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Western Civilisation 'maintains itself by banishing Others (nature, animals, women, children) to the margin'.[1] How do Notions of Alterity and/or Marginalisation Feature in the Representation of Animals?

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Humans' relationship with animals is a complexly mutable one, with the parameters of distinction being repeatedly rethought and redrawn by thinkers from a range of disciplines. The protean nature of these irreconcilable views is apparent given how, as observed by John Berger, throughout history animals have been concurrently bred yet sacrificed, subjected to suffering yet worshipped in idolatry.[2] Accordingly, animals have continuously occupied a liminal space both above and below (but never *with*) man, a form of existential dualism reflective of the seemingly irresolvable struggle of where to place them in relation to humans. The site of difference between humans and other animals is where we derive our ontological concepts of humanity and animality and thus, ultimately, our place in the world as one species amongst others (an admittedly anthropocentric telos). Traditionally, ontological discourse on this issue has been dominated by an animal-human dichotomy, wherein the subjects are defined in opposition to each other.[3] The privation of certain attributes are cited as evidence for this polarity, with philosophers such as Kant, Descartes and Aristotle citing humans' capacity to reason as the qualifying criterion that simultaneously demarcates humans from animals, and endows us with a superiority over them. This binary contradistinction is threatened in Franz Kafka's 'A Report to an Academy', which utilises various postcolonial narrative strategies to obfuscate the human-animal distinction, destabilising the West's confident certainty in the Otherness of animals, and complicating the ethics of using animals' assumed alterity to justify their marginalisation and mistreatment. However, these notions of alterity have endured well beyond the time of Kafka's writing, and the modern-day consequences of this perennial ideology are interrogated in J. M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals,* the academic context of which allows Coetzee to catechise an audience about animal ethics through his amanuensis Elizabeth Costello. While Costello's polemic is met mostly with resistance by her in-text audience, she raises fundamental questions about the position of animals in Western thought and the repercussions of this.

As argued by Costello in her lecture, the philosophical thinking that foregrounds reason above all else as a uniquely defining trait of humans is inadequate when it comes to understanding and sympathising with animals; literature, however, is better equipped.[4] The subject of animals has often been explored in fiction, but despite authors' best intentions, their representation of animals inevitably tells us just as much about humans as it does animals, for two particular reasons. Firstly, humans' propensity to 'gaze at our own reflection in animals' means that they frequently act as ciphers in texts, adopting human attributes under an anthropomorphic lens in order to serve a symbolic purpose.[5] Secondly, the reason for the inevitability of this human omnipresence, is the very dichotomy used by Western tradition to widen the gulf in the human-animal distinction. Western insistence on defining human identity in opposition to animals means that the two ontological categories are, paradoxically, intrinsically linked, as this antithetical reasoning necessarily relies on construing the self through what it is *not*. This process is similar to apophatic theology's use of the *via negativa* to understand God, a way of thinking that raises intriguing questions about how humans perceive themselves in relation to animals, and perhaps suggesting a link to the Christian doctrine of dominion that hierarchically places man above all other forms of life.

A consequence of this discourse is that it creates the notion of alterity, a condemnation of Otherness that Western civilisation assigns to animals to deepen the divide of the animal-human dichotomy. This label of alterity has damning real-world ramifications: it formalises the idea that animals belong to a different order to humans, resulting in an in-group mentality which, Costello claims, leads us to internalise the belief that 'we can do what we want with [them]'.[6] Thus, when animals are represented in this state of Otherness, it paves the way for their marginalisation and subsequent persecution and maltreatment. There is no urgency to redefine these ideas about animals, however, as the notion of alterity

[1] Ursula Le Guin qtd. in Karla Armbruster, 'What Do We Want from Talking Animals?', *Speaking for Animals: Animal Autobiographical Writing,* ed. by Margo DeMello (London: Routledge, 2013), pp.17-33, 20.
[2] John Berger, *About Looking* (London: Writers and Readers, 1980), p. 7.
[3] Karla Armbruster, 'What do we want from talking animals?', in *Speaking for Animals: Animal Autobiographical Writing*, ed. by Margo DeMello (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 19.
[4] Amy Gutmann, 'Introduction', in J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 5.
[5] Armbruster, 'What do we want', p. 19.
[6] J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 58: hereafter cited in-text as (LA).

is employed to anthropocentric ends in order to justify society's treatment of animals and thus ensure the continued existence of Western civilisation in its current form, a polemical observation received unfavourably by her audience, generating an uneasiness symptomatic of the pathos permeating throughout the text. Through his amanuensis Elizabeth Costello, Coetzee challenges Western civilisation's relationship with animals and advocates a reconsideration of the current understanding of the human-animal distinction, imploring society to redefine the ontological boundaries currently used to banish animals to the margins of society.

