, *Käfig*, hinting at Gregor's entrapment in his tedious job. However, if we read Gregor's transformation as something giving outward symbolic form to his self-sacrifice in the family's interests, his attempt to redeem the family through self-immolation (he dies as a result of refusing food) is strangely ambivalent. It succeeds in the sense that as he wastes away they go from strength to strength. But they do not recognise his part in this process. The story has been interpreted by psychoanalytic critics as one reflecting the author's self-hatred because of his unacceptable Oedipal wish to replace his father, and depicting a search for redemption through self-sacrifice, which is doomed to failure. Gregor's transformation into 'vermin' may have been inspired by Dostoyevsky, who had already used vermin (in "Notes from the Underground") as a literary figuration of the conflict between father and son, associating it with lust, degradation, and oppressive office work.

Openness to multiple interpretations is the very essence of Kafka's art. If the human-animal hybrid, Gregor Samsa has been read as a displaced self-representation of the author, and "Metamorphosis" as a parable reflecting the psychotic state arising out of experiences ranging from ethnic discrimination to troubled masculinity, the story has equally been read as a reflection on the position of Jews in the Austro-Hungarian empire, and as a commentary on the situation of the artist, standing on the margins of society and sacrificing life to art. Kafka's animals are often sacrificial animals, which reflect a special self-understanding of the role of the writer: in a letter to Max Brod written in 1922 reflecting on the nature and function of literature, Kafka refers to the writer as the "scapegoat of mankind", for "he makes it possible for men to enjoy sin without guilt, almost without guilt" (Kafka 1979, 295). As Chris Danta points out (2007, 723), it is not merely that Kafka sees the writer facilitating human salvation by suffering on behalf of others, taking on the sins of the human community and bearing them away: the 'scapegoat' metaphor he uses also reinforces the link, ubiquitous in his work, between writers and (abused) animals. Writers identify with animals and express their suffering. Literature sparks our imagination, enabling us to inhabit their bodies. This gives access to a point of view outside the human: the (literary) story of violence is told from the side of the animal and our own animality. In the following sections I turn to the concept of biocentric writing and its instantiation in Kafka's "Report to an Academy", in which Kafka bears witness to animal victimhood and foregrounds human animality.

## Zoontology: Kafka as biocentric writer

Although Fingerhut acknowledged the complexity and diversity of the functions of Kafka's animals, his focus on them as symbols conveying insights into the human world led him to play down Kafka's engagement with real animals, and to overlook the author's critical reflection on the validity of common assumptions about our difference from animals. The opening pages of "Blumfeld, an Elderly Bachelor", for instance, lampoon our exploitative use of pets for companionship, affection and affirmation. Blumfeld "only wants a companion, an animal to which he doesn't have to pay much attention, which doesn't mind an occasional kick, which even, in an emergency, can spend the night in the street, but which nevertheless, when Blumfeld feels like it, is promptly at his disposal with its barking, jumping, and licking of hands" (Kafka 1995, 208). The bouncing balls which mysteriously appear and follow him have been interpreted as perverted concretisations of this desire to live in companionship while denying others care and attention.

A second example is "A Crossbreed". Kafka's imaginary creature, the "kitten-lamb", has been interpreted as a model of the assimilated Jew and a figure for the author's cultural and spiritual complexes. However, it also prompts the reader to reflect on the ultimately arbitrary designation of some species of animal as coddled pets while others are treated as sources of food. The story challenges our assumptions about the right to kill and eat animals, while (through the lamb) hinting that animals' relationship with humans is that of a sacrificial victim (see Kriesberg 2010, 35-40).

