

## Introduction: What is Animal Poetics?

‘Wandering between two worlds, one dead,  
The other powerless to be born,’

- Matthew Arnold, *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*

“Thinking is poetizing, and indeed more than poetry and song,  
Thinking of being is the original way of poet”.

- Martin Heidegger, *The Anaximander Fragment*

“It has its point of view regarding me. The point of view of the absolute other, and nothing will have ever given me more food for thinking through this absolute alterity of the neighbour or of the next door than these moments when I see myself seen naked under the gaze of a cat”.

-Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*

Is it possible for human- animals to know other animals from their side of things, from underneath their own skins? In a sense, there is an originary “yes” that comes before this question: himself an animal, the human becomes a subject by saying ‘no’ to his own animality, animality that comes before humanity. Conversely, precisely because humans do not consider themselves animals, they find themselves pigeonholed into an anthropological enclosure and gape at the animal world in

wonder and awe across the abyss of speciesism. Knowing the animals, thus, is as much a matter of crossing over this species divide as it is a matter of immanent reckoning of the animal within the human, of staying cross-ed within oneself. Making sense of animal life requires more than what our taxonomic vocabulary and empirical description of it can exhaust; it also calls attention to a deeper ontological consideration in how its strange existence resists and exceeds human expectations. Traditionally human thinking has been so heavily conditioned by its anthropological narrative of mastery that there is no way for animals to exist outside the calculus of human projection. My thesis is an attempt to unravel and explore the possibility of knowing this complex sense of animal being which I have chosen to call ‘Animal Poetics’ through my reading of some select works of literary fiction. My interest in this thesis is not to provide any empirical or neurobiological account of an animal's behavioural dynamics. I have made no effort to present any ‘science’ of animal life. Rather, my thesis aims to see how our ontological and conceptual probing of animal consciousness, when seen through the optics of literary works, allows us to see the animal as an impossible possibility, a possibility that is at once possible and impossible. Such ‘im-possible’ animality underscores and epitomizes animal poetics in this thesis.

Animal poetics, in this thesis, doles out a view of the animal as a necessary ‘im-possibility’, a possibility realized and withheld at the same instance. To experience an animal as an animal, one must encounter it both as a material or corporeal substance and as a much broader semiotic or conceptual cypher that in turn mediates all our experiences of animality: the animal is, in Donna Haraway language, a “material-semiotic knot”<sup>1</sup>. Encountering the animal is as much physical as it is a conceptual event. While our general perception of animal life is largely

shaped by our physical interaction with them at a more immediate physical level, it would be wrong to conclude that an animal is nothing other than its brute physicality. There could be no tangible sense of animal life without the presupposition of some kind of categorical imperative. All events of supposedly 'real' encounters with a diverse array of animal lives add to our understanding of what we know as animals, but they can do so only through the pre-existing concept of animality set in motion through its written or inscriptive marks. At the same time, to reduce the vibrancy of one's face to face encounter with radically heterogeneous organisms (from elephant to arthropods, jellyfish to jaguar) to the elocutionary effect of the word 'animal' which acts, as Derrida reminds us, as "catch-all concept" is to overlook the possibility that it might have "its point of view regarding me".

Believing that animals can have a 'point of view' that remains opaque to the human gaze may lead us to infer that all our understanding and insights of animal life habitually proceeds from our inability to know it from its ontological enclosure. Since our representation of animal lives remains caught up within human categorical postulation, our idea of animality is destined to remain embroiled within a very 'general' sense as our cognition fails to fathom what it feels to be an animal in itself. This is the fundamental philosophical argument advanced by philosopher Thomas Nagel in his highly-referenced essay from 1974, *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?*, where he acknowledged the eventual failure of philosophy to understand a mode of existence not reducible to our own. Building on his neo-Kantian transcendental idealism, Nagel posits an ultimate schism between a bat (or any other animal) as recognized by the human perception (phenomena) and a bat as in itself (noumena):

There are facts which could not ever be represented or comprehended by human beings, even if the species lasted forever—simply because our structure does not permit us to operate with concepts of the requisite type...Reflection on what it is like to be a bat seems to lead us, therefore, to the conclusion that there are facts that do not consist in the truth of propositions expressible in a human language. We can be compelled to recognize the existence of such facts without being able to state or comprehend them (Nagel 441).