Throughout the text, Costello interrogates some of the main arguments for animals' alterity and subsequent marginalisation, such as Christian doctrines of dominion and *imago dei,* and the devotion to reason as a universal value so favoured by the likes of Kant and Descartes.[7] Costello's aim is to disturb the security of human identity's distinctness from animal being, hoping instead to establish a commonality and thus remove humans' entitlement to 'treat them as we like' (LA 34). Costello discusses the traditional idea that 'God is a God of reason' and that 'man is godlike, animals thinglike', theological thinking that establishes animals in alterity to humans: since animals were not created in the image of God, they do not possess the capacity to reason, which prevents them from understanding the universe and means they can do nothing more than 'follow its rules blindly' (LA 23). This concept of *imago dei* reduces animals to Descartes' soulless biological machines set apart from mankind. The consequence of this violent interpretation of doctrine 'has had the most destructive role in obliterating planetary life for the sake of human opportunism', for it positioned humans above animals in the hierarchy of life, instilling a sense of Otherness in all nonhuman animals.[8] This apparent endorsement by God has been used as justification for the marginalisation and maltreatment of animals, assuaging any feelings of guilt that might have plagued our consciousness. Costello argues that herein lies the origins of gods; they were scapegoats invented by humans to shift the blame and give us permission to do as we pleased with animals since we have dominion over them, a rationality eerily reminiscent of the 'just following orders' excuse used by many participants in Nazi Germany to excuse and justify their involvement.

However, the conspicuous absence of animals in a text purportedly advocating for their rights is a manifestation of postcolonial fatalism, insofar that it assumes that the subaltern cannot 'speak' for themselves.[9] This assumption of animals' voicelessness is apparent in the text through Costello's remark that they have 'only their silence left with which to confront us' (LA 25), and whilst Coetzee avoids accusations of zoological ventriloquism by using a human mouthpiece, the text repeatedly invokes animals in an indirect way to anthropocentric ends: animals are only present to function as lines of Costello's argument, who utilises the conceptual ideas they represent in order to interrogate humans' relationship with them. Their lives are subordinate to their abstract value, and their voices unaccounted for. Ostensibly, Kafka's text does not suffer from this same quandary as Red Peter supplies an animal presence, though the extent to which this presence constitutes a genuine animal *voice* is debatable. Margot Norris attests that Red Peter's first person narration of his own story allows the animal voice to manifest in a much more 'direct' expression.[10] However, it seems hasty for Norris to argue on these grounds that his narration is an authentic animal account, as first person narration does not necessarily equate to reliability, especially considering how Red Peter admits to having to rely on the anecdotal evidence of (human) others to fill in gaps in his memory.[11]

Moreover, the degree to which Red Peter can still be categorised as an animal is questionable, and thus casts doubt on whether he truly represents an *animal* voice given the complex nature of his identity, which he himself cannot reconcile: he talks of belonging to the animal world of the Gold Coast (RA 251) but also to the world of men (RA 250), and whilst he claims that his ape nature 'fled' out of him (RA 258), he later takes comfort from the female chimpanzee 'as apes do' (RA 259). This crisis of identity is a marker of his hybridity; he is neither fully animal nor fully human, instead existing as a composite of characteristics and traits from both sides of the traditional dichotomy. Employing the concept of hybridity in this manner is reminiscent of postcolonial writings, wherein the 'transgressive power' of hybrid figures is used to challenge the categorical oppositions imposed by hegemonic culture.[12] Kafka's use of this

[7] Gutmann, 'Introduction', p. 5.
[8] Jacob Ericsson, 'The Apophatic Animal: Toward a Negative Zooethological *Imago Dei*', in *Divinanimality*, ed. by Stephen Moore (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), p. 89.
[9] Philip Armstrong, 'Postcolonial Animal', *Society and Animals*, 10:4 (2002), 413-419 (p. 415).
[10] Margot Norris, 'Kafka's Hybrids: Thinking Animals and Mirrored Humans', in *Kafka's Creatures*, ed. by Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 21.
[11] Franz Kafka, 'A Report to an Academy', in *The Complete Short Stories*, ed. by Nahum Glatzer (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 251: hereafter cited in-text as (RA).
[12] Pnina Werbner, 'Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity', in *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, ed. by Pnina Werbner, Tariq Modood, and Homi Bhabha (London: Zed Books, 2015), p. 1.