Publications on Kafka's literary animals took a new turn with Margot Norris's study, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination* (Norris 1985). Of particular importance for Kafka scholarship were her Introduction (on the 'biocentric tradition'), and Chapter 3, in which she read "A Report to an Academy" against the grain of allegorical interpretations as an imaginative act of animal witness. Norris describes Kafka's "radical animal ontology" as his greatest achievement, contrasting his "brilliant animal narratives" with his "inconclusive and incomplete" novels (20). She locates Kafka in a tradition of biocentric writing which was grounded in Darwin's collapse of the cardinal distinction between animal and human, on the basis that the intellectual, moral, and cultural differences which these exhibit are ones of degree only, not of kind. The second major influence on biocentric writing was Nietzsche's valorisation of the body and its instinctual epistemology over the mind and mediated human experience. Norris presents Nietzsche's understanding of animals and human animality in Lacanian terms: "Nietzsche was able to identify in the enthrallment to the symbolic 'other' the precondition for consciousness, social interaction, and cultural ambition, all quintessentially 'human' states that depend on the devaluation of the material body, the repression of instinct, the oppression of the animal, and the obliteration of creatural or 'animal' man." (221) The animal's putative inferiority to the human is, Norris argues, traditionally ascribed to "a lack, a deficiency in reason, speech, soul, morality", while the human being is viewed as



“complete, perfect, fulfilled” (3-4). Biocentric writers, however, treat the animal (including the human as animal) as a plenum, and cultural man as suffering an imaginary lack, which gives birth to desire, and makes him produce language and the Lacanian symbolic order governed by reliance on the other (4). The animal lives for itself in the fullness of its being, but cultural man lives in imitation of desire of the other.

Norris discusses Kafka, the Surrealist artist Max Ernst and the novelist D.H. Lawrence as representatives of a third generation of biocentrist thinkers (following those of Darwin and Nietzsche), and argues that their narrators, protagonists and figures reappropriate their animality in an anthropocentric world (1). Kafka was, as already noted, no unqualified admirer of the untamed animal instincts which some of his contemporaries celebrated as a panacea for man in advanced civilisation. However, “A Report to an Academy” and other stories such as “A Hunger-Artist” and “In the Penal Colony” depict the oppression and suppression of what is creatural in the human – the body, feeling, pain, libido – in the ostensible interest of rationalism and idealism. Deconstructing the human by exaggerating rationality and presenting it as a site of perversity, Kafka seeks to recuperate “an imagined animal sensibility, reflecting a subversive image of the human as seen through animal eyes” (Norris 2010, 19). Kafka’s deconstruction of the false oppositions to the animal on which notions of the human have been built, in “A Report to an Academy” in particular, prefigured Derrida’s undertaking to “think concerning the animal” (Derrida 2002, 377), and Agamben’s call to discard the “anthropological machine” which is responsible for both the Holocaust and the ongoing mass slaughter of animals.

Biocentric thinking has implications for form: Norris claims it cannot find adequate expression in realist art, because realism involves imitation, and is implicated in the abstraction from and displacement of Nature inherent in anthropocentric art: “Subversive interrogation of the anthropocentric premises of Western philosophy and art” goes hand in hand with “the invention of artistic and philosophical strategies that would allow the animal, the unconscious, the instincts, the body, to speak again in their work” (Norris 1985, 5). She regards Kafka as one of a small group of thinkers, writers and artists who “create as the animal – not *like* the animal, in imitation of the animal – but with their animality speaking” (1). As biocentrists, they are both philosophers of the animal and its instinctual life, and producers of “self-reflexive metaphors of recognising the animal in oneself” (21), responding to the implications of their own animality for writing by transforming their work into “bestial acts and gestures” (1).

Kafka’s particular form of biocentric art invokes representation only to dismantle it, thereby uniting an affective and a deconstructive aim, and meeting the requirement of a mode of creation that rebuffs interpretation, frustrates communication, and negates authority. As Norris writes: “The art produced by a biocentric discourse consists [...] of tormented

generic and rhetorical experiments" (3), for "the rationalistic assumptions of conventional realism (including a logical subject, cause and effect, the relationship of part and whole, 'plausibility', noncontradiction) could scarcely accommodate the exploration of organic, feral, natural life" (19-20). Kafka's "antirepresentational" mode of writing includes designification of the figure of the animal (denying it unitary meaning), and experiments with animal points of view (16). Norris argues that Kafka's "experiential, spontaneous, gestural, performative" (5) writing is "a major weapon in the biocentric critique of an anthropocentric art in the service of human (as opposed to animal) desire" (12).