Nagel's theoretical inquiry into bat's life presupposes a rift between what a bat is and how it is languaged; he locates the truth of bat's life in the domain of its elusive corporeal dimension. As I strive to demonstrate, animal poetics inhabits somewhat the middle ground between the two extreme poles. Just because it decrees, humans experience animals in their physical signatures does not solely imply that our experiences of the animals are "physical or that we understand fully the way in which the physical yields the phenomenal" (Colebrook *Only An Animal*) To think of animal lives is not merely to cognize oneself with the empirical or the physicalist details of animal lives; one must also attend to how these supposed objective attributes of animals' lives are always already mediated (in our experience) through their corresponding written or spoken marks (in speech and writing). Because one is never entitled to any unmediated access to what they are in themselves, thinking animals must presuppose some form of human 'making' (poetics) or system of apprehending. While the human experience of animal lives (in all their immediacy and plenitude) cannot altogether be restricted to its material signifiers, it cannot entirely be liberated from them either.

Animal poetics works with/through this implicit sense of irony: on one hand, no creature can be rightfully called an animal without becoming a part of the human system of signification (poiesis), on the other hand, animal, to be worthy of its name, must leap beyond the horizon of the human system of signs. While the truth of animal experience unquestionably exceeds the categorical grasping of its human-centred contexts, it is, nonetheless, only such human contexts that allow humans to imagine the 'beyond' which lies outside the human realm. Although humans might never know what it is like to be an animal, it still helps us understand the productive impossibility in the evocation of such contexts. Ron Broglio's observation here appropriately sums up the provocative double-bind of contextuality underlying any theoretical probing into animal phenomenology:

To ask what is animal phenomenology is to engage in an unanswerable question. Lest readers become disheartened at the outset, it is worth noting that the very impossibility of understanding the animal as Other serves as the productive friction by which authentically new thinking and art are produced. The problem itself becomes a means of creating outside of what is acceptably known and intelligible. Unlike conventional engagement with animals, the problem of ascertaining an animal phenomenology inscribes within itself and announces in advance its own impossibility (Broglio xx-xxi).

My thesis wishes to see animals not as an enclosed totalitarian concept: it seeks to explore not 'the' animal but simply animals. The sense evoked by the word

‘animal’ exceeds its physical ontic reality and its conceptual dissipation. Human thinking of animals is dented at its foundation by the conditions of its submerged anthropocentrism. Brought up on the legacy of Cartesian dualism (*cogito*) our thinking has inevitably led us to authorize an inflexible line of demarcation between the human and the animals in a way that impedes its own access to animals. Hence the provocation to think of animals beyond our thinking is to realize how our thought itself handicaps and holds us back from glimpsing their actual being. It is good to recall Derrida’s words- words that have taken on almost legendary status among animal studies scholars - in this context: “An animal looks at us and we are naked before it. Thinking, perhaps, begins there” (Derrida 29). Derrida calls on us to tread on a path that leads to a ‘performative contradiction’ in the first place, he alerts us to dangers of our banal and habitually complacent anthropocentric endeavours that seek to corral them under a single concept (the animal); secondly, he seems to suggest that the very idea of such transcendent animal figure lying outside human representations necessarily emanates from within the hermeneutics of human desire and remains a necessary im-possibility. Knowing animals, thus, always remains a double-articulation: to know about animals, one must submit to some concept of animality only to arrive at knowledge about its conceptual inefficacy. My understanding of animal consciousness as a ‘quasi-transcendental’ experience remains hooked to my interest in the questions of animal ontology as a realm of the ineffable that, as Derrida believed, is perpetually haunted philosophy from the beginning. In the event of our theoretical speculations about animal ontology ( such as the one undertaken by Derrida himself with his cat), we are forced to encounter the poverty of our anthropocentric point of view in the presence of something heterogeneous. As our consciousness makes the transition from ‘seeing’ animals to

'being seen' by them, we are catapulted into re-imagining the monolithic autonomy of words like 'thinking' 'knowing' 'being', and 'response' as if they meant something entirely different. The experience as such may not take us close to the animal in itself, but we nevertheless grasp this transcendent animal through its very absence; we at least know the idea of the absolute animal can be realized through the creation of disparate representational configurations which make us think in the first place. It is this ironic, fragmented and almost incomplete experience of animal lives that I have chosen to call animal poetics. Understood in the Aristotelian sense, Poetics looks back to its Greek *Poiesis*, which for Aristotle denotes a power (*dunamis*) that alludes to a less perfect mode of existence, one which perennially points to end outside itself and thereby intrinsically incomplete.

