

## Abstract

My thesis attempts to find the ‘literary’ answer to the problem of knowing the animals from their own ontological enclosures. Mobilising the word ‘Poetics’ to resonate a paradoxical awareness of animals’ being, which we at once succeed and fail to discover, the project seeks to uncover how the works of literature as ‘*poiesis*’ are fundamentally consistent with such an *im-possible* animality. While not discrediting the empirical dimension of an animal’s being, my work attunes to what is at stake in our attempts to conceptualise animal thinking. Primarily conceptual, the project examines the stakes of literature to put in motion the ‘onto-epistemic’ paradoxes and disorientations that underlie the question of animals and their seemingly ‘straightforward’ representations. Refusing to see the animals neither solely in their physical register nor in their conceptual costume, the project homes in on a ‘in-between’ experience that does not draw any demarcation between species identity: between the animal and the human. The expression ‘Animal Poetics’ does not seek to bring home yet another ‘human standpoint’ on animal lives but proceeds to read all forms of animal thinking as primarily arising out of a deeply entangled human-animal consciousness, an experience that always comes before the event of *actual* animal subjectivity.

Sniffing the scent of such a singular animality, the chapters here present us with three of the most commonplace approaches to animal lives: ethics, stupidity and monstrosity. My first chapter, titled “**Animal Poetics & The Question of Ethics,**” problematises the very idea of animal ethics through a close reading of two fictional works by the novelist J.M. Coetzee: *Disgrace* and *Lives of the Animals*. In *Disgrace*, the chapter reads the relationship between David Lurie and his dogs as

hinting towards an alternative platform for thinking animal-centric ethics which is anchored neither upon the ‘sameness’ nor ‘difference’ between animal and the human species, but upon a feeling of *mutual indistinguishability* brought on by a feeling of epistemic uncertainty. In *Lives of the Animals*, the chapter unearths the tacit anthropocentrism at play in western thinking that avows to speak *for* the animals. Deciding to read against the grain of an ostensibly zoo-centric aspiration of the novelist Elizabeth Costello, it unmasks the more profound ‘sacrificial logic’ at work in the discourse of vegetarianism widely accepted to function as a mode of *dietetic redemption*. The second chapter – “**Animal Poetics and the limit of Stupidity**” – ties in with the problem of stupidity, a supposedly ‘lesser’ behavioural trait so often imputed to animals for the alleged lack of language and logical thinking. However, the chapter overturns such run-of-the-mill contention by engaging with two of Frantz Kafka’s notable zoo poetical texts, *The Metamorphosis* and *A Report to an Academy*. In both texts, the chapter discovers a conscious literary design that deliberately seeks to obscure our received ideas of animal subjectivity by drawing attention to a figure of an ‘animal within’, an experience, it claims, that is irretrievably entangled with our experience of the literature and language. My final chapter titled “**Animal Poetics and the Monstrosity of the Other**” probes into the concept of ‘monstrous Other’ or monstrosity and re-locates it at the febrile frontier between the human and the animal species. As it recalibrates our banal reception of literary monsters, the chapter further invites us to examine the very power of literary texts to construct monstrous discourses that can eventually return its readers to a state of an (in-between) ontological disruption in themselves.

However, what unites all these chapters is my underlying belief in the elusive and ambivalent ontology of animal life, a reality that is at once disclosed to and withheld from its readers and leaves them perpetually in the ontological ‘no-man’s land’ between the human and the animal. The poetics of such ‘*indistinction*’ is, as my project argues, inextricably bound up with the experience of literature. ‘Animal Poetics’ does not attempt to be *objectively* accurate about specificities of animal life as such, but lays bare the deeper considerations at work in such authoritarian undertakings: it is not concerned with animals as a theriomorphic reality, the animal as it ‘is’, but with the animal as an experience of the ‘impossible’.