### "Investigations of a Dog" and "A Report to an Academy"

"Investigations of a Dog" and "A Report to an Academy" are two stories in which Kafka subjects to sustained scrutiny our treatment of animals, and what distinguishes human beings from other animals. In the first, a late piece written in 1922, Kafka parodies human pretence to universal knowledge and forensic self-examination by placing these in the mouth of a dog. As Margot Norris demonstrates in her contribution to Lucht and Yarri's edited volume, *Kafka's Creatures* (Norris 2010, 23-26), the central conceit of the tale is that humans are invisible to dogs and oblivious to human agency. The dog (a species which we regard as the prototype of the domesticated animal) speaks as though dogs lived wholly autonomously from the human world: "All I cared for was the race of dogs, that and nothing else. For what is there actually except our own species? To whom but it can one appeal in the wide and empty world? All knowledge, the totality of all questions and all answers, is contained in the dog." (Kafka 1995, 321)

Satirising the blinkeredness of humanist morality and research into primate intelligence at the time, he attempts to interpret the behaviour of performing circus dogs, who did "the very thing which is both most ridiculous and indecent in our eyes; they were walking on their hind legs" (316), and that of lapdogs, who appear to him to float on cushions in the air (326-327). He takes it as axiomatic that all food comes from the earth, which "when it is watered and scratched according to the rules of science, extrudes nourishment", and that the emergence of food can be "hastened by certain spells, songs, and ritual movements" (in other words, begging!) (319-320). "Investigations of a Dog" parodies Descartes' understanding of animals as creatures devoid of subjectivity and the means of self-expression, mere instinct-driven machines, and satirizes the arrogance of science and the human subsumation of the diversity of animal life under the generic term 'the animal': "Apart from us dogs there are all sorts of creatures in the world, wretched, limited, dumb creatures, who have no language but mechanical cries; many of us dogs study them, have given them names, try to help them, educate them, uplift them, and so on. For my part I am quite

indifferent to them except when they try to disturb me, I confuse them with one another, I ignore them.” (311)

“A Report to an Academy” (1917), Kafka’s first tale told from the perspective of an animal, and the story on which most interest in Kafka has focused among thinkers and writers on the animal question, is more complex. Not least because it was first published in a Zionist magazine, it has traditionally been interpreted as an allegorical account of the attempt of Jews to assimilate into Western society. It has, however, equally been read figuratively as a satire on colonial subjects, and a study of self-alienation. Fingerhut discusses the story at two points in his book (103-105; 251-255), rehearsing a range of different interpretations. Commentators understanding the ape narrator as deceived (i.e. as not recognising his failure to get beyond appearing in a variety show) have read the narrative as reflecting critically on assimilated Jews (interpreting the ape as fraudulently seeking to become human). However, it is equally possible to interpret the tale as a satirical critique of human society through the eyes of an outsider. Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello reads it in this light as an allegory of Kafka the Jew performing for Gentiles, and Fingerhut’s preferred interpretation appears to be that of an allegorical account of the artist’s relationship with bourgeois society (with ‘apeness’ serving as a metaphor for the artistry he must give up in order to survive). In support of this last interpretation, it is worth noting that while apes are traditionally associated with physical ugliness and malice, and presented in Christian iconography as emblems for the vices of vanity, greed, and lechery, they are also characterised as prone to imitation: since the Renaissance artists have periodically been portrayed as apes.