The word 'Poetics' here should not be read either as a generic reference to works of poetry or as poetic works thematically oriented towards the animal, as the use of the word seems to indicate in some notable contemporary works.<sup>2</sup> Nor can the word be conceived in its typical Aristotelian sense as a methodological analysis of foundational tenets of any form of theoretical enquiry. As stated before, my work recruits the word poetics in a unique sense in which it is deemed to reflect the elusive nature of animal existence that obstinately flies in the face of our systematic mapping, cognitive or conceptual. Since humans cannot view animals without altering the latter's perspective, there exists an endless conceptual stream, incessant hermeneutical conjectures about the ontology of animal lives about which no final knowledge could be reached. Animal poetics does not offer any overarching solution to this problem. However, in seeking to unravel the animal's enigmatic consciousness, it draws our attention back to the provisional status of our representational manoeuvres that helped create such an ultimate and unrepresentable

condition in the first place. Animal poetics, in this sense, cannot be conceived as some form of Hegelian ‘sublation’ (*Aufhebung*) wherein thinking of animal is ‘annihilating’ it into a conceptual fixity, but allowing its essential uncanny opacity to retain in a way that enables the thinking to turn back upon itself. It resembles what Heidegger called a ‘stepping backwards’ (*schrittzurück*) from any foundational or totalizing pattern of animal life. Where our theoretical probing of animal life seeks to ground our knowledge of it on to some fixed, immutable metaphysical principle of truth (*theoria*), the word poetics, conceived in its original Greek sense *poiesis*, promotes an ontological interruption between animals and their representations. Claire Colebrook's words here help us underline the difference at stake ‘between ‘theoria’ and ‘poetics’:

The Greek word *theoria* was tied not just to looking, but to an elevated look that could grasp the Ideas themselves: those forms or essences that could always be seen in any singular particular and which allowed for any particular instance to be what it is. By contrast, *poiesis* is anti-self-conscious; *poiesis* is the creation of some term (such as a poem) that is other than the act. Unlike *Theoria*, which aims to see life as it is and to be at one with the essence of life, *poiesis* allows the fall of life into fragmented, detached, and finite productions, such as the various works and voices of culture. <sup>3</sup>

I am tempted to see such an ineluctable experience of poetics as something close to Martin Heidegger's general project of fundamental ontology. Although the general tenor of Heidegger's thinking is far from accommodating a critical space for

favourable discussion of animal ontology, it nevertheless augments my critical formulations of the kind of animal poetics I aim to advance in this research. What interests me in Heidegger is his fundamental belief about how human beings ontologically relate to other beings (including animals). He considers this aspect of relationality to be so essential that he defines human beings on its basis: humans are *Dasien* or simply 'being-in-the world' Being- with. It is because of its 'thereness' (*Da*), its enmeshed and almost undifferentiated plexus with other beings -which he calls 'Being-With' (*Mitsein*)- that it finds itself to be existing at all. Such being the default human condition, human consciousness cannot posit any theory about the beings it encounters since, for the most part, it encounters beings at a pre-theoretical and unreflective level of immediacy. Such a state always precedes its purely detached and objective gaze of the world. Thinking about other beings (animals in this context), therefore, cannot be an act of our intentional consciousness postulating diverse representations and turning them into an objectified 'reification' but "a non-assertive tracing out of the measure and manner of *the realm of unconcealment* (italics mine) in which all things move" (Clark 86). For Heidegger then, entities do not manifest themselves only as theoretically intelligible, physically quantifiable, the truth (*a-lethia*) about their being is any time more than their presence, intelligibility, and taken-for-granted objectivity. No amount of physical or conceptual description can exhaust the being of entities which is simply averse to the contexts of human reason and use-value to which we habitually put them: they are in effect defined by their recalcitrance, inscrutability, and withdrawal.