particular postcolonial narrative strategy is apt when considering the historical context in which he was writing, a Darwinian aftermath that destabilised the traditional animal-human dichotomy by suggesting an evolutionary continuity between man and his fellow animals. Thus, Red Peter's hybridity represents the erosion of the previously absolute dichotomy, subsequently threatening notions of alterity. The ability to reason and use (symbolic) language has long been heralded as a defining trait of humanity, posited millennia ago by Aristotle and later championed by numerous other philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, and Heidegger.[13] To have Red Peter, a nonhuman animal, successfully and skilfully demonstrate these abilities compromises humans' monopoly on these 'superior' traits. Whilst creating these commonalities between the two formerly disparate ontological categories works against the notion of animals' alterity, one issue with the use of hybridity is that it risks giving the Other an accent 'so foreign' it cannot be understood.[14] This concern is relevant to Red Peter given the form of text as a report: he is the only visible character and the text only consists of his dialogue, meaning that it is not immediately apparent that he is, in fact, *not* human, especially considering the sophistication of his speech. It is only when he explicitly refers to his animal origins that it becomes clear, though perhaps this was intentional on Kafka's part in order to defy readers' expectations that only humans could produce this language skill. Nevertheless, the animal voice is lost to some extent as a consequence of this hybridity.

In defence of Kafka, to see an ape demonstrate language and reasoning skills akin to that of humans is no longer such a stretch of the imagination, since the basic premise of his hybridity has gained empirical currency in the following century. Scientific research has increasingly narrowed the distance between apes and humans: apes not only share at least 95% of humans' genetic material, but have also been shown to possess the intelligence skills and reasoning faculties of a three-year old human, with some chimpanzees even displaying a (limited) grasp of human language.[15] The result of this, as explained by Costello, is that some advocate for the inclusion of apes into the greater *Hominoidea* family and be accorded human rights, though she goes on to state that this was not an outcome sought by Red Peter when giving his report (LA 26). His demonstration of these skills, whilst a skilful critique of animals' assumed alterity to humans, do not allow Red Peter to truly overcome the divide, for as concluded by Norris, he is more a 'colonised ape' than an 'evolved human'.[16] Though he sees himself as having 'gallop[ed] through' the course of evolution (RA 250) and does indeed possess traits ascribed to the human ontological category, the extent to which these characteristics are genuinely realised is questionable, an issue touched on in Costello's remark that Red Peter 'performs before human beings' (LA 18). In another postcolonial narrative strategy, Red Peter shifts the sense of Otherness onto humans both through his detailed observations of their behaviour and his remark that they were indistinguishable from one another (RA 254-5). Throughout his report, he uses words denoting performance and mimicry, stating that it was 'so easy to imitate these people' (RA 251, 255, 25-8), which implies that his adopted human traits are more along the lines of mimicry as opposed to genuine cognitive developments, marking him as Norris' colonised ape. Jacques Lacan calls mimicry an act of camouflage, an act undertaken to blend into one's surroundings, which is applicable to Red Peter's situation: he decides to 'stop being an ape' (RA 253) and subsume into the hegemonic species, blending into the human world as a means of survival.[17] The verb choice of his remark that he 'became like them' is particularly significant, as it implies imitation rather than a genuine transformation.

The idea of performance is also observable when it comes to the human quality of shame, particularly in a postlapsarian sense. This attribute is one of the many facets comprising the overarching notion of alterity, as evidenced by the discussion during the post-lecture dinner in *Lives of Animals.* Costello's son John Bernard remarks that 'animals have no shame', a statement concurred by Wunderlich's followup that 'shame makes human beings out of us' (LA 40). For one journalist, Red Peter's lack of shame is enough to remark that his 'ape nature is not yet quite under control', for he feels no embarrassment when removing his trousers in front of guests (RA 251-2). This Edenic shame alluded to by the journalist is not possessed by Red Peter, who wears clothes not out of any embarrassment over nudity, but simply as an imitation of another human characteristic.

Furthermore, Red Peter's use of human language is problematic insofar that it lacks the necessary terminology for describing the animal experience, an issue that Kafka shows awareness of through Red Peter's remark that 'what I felt then as an ape I can represent now only in human terms, and therefore I misrepresent' (RA 253). Moreover, using human language to communicate his story means that the text ultimately subscribes to and perpetuates the very notion of alterity it strives to challenge, as

[13] Margo DeMello, *Animals and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 39.
[14] Armstrong, 'Postcolonial Animal', p. 417.
[15] Trevor Harley, *Talking the Talk: Language, Psychology and Science* (Sussex: Psychology Press, 2010), pp. 39-44.
[16] Norris, 'Kafka's Hybrids', p. 22.
[17] Jacques Lacan, 'The line and light', qtd. in Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Oxon: Routledge, 1994), p. 121.