Norris’s biocentric interpretation focuses on Red Peter’s strategies of deception, arguing that he is consciously concealing the violence done to him. Through the ape’s very circumlocutions and euphemisms for the pain and injury incurred in his transformation into a human being, “A Report to an Academy” exposes human cruelty. The story tells of Red Peter’s violent capture (he refers to it as a “criminal assault” – Kafka 2007, 227) and “training” to imitate human behaviour in such a way as to present ‘brutality’ as a human feature, and animals as superior. At the same time, the ape’s exaggerated academic parlance, rhetorical sophistication, urbanity, self-control and irony parody notions of these qualities as distinguishing features of humanity, thereby deconstructing notions of human perfectibility and superiority over animals. Kafka was prompted to write the story by a newspaper report on the appearance of a chimpanzee as a variety show artist. Whereas other narratives of apes captured in Africa and brought to civilisation such as the 1933 film *King Kong* have tended to represent primates as the violent ‘beast within us’, symbolising a barbarism which threatens to wreck modern civilisation, Kafka critically references the hunting and zoological practices of the time.

The form of the story parodies contemporary scientific reports, in which a researcher presented findings on ape behaviour to an academic audience: here it is the ape himself who speaks. He has been asked to tell of his life as an ape prior to being captured on the Gold Coast, but claims he cannot remember anything of this. Shifting the subject of his report from the story of his ape life to that of his accelerated evolution from ape to man enables Red Peter to become a subject and cease to be an object, and focuses attention on the barbaric methods of his humanization and civilization.

The fact that Red Peter describes his learning of language not as a way of gaining liberty, but merely as a 'way out' (*Ausgang* – the term that Kant used to define Enlightenment's release of humans from subjection to despotic rule and irrational authority, prompts us to read "A Report to an Academy" as an allegory of our entry into modernity through enlightenment and the concomitant loss of animality. The ape's "gradual enlightenment" is an imposed conformity to the "way of humanity": the ostensibly emancipatory process is subverted by irony and satirical exaggeration. As Norris remarks, the ape's report is a sophisticated dissimulative performance. Associating humanity with vice and trickery rather than rational thinking or moral virtues, Kafka "decodes cultural performance as atrocity". Here and in other stories, Kafka's technique is one of "slyly repealing the representation, by de-signifying the event, stripping it of symbolic meaning, rendering its justifications absurd" (Norris 1985, 12). Kafka critiques civilisation in general and traditional forms of mimetic art for their sacrifice of the interests of the animal and the body to "reason, spirit, ideals, virtues, beauty, form" (11).

In a recent contribution to a collection of essays on *Philosophy and Kafka*, Chris Danta argues, following Margot Norris and Kari Weil, that Kafka was a prophetic precursor of contemporary critics of speciesism (Danta 2013). Few authors can lay claim to a worldview as creaturely as Kafka's, which Danta sees encapsulated in a passage from Kafka's diaries: "If I closely examine what is my ultimate aim [...], I strive to know *the whole human and animal community*, to recognize their basic predilections, desires, moral ideas..." (Kafka 1999, 387) [Emphasis mine]. This human-and-animal community is constructed through variants of animal-to-human and human-to-animal transformation in Kafka's stories, including animals invading human space and supplanting humans, and human subjects responding to exposure to external forces, projecting themselves out of the human community into the community of animals and adopting the position of the animal victim.

To become an animal in Kafka is to become a special kind of *victim*, Danta argues (2013, 129-130), through separation from one's species. Red Peter's 'report' demonstrates how the birth of the human has traditionally involved victimization of the animal. By changing from ape to human, he makes the physical and moral proximity of humans and apes self-evident. Danta compares "A Report to an Academy" with a folk tale known as the Animal

Bachelor story. Here, animals masquerade as human beings: they are often beast by day and man by night. Such tales contain the truth that the human being is an animal. But usually the story is resolved by the subject being either a human or an animal. Kafka's animals are in contrast close to us yet strange, at once animal and human. They convey a sense of 'proximate estrangement' (130). Humanity has founded its superiority on forgetting our animality, and contempt for animals, reducing them to the level of things, enslaved and butchered. Kafka utilises the mythic permeability of animal and human identity to convey the alienation of modern humans, not just from other animals, but also from each other.