Although Heidegger agrees that this primordial sense of relatedness permeates all beings: both the humans and animals, only the latter are privileged to experience this "wealth of being-open" (Agamben 60). They are privileged because

they are captivated by the space that environs them. By contrast, human beings are denied such joyous unmediated immersion into their environment because they can free themselves from such captivating spells. However, the alienation as such need not be regretted for it is what enables human beings to experience animals as animals: one cannot think of it entirely as ‘privation’ since it is in the very act of affirming their distance and difference from original Edenic unity that humans recognize themselves as conscious beings, possessing subjectivity. To Heidegger, this is the primary way human beings are ‘attuned’ or related to the world of animals and also how they disclose themselves to us. The structure of ‘attunement’ (*Befindlichkeit*) for human beings (through which they perceive animal beings) has an ambivalent relationship to knowledge. Attunement and knowledge are different yet cannot be differentiated; we can know about animals only because we are fundamentally attuned to them even as our knowledge forever fails to grasp the very kernel of such attunement. The following quotation from *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* succinctly explains the poetics of attunement as it constantly seeks to escape the radar of human knowledge:

Attunements are something that cannot be straightforwardly ascertained in a universally valid way, like a fact that we could lead everyone to see. Not only can an attunement not be ascertained, it ought not to be ascertained, even if it were possible to do so. For all ascertaining means bringing to consciousness. With respect to attunement, all making conscious means destroying, altering in each case, whereas in awakening an attunement we are concerned to let this attunement be as it is, as this attunement. (Heidegger 65)

Heidegger here forces us to contemplate an onto-epistemic paradox that drives human thought to acknowledge its limit, its impossibility: On one hand, humans can never truly ‘awaken’ animal attunement since to do so would be to render it into a product of human knowledge made ready for practical use; knowledge and attunement are at war one another. On the other hand, since we are always far from such attunement, we can open a ‘clearing’ where we may allow animals to ‘let be’ (*Gelassenheit*). The very possibility of knowing animals *as* animals stems from the impossibility of knowing them as such.

In a crucial sense, Heidegger’s fundamental ontology helps us see how animals and humans are fundamentally entangled; this entanglement is so fundamental that it precedes its generic sequestration into categories of human and animal. From this entangled or enmeshed state, we distinguish between the animals and the human, but this can only occur after the event. Seen from such a vantage ground, it helps to reorient our approach to animals and animal studies. There cannot ever be any animal studies in any absolute sense of the term (animals studied by animals) since “all animal studies are inherently human studies”<sup>4</sup> just as there can be no humanism or humanity or humanities without symbolic exclusion of the animal other, animal as other. An acceptance of the failure of rendering animals’ point of view, far from widening the gap between the animal and the human, can surprisingly bring them together on a shared platform - which is the recognition of one’s own finitude, a fragility or incapacity that humans share with the animals. Cary Wolfe, citing Derrida, speaks of finitude as an incapacity or radical passivity that humans share with animals, and as such, this sharing can assume an ethical valence. He refers to two types of finitude: firstly, the finitude of

flesh, which is the physical mortality in which they both partake; secondly, coming out of the first, the finitude of thought in which human beings can experience something akin to animal attunement, an experience where humans experience an utter collapse between the overwhelming state of animal's reality and the conceptual tools they deploy to comprehend such, in American philosopher Cora Diamond's words, "Difficulty of Reality."<sup>5</sup> The very act of thinking one's finitude can trigger a sense of what Derrida calls 'not being able', a radical incapacity or passivity that in turn helps us see finitude itself as a form of animality, an animality that is also within us. Determining what makes an animal's point of view is as baffling and challenging as determining what makes a human being a human being since one human being can be an entire mystery to another, much less to himself. As Claire Colebrook comments that we "may know all we can about humans but just as we do not know what it is like to be a bat, we do not know what it is like to be blind or deaf, and we certainly do not know what it is like to be human. One does not know what it is like to be one's self until one reads one's self as if one were an alien animal." (Colebrook). The inability to make sense of animals turns the human gaze back upon itself, forcing humans to acknowledge the animal they always have been. This ontological disclosure of beings in which they are neither identical nor different to one another remains in a state of perpetual ontological doubt and betweenness - the space which always comes before the distinctions between the species are constituted - that I designate as 'Animal Poetics'. Poiesis, for Heidegger, is a mode of 'disclosure' that never indeed discloses or manifests itself but constantly veers away from foundational or totalizing patterns and is resistant to being named. It is something, he believes, that arises out of itself and, for this reason, it is never going to be a matter of human management and control, even though it only manifests or

reveals itself through human mediation. Animal poetics is made a disclosure of animal being through forms or systems of human ‘making’ (*poiesis*) as well as an ‘unmaking’ in the realization of the ultimate failure of such making, while not for a moment forgetting that it is the only through such finite forms of human creation that we can picture the transcendental animal being. Thinking animal poetics, therefore, is not only about asking ‘what’ is animal consciousness or being, but also about asking how do we know what we know; it allows us to probe the question of the animal not only at the level of thematic but also at the level of methodology. It deems animals not merely as a detached object of investigation but an agent in its own right actively engaged in the creation of its own meaning. It is not an invitation to perform some absolutist thought-experiment but engenders “an understanding that always has its potential for collapse before it” (Broglie xviii ).