it is intrinsically predisposed to place humans in a superior position to animals through a complex system of conceptual metaphors. As explained by Lakoff and Johnson in their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By*, the human language system is comprised of various 'parent' metaphors that give rise to other related linguistic expressions, a structural system deriving from the cognitive principle that posits that metaphors are much more than mere figures of speech; they in fact form the basis of how humans perceive the world.[18] Thus, as remarked by Greg Goodale, 'words shape our ability to think', and consequently play a crucial role when it comes to thinking about animals.[19] The parent metaphors 'good is up/forward' and 'bad is down/behind' are of vital importance here, as they metaphorically and symbolically place man above animals. For Red Peter, the aim of becoming human is a 'lofty goal' (RA 255) and, once achieved, he remarks that he 'managed to reach the cultural level of an average European' (RA 258), a phrase that not only places humans at the top, but specifically Western European humans, remnants of an ideology of hegemonic Western culture. Comparatively, should Red Peter attempt to return to his animal state that '[tickles] at the heels' (RA 250), he would have to 'crawl' back (RA 250), expressions attributing a physically low positioning to animals, thus connecting them to negative connotations of the parent metaphor. Though these concepts are manifest unconsciously, they demonstrate how notions of animals' alterity are inherent in the very level of language itself, with animals being hierarchically coded as inferior against the superior human. Costello is also guilty of this, as she summarises Red Peter's account as an 'ascent from beast to something approaching man' (LA 18), though she jarringly inverts this in her later statement that 'Red Peter took it upon himself to make the arduous descent from the silence of the beasts to the gabble of reason' (LA 25).

Coetzee's text ends on a peculiar note, for whilst it seems to show a brief moment of reconciliation between mother and son, the scene is irrepressibly evocative of the moments immediately preceding the process of putting down a sick animal: he notes the smell of her 'old flesh' as he 'takes his mother in his arms', a seemingly innocuous choice of phrasing that in actuality reduces her, making her seem somehow *smaller* (LA 65). His offering of comfort - 'there, there. It will soon be over' - seems too clinical, too emotionally detached to be genuine comfort (LA 65), the words carrying an unspoken promise of oncoming death (and the release from suffering it brings). This evoked analogy touches on the moral dilemma surrounding euthanasia; that it is acceptable, *kind,* even, to put down suffering animals, but to perform this same procedure on humans is viewed by many as immoral, a double standard that has its roots in notions of alterity. These principles are surmised by O'Hearne during his debate with Costello, who remarks that 'life isn't as important to animals as it is to us' (LA 64), an unsettlingly anthropocentric statement reminiscent of Peter Singer's verdict that there is a greater loss of value in killing humans compared to animals, ideals justified by animals' ostensible Otherness.[20] Conversely, as reflected by Cary Wolfe, the human-animal dichotomy is fundamentally nullified by virtue of their shared finitude, which Coetzee reminds readers of with his parting allusion to Costello's mortality.[21]

Enduring notions regarding animals' alterity to humans have been utilised by Western civilisations in order to justify marginalising and mistreating them, with the human-animal dichotomy being consistently augmented by the significance various philosophers have placed on the faculties of reason and utilisation of symbolic language. This contradistinction has been used as an *a priori* basis for positioning humans in a hierarchically superior position to animals; these ideas of supremacy are even inherent in the very level of human language itself, as evidenced through conceptual metaphor theory. Both Kafka and Coetzee have interrogated this human-animal distinction, though through different means and for different ends. Kafka's Red Peter is a multifaceted figure whose hybrid nature situates him in a complex liminal state, thereby obfuscating the formerly clear demarcation between humans and animals by fictionally epitomising Darwinian ideas about ape-human evolutionary continuity. However, though outwardly Red Peter seems essentially human*,* he lacks their Edenic shame and uses specific language choices denoting performance, factors that suggest his humanity is mimicry as opposed to a genuine evolution. Though he provides the text with a physical animal presence, something Coetzee's work lacks, Kafka fails to produce an 'authentic' animal voice: Red Peter's problematic use of human language that is biased towards human supremacy, and his vast distance from his ape origins, results in an account of animal experience so disrupted and distorted that it serves only to reveal observations about the way humans treat animals. This latter issue is present in *The Lives of Animals,* exacerbated by the text's complete lack of animals in anything other than an invoked abstract sense. This issue aside, the text's attempt to deconstruct the human-animal dichotomy is efficaciously achieved through its polemical assault on the facets comprising traditional notions of animals' alterity, and the confrontational investigation of the

[18] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 3-6.
[19] Greg Goodale, *The Rhetorical Invention of Man* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), p. 25.
[20] Gutmann, 'Introduction', p. 9.
[21] Armbruster, 'What do we want', p. 26.

consequences this has on their relationship with humans. The text's parting reminder of humans' and animals' shared mortal finitude leaves readers with a commonality perhaps significant enough to overrule arguments of putative alterity and instead open our hearts to sympathy, and grant animals the right to a life of freedom and protection from harm, as Costello implores us to do.

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