### Critical Zoomorphism

Kafka played a pioneering role in adapting to modernity cultural traditions running counter to the human-animal philosophical binary, using animals as personas for human emotional states and as allegories for suppressed minorities. At the same time he focalised his animal narratives in such a way as to avoid the domesticating, moralising anthropomorphism of classical fables and tales of transformation into animal form. His stories exemplify the critical anthropomorphism of which Weil, and ecocritics including Garrard and Clark, write that, combining affect with critical awareness of irreducible difference, it can do justice to the agency of the non-human, and serve as a tool for questioning the complacency of dominant human self-conceptions. Anthropomorphic attentiveness to the other and imagination of their perspective may ultimately be the best means at our disposal to bring readers to act on behalf of animals' perceived needs and desires (see Weil 2002, 19).

Kafka's animal tales conform to the epistemology of literary Modernism in that they critique modernity's instrumental reason and domination of other species, and figure the repression of our own animality. However, while sharing Modernism's break with nineteenth-century sentimental engagement with animals in the aesthetic sphere, they do not participate in its turn to revitalising savagery, either in the form of D.H. Lawrence's recuperative stance towards the animal, which imagined restoring a primal union between human and beast, or in a struggle to the death between the two as a way of stepping out of the empty artifice of modern living into truth, as in Ernest Hemingway's depictions of bullfighting, big game hunting and fishing. This makes Kafka's disruption of anthropocentrism a particularly rewarding subject for analysis in Animal Studies.

Kafka's stories are also Modernist in aesthetic terms, as we have seen, with their formal experimentation and richly suggestive symbolism. Modernist formal innovation was in fact closely linked with the project of undermining the human-animal binary, as Carrie Rohman has argued. The breakdown of traditional literary syntax, structure and narration through the introduction of circuitous and unstable narrative devices coincided with the post-

Darwinian eruption of non-human chaotic forces within humanism, forging a distinctly Modernist formal embodiment of the animal problem (Rohman 2009, 27). These qualities have made Kafka's stories as a *locus classicus* of literary animal representation, which has served as an inspiration for younger writers: Philip Armstrong has described "A Report to an Academy" as "the most influential literary great ape narrative of the twentieth century" (202).

Such writing subverts the categories and distinctions which we rely on to make sense of the world and elevate ourselves above it, challenges us to reconsider assumptions about our uniqueness and virtue, and moves us towards overcoming our alienation from the natural world and our own bodies. Kafka exemplifies the role of fiction writers in negotiating change in our perceptions of animals, nature and environment, and demonstrates the ability of narrative to contribute to debates on issues of public concern alongside conceptual discourses. Animal studies thus reveals itself as a field in which literature serves as a prime medium of cultural ecology, serving to restore "the richness, diversity and complexity of those inner landscapes of the mind, the imagination, the emotions, and interpersonal communication that make up the cultural ecosystems of modern humans, but are threatened by impoverishment from an increasingly overeconomised, standardised, and depersonalised contemporary world" (Zapf 2008, 852).

Work examining the representation of animals and analysing conceptions of human-animal relations in literature, film and art has until recently only been loosely connected with Ecocriticism (which has had closer links with Feminist and Postcolonial Studies): of the 34 essays recently presented by Greg Garrard in the *Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, only four (contributions on Posthumanism, Ferality Tales, Extinctions, and Children's Literature) engage significantly with animal questions. Although at first sight Kafka's writing does not appear to address ecocritical themes, his animal stories have nonetheless provided a forum for "the enactment of the dialogical interdependence between self and other" which Zapf calls for, while offering the necessary resistance to simplistic interpretation and appropriation of life's complex, dynamic processes. Staging and exploring "the complex feedback relationship of prevailing cultural systems with the needs and manifestations of human and non-human nature" (ibid.), they make a significant contribution to cultural self-renewal.

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