In this research, I have attempted to demonstrate animal poetics by reading select works of literary fiction that recoil from the idea of animals as normative, prescriptive, and totalizing. As *poiesis* (both as ‘unconcealment’ and ‘making’), they shy away from setting about any definitive philosophical or theoretical formulation about animal being as a timeless or immutable essence but attempt to un-conceal such supposed essence as an effect of such finite forms of literary or poetic making (poetics used synonymously with literature). Although the term *poiesis* in Heidegger has a conceptual reach that is much broader than the reference to works of poetry or literature,<sup>6</sup> there is a reason why he considers literary works to have the edge over philosophical discourse. According to Heidegger, *poiesis* as a revelation of being is the original site of truth (*a-lethia* or unravelling), and thus indistinguishable from one another. The connection between *poiesis* and literature (poetics) is an intrinsic one. Therefore, we are not merely looking at the works of literature or poetics as a

domain where the truths of animal beings (human and nonhuman) are revealed, but all thinking of truth about beings is inherently *literary*.

There is yet another sense in which thinking about animal consciousness aligns with literary thinking more than it does with the philosophical. Whereas philosophy as *theoria* in seeking to grasp the essence of a being's truth presses towards an objectifying form of knowledge that invariably falls out of sync with such disclosure, literary works being fundamentally non-propositional, non-representational and non-assertive works in sync with it. While philosophy attempts to 'thematize' and render it objective, in literary works, it stays 'unthematized' or 'un-thought' and thus affects a non-metaphysical relationship with being.

This 'unthematized' sense of the animal being revealed through literary works implies that we never truly perceive the animal as a self-enclosed subject or entity in its own right separate from the human. Instead, it leads towards a pre-reflective and pervasive sense of wholeness from which the sense of animal or animality occurs; it is a web of relationality between animals, between the human-animal and non-human one. It is pre-rational but not anti-rational. It is no longer possible to pinpoint their difference in the first place. The works of literature as *poiesis* create a space of indistinction between species where they touch one another without really touching, relate without relating, become one another without having their reality entirely effaced. Here the literary draws its sheer force from how the distinction between human and animal can be unstable. It is not that there is a pre-existent world of the animal embodied through literary works, whereas the literary primarily works to 'imitate' or re-present the original presence of the animal. Instead, the very sense of the animal (as well as the human) can emerge only from 'literary or poetic thinking' itself, in the way literary works think back on their own

(textual) complicity and active involvement in the creation of meaning. Instead of allowing the animal to assume a position of a transcendent figure existing outside the literary or textual discourse, it draws the readers' attention back to the operation by which they both represent and perform the animal and animality. By opening up a threshold spot between the animal and the human, the space of literature induces a 'literary point of view' which is neither quite animal nor fully human but a singular in-between consciousness that refuses to ascribe to any specific species standpoint. However, from this disorganized heap of affects, the distinctions between the species are produced. Claire Colebrook elucidates the ability of literary enunciation to promote a scepticism regarding the points of view specific to any species:

it is never fully determinable whether what is being said is what is meant, creating a zone of indifference between the generically human and the utterly alien. In literature point of view is singular; to speak is to open the world to a certain style. In literature there is no 'what it is like' to be the character; all we have is an inscription as such and no phenomenal or human self behind the speech. I would suggest that the same applies in every dealing with every living being of the world: not only do we not know what it is like to be deaf or blind or a bat, we do not know what it is like to be oneself. Or, more accurately, we are all deaf and blind to what we say and who we are; we might as well be bats. (Colebrook)

Responding to the call of animal poetics, all of my chapters attempt to read this fugitive sense of animal being in its non-foundational mode in works of literary

fiction with which I have chosen to engage. The idea is not to treat the animals in the text solely as ‘objects’ of study (a method which remains predominant in many works of literary animal studies); they are not simply rhetorical tropes or conceptual stand-in for the real animals but a ‘material-semiotic amalgam that goes beyond physical/conceptual barrier to develop their agentic singularity. The objective is very much, what Derrida says, “to have the plural animals heard in the singular” (Derrida 47). The choice behind the literary texts selected in this thesis is not exclusively guided by the aspiration to find out how far they allow us to interpret the animal ‘out’ from these texts. It is motivated by an anxious desire to see how they also problematize such interpretive endeavour. They ‘represent’ the animality and yet question such representations. By questioning textual representations, they underscore the impossibility of knowing the animal in the singular while also maintaining that it is only through the evocation of such representational pluralities that one can imagine a singular animality. Following the trails of such singular animality invoked by animal poetics, my successive chapters attempt to engage particularly with three habitual and almost stereotypical modes of human assertions by which we mostly try to make sense of animal lives: ethics (to make them live better), stupidity and monstrosity. The chapters do not aim to take on these given human impulses in a bid to dislodge them as prejudices that come in the way of our true analysis of animal lives but make them undergo a radical ‘defamiliarization’ (to use one of Russian literary critic Viktor Shklovsky’s term) that overturn our habitual disposition about them. Under the defamiliarizing pull of animal poetics, ethicality, stupidity, and monstrosity renew their hermeneutical reach and extent.

The first chapter titled ‘Animal Poetics and the Question of Ethics’ ties in with the argument over the question of the ethics of non-human animals, particularly

with the argument of whether there is any possibility of true animal-centric ethics in the first place, given the very anthropocentric underpinning of Western thought out of which our thoughts of ethics and rights subsequently emerged. This chapter seeks to offer a critique of the hidden anthropocentrism of western thought based on the idea of the systematic erasure of the animal or animalistic from human subjectivity. This principle entrenches itself in creating what Cary Wolfe calls the ‘institute of speciesism’. The idea of animal ethics is principally triggered by the belief in extending legal rights to the community of the non-human animals on the presumption that the latter, when given the proper training and exposure, is capable of performing some of the foundational acts that differentiate the human from the animal- such as the supposed ability of some apes to learn human language and teach the same to other apes. For Peter Singer and Paola Cavalieri, figures instrumental for founding the Great Ape Project (1993), such discoveries make them eligible for their inclusion in what they call a “community of equals” This particular view is underscored by a principle of ‘sameness of species’ which opens onto an idea of a shared ‘capability’ or ‘I can’ of both human and animal.

Against such formulation of ethics based on shared capacity, my chapter seeks to reveal an animal poetics, through a reading of J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999), that aims to show how a literary text can pose a serious challenge to the ethics founded on the observed ontological sameness between the community of equals. Such a conceptual co-opting of the animal into human discourse promotes human ‘sympathy’ to assume an uncontested ethical legitimacy. By exposing both the protagonist of the novel David Lurie and his dogs to an experience of finitude and suffering, the chapter outlines how a feeling of mutual vulnerability and operativity can trigger a sense of indistinction between them. It strives to

demonstrate how such exposure to finitude drives the protagonist to be overwhelmed by a state of onto-epistemic confusion in which he fails to draw a boundary between ‘killing animals’ and ‘being ethically serviceable to them’.

The chapter then turns to *Lives of the Animals* (1999), another important work by Coetzee on human-animal ethical relations, a meta-fictional work featuring two talks delivered by the writer Elizabeth Costello on the subject of animal lives. By carefully attending to what is at stake in Costello’s ethical championing of vegetarianism: a ‘dietary prohibition’ in her first talk and her passionate advocacy of poetry over philosophy as a more genuine mode of animal exposure in the second, it charts a different permutation of animal ethics which ultimately makes us see how our deeply-held beliefs, sympathetic performances, practical commitments attuned to animals can be at odds with the inscrutable reality of animal lives.

The second chapter titled ‘Animal Poetics and the limit of Stupidity’ takes up Kafka’s ‘vast zoopoetics’ to show how Kafka’s unique treatment of the animal question recasts the discourse of the human and the non-human in a way that not only complicates our linear understanding of the relationship but turns the very question of the animality on its head by calling us to doubt everything we ostensibly know about animal being. Animals in Kafka are not anything like one commonly recognized ‘as’ animals. In general, Kafka’s work is not about the pursuit of any final transcendent knowledge of animal life but attempts to capture such inscrutable experience in the figure of an ‘animal within’. Passage to such an internal animality lies not with knowledge but stupidity- a word too often profaned for human beings due to its traditional association with irrationality and ignorance epitomized in the figure of the animal. However, this chapter attempts at countering such anthropocentric assumptions that end up coupling humans with intelligence,

language, and knowledge while animals with the mere body and stupidity. Kafka explores the possibility of stupidity as a limit-experience in his literary works on animals. For Kafka, stupidity is just not another form of human imprudence or an error loosely ascribed to animals; it instead ties in with his more profound understanding of how animality as a discourse stages a complex and unsteady dialogue between knowledge and stupidity.

Building on the idea of a stupid human-animality that remains eternally lost to human knowledge, the chapter investigates Kafka's *Metamorphosis* that describes a mysterious becoming-animal of its protagonist Gregor Samsa. The animal poetics or the animal consciousness emerges in the text precisely with this particular moment of failure of the ability of knowledge to make sense of the 'alien' in the self. Furthermore, in that, we are served better by stupidity. Such asinine stupidity may be counterproductive when one begins to count the rewards it brings. Kafka seems to hint that it may feel stupid to have transformed into a creature lacking communication, but such non-communication can open up the horizon of experience to other forms of expressivities, hitherto ignored.

The second part of this chapter looks at Kafka's *A Report to an Academy*, in which the analogy between animality and stupidity appears even more pronounced. While in *Metamorphosis*, we witness the 'becoming-animal of a human, this slender work of fiction presents an animal experiencing 'becoming human. Kafka's story of an 'animal tuned human' nevertheless harks back to a residual experience of animality that stays withheld from others and himself. Kafka's understanding of such paradoxical animality is inherently literary in the sense that it cannot be disentangled from our experience of literature and language. Thus, Kafka's animals lay bare an experience of animal poetics in which literature and animality are inextricably

entangled. The doorway to such impenetrable animality is only possible through the passage to one's stupidity.

I take this question of insulated human-animality to its bio-political extreme in my final chapter titled, 'Animal poetics & the 'monstrosity' of the Other'. The chapter turns towards the question of 'monstrosity' or the 'monstrous other', which becomes integral to the essential distinction between categories of human and animal. Although very much a fictional category travelling back to the earliest times, it always has had the potential to disturb the foundational assumptions around which the human and the animal discourses constituted themselves. Provoking playful indeterminacy at the faultline of our species-boundary, the figure of a monster promotes what Donna Haraway calls a "confusion of boundaries and the responsibility of their construction."<sup>7</sup> A strange mixture of the sovereign and the beast, the existence of the hybrid figure of the monster serves to question the very foundation of our human identity. For this reason, we always seek to be rid of them. By evicting them through variegated forms of exclusion, we rid ourselves of the unwanted attributes they are perceived to carry.

However, instead of closing down on such a 'monstrous other', my chapter stages the return of the repressed. By choosing to see things from a monstrous point of view, the chapter uncovers an animal poetics that takes issue with the divisive implications of our bio-political humanity. Thus, the chapter reads Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* from the perspective of its unnamed monster, which stands in stark contrast to the self-replicating, narcissistically myopic, and hyper-humanist point of view of its creator, Victor Frankenstein. As a foil to Victor's Promethean form of knowledge, the monster exemplifies a pre-reflective 'formless knowledge' that obscures the ingrained distinctions between human and the non-human and

opens the door to a new ethical imaginary for the human-animal relationship. The chapter then turns the question of monstrosity inwards by asking how humanity, in its mindless drive towards self-perpetuation, produces an abject monstrosity which it can neither escape nor disregard. It does so with Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* - a text that can be seen as a modern-day companion piece to Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*. *Never Let Me Go* engages with the overly Frankensteinic urges of our biopolitical humanity, which both produce and is produced by figures of monstrous cloned beings in Ishiguro's text.

Throughout my work, I have not approached 'animal poetics' as a nomothetic category that would posit a concrete universalized method of revealing the truth of animal beings. I am interested in showing how it remains an ontological im-possibility and how such an im-possible and inscrutable animality is inherently attuned to the works of literary fiction. Animal poetics primarily responds to the problem of knowing what it is like to be an animal; it never approximates to any denial of an animal's physical reality but only serves to show what is at stake when one undertakes such endeavours. It would be a mistake to advance it as a stringent method for reading animals since it calls attention to an experience of animality that is inherently resistant to any form of methodological practice. Throughout, I have used the expression 'poetics' in more than one sense: poetics as 'making or the system of representation', as 'unmaking or the undoing of representation', as 'revelation or unconcealment' and as 'literature'. To legitimize such an eclectic use of the term, I have looked up to the works of some of the significant philosophers that directly or indirectly speaks to the nuances intrinsic to animal poetics and serve as theoretical elucidation: Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida,

Giorgio Agamben, Jean Luc Nancy, Gilles Deleuze to mention only those to whom I have recurrently gone back for ideational clarity.

Lastly, I set myself to ask the most important question of all - what good is animal poetics if it fails to grasp animals in its entirety? Why even bother asking this question when we know it is doomed to remain a futile exercise from the beginning? The animal, says Agamben, “is constituted in such a way that something like a pure possibility can never become manifest within it” (Agamben 68). It is precisely this “pure possibility” which ignites animal poetics. In the face of the impossibility to know and experience the animal from within its own membrane, we fall back upon the power of ‘human poetics’ (in all senses explicated above) to create its artistic fragments from which we inevitably conjure up the image of a transcendent animality lying outside the human world. All of my chapters perform such artistic mediation on the vexing opacity of animal lives, and by so doing, unfold the possibility of discovering new animal worlds. However, these would also be worlds in which rigid distinctions between animals and humans can no longer be maintained. In what follows, my chapters will invite the readers to enter what famous German bio-semiotician Jakob von Uexküll calls a “bbble” space that risks collapsing all pre-given species identities into a zone of mutual indistinction. Such a redemptive understanding of the human-animal relationship might not compensate for the loss of failing to know animals from their ontological enclosures; but the loss, here, far outweighs the gain.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Donna Haraway's revisionist ontology always pitted itself against a whole gamut of binary construction: emotion-intellect, nature-culture, domestic-wild, form-content, man-animal. She seeks to suspend such binary operations by not using them in distinction from one another but as a compound term - as in the case of 'natureculture' - that enables the readers to see through politics of keeping the terms separate from one another. Such compound expressions help us see how many many of these binary distinctions are always already compromised in our everyday lived experience. See Haraway, Haraway, Donna J. *When Species Meet*. 2008, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Nagel 441.

<sup>3</sup> Colebrook *Only An Animal*.

<sup>4</sup> Broglio xx-xxi.

<sup>5</sup> Derrida 29.

<sup>6</sup> Two notable contemporary works (under the aegis of Literary Environmentalism) to use the word 'poetics' to refer specifically to poetic works are Angela Hume, and Gillian Osborne edited *Ecopoetics: Essays in the Field* (2018) & Aaron M. Moe's *Zoopoetics: Animals and the Making of Poetry* (2014).

<sup>7</sup> Colebrook, *Irony* 52.

<sup>8</sup> Clark 86.

<sup>9</sup> Agamben 60.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger 65.

<sup>11</sup> Maccormack 20.

<sup>12</sup> Cora Diamond's phrase fundamentally reminds us of the limitations of philosophy as wisdom (*sophia*) about life. One can see how the limitation is inscribed literally in the very definition of philosophy: it is a 'love' (*philo*) of wisdom (*sophia*) and not the wisdom *itself*. See Cora Diamond's "The Difficulty of Life and the Difficulty of Philosophy," in *Philosophy and Animal Life*, Columbia University Press, 2008. pp. 42-89.

<sup>13</sup> Colebrook *Only An Animal*.

<sup>14</sup> Broglio xviii.

<sup>15</sup> Heidegger's concept of *poiesis* is very nuanced and developed throughout his career. Although the word '*poiesis*' is the one that procures 'poetry', Heidegger's use of the term takes it far beyond poetry or literature. He calls it type of a 'bringing forth' that takes place in two ways: both through human 'clearing' (such as human activity bringing something into existence, e.g., poems produced by poet or furniture made by a carpenter) and also when it takes place without any human interference (imagine the natural occurrences such as the weeds begin to sprout of its own volition), which Heidegger calls '*physis*'. Finally, he further links this idea of bringing something into existence from the realm of concealment to the Greek word '*Alethia*' (meaning 'truth'), which also carries the connotation of 'revealing' or 'unconcealment'.

<sup>16</sup> Colebrook *Only An Animal*.

<sup>17</sup> Derrida 47.

<sup>18</sup> Derrida 6.

<sup>19</sup> Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, 174.

<sup>20</sup> Agamben 68.

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