

Prospectus for Dissertation

Working Title: *Zoe: Animal(ity)s, Sexuality, and Biopolitics in South African Literature*

Introduction

Recent cultural theorists—Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan, Philip Armstrong, et al.—have pointed to the ways in which Postcolonial Studies and Animal Studies (and Ecocriticism more broadly) need each other or, in other words, how until recently each has failed to take into account the main concerns of the other’s discourse resulting in lacunae in both fields . There is a need to consider the specificity of human and nonhuman animals living under postcolonial conditions and a need for postcolonialists to consider the position of animals in response to critiques of Eurocentrism and anthropocentrism, respectively. As an emergent field, Animal Studies, is interestingly positioned within and across Posthumanism, Ecocriticism, and, as mentioned, Postcolonialism, among other disciplines. In this way the question of the animal might be said to be fundamentally interdisciplinary as it necessarily problematizes the nature-culture divide. As Julia Martin comments in *A Millimetre of Dust* critiquing this dualism, “the natural world is full of culture” (53). In this light, a central task in this dissertation will be to trace how the literature under question complicates and undermines the nature-culture divide towards an ethics that calls for more sustainable conditions for those who have found themselves considered as closer to the nature end of the spectrum (animals, women, people of color, etc.) under humanism, and who have therefore been more prone to being instrumentalized and viewed as blank spaces awaiting appropriation by colonization.

Rob Nixon argues in “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism” that ecocritics need to move away from such a strong focus on American fiction and analyze more recent writing coming out of postcolonial locations. This dissertation will, in this vein, analyze mostly recent

literature from South Africa that represents animals, with the exception of *The Impressionist* by British author Hari Kunzru, a novel that deals significantly with the topics and tropes raised in this study. Complicating a nature-culture divide, animals and specifically representations of animals in fiction locate a pivotal position for considering the politics of what it means to be human: Who counts as human? And what results from being included/excluded from this category and community? By extension, the question of human and animal rights becomes of great importance in this project. Indeed, the South African writers in this study portray characters who work both within and outside the law towards creating more sustainable futures for the inhabitants of their communities and environments.

Critiquing dominant notions of subjectivity will be the focus of Chapter 1 as many scholars suggest that humanist subjectivity leads to delusions of autonomous agency, mastery, and control. For example, in “Eating Well,” Derrida highlights the importance of an idea of the subject in relation to biopolitics:

There is no need to emphasize that this question of the subject and of the living ‘who’ is at the heart of the most pressing concerns of modern societies, whether they are deciding birth or death, including what is presupposed in the treatment of sperm or the ovule, pregnant mothers, genetic genes, so-called-bioethics or biopolitics (what should be the role of the State in determining or protecting a living subject?), the accredited criteriology for determining, indeed for ‘euthanastically’ provoking death (how can the dominant reference to consciousness, to the will and the cortex still be justified?), organ transplant, and tissue grafting. (115)

A posthumanist subjectivity which recognizes the nonhumanness (animality or *zoe*) at the heart of the subject, as Braidotti argues, positions humans as embedded in environments as a corrective to the traditional humanist subject in a way that brings the question of our treatment of the nonhuman such as the environment, animals, and those traditional humanism has regarded as others of Man as interdependent with subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming animal”

therefore figures as an important theoretical intervention in positively valuing difference and thinking subjectivity differently, as process and in assemblage with the nonhuman and others. Haraway's notion of "becoming with" also recognizes that subjectivity is processual and occurs in relation with others, usually via contamination, suggesting the nonhumanness of the human as some of those we are becoming with, for example, are the bacteria that live in our bodies.

Rosi Braidotti writes that desire is the unthought at the heart of thought: "the totality and priority of the en fleshed corporeal subject—rooted in desire—is that which remains unthought at the heart of the thinking subject, because it is what drives him/her in the first place" (112). For her, desire precedes thinking and is therefore non-discursive, more closely aligned with *zoe* than *bios*. Following the nonhuman life force that is *zoe*, then becomes a political project outside of discursive thought, where, for her, it becomes important to develop an ethics of sustainability that enables *zoe* to flourish, promoting future becomings. In this vein, desire and sexual desire in particular becomes political in South African literature, especially as it works across distinctions between species and race. Such representations of desire call into question these ostensible divisions resultant from humanism, portraying the possibility for intimate relationships where ethical response is warranted.

In contrast to rights discourse, which (for most approaches at least) starts with a humanist subject that then extends rights to previously excluded groups—women, natives, environments and animal others—desire precedes a discursive subject and offers a politics that does not yield or appeal to the authority of previous thinkers whose logic of the Same allowed for such exclusions, but instead works differently via the sensuousness of bodies. Desire (both sexual and other kinds of desire, such as for sustainable environments, living wages, etc.) as unthought and as springing forth from the radical immanence of the body brings together

disparate bodies and entities positioning them in ethical relationships (and communities) in ways that humanism is unable to account for with its exclusionary practices. Thus, positively valuing *zoe* offers an important political intervention into South African culture, given the legacy of apartheid, with its prohibitions against miscegenation and other divisions of labor, space, wealth, and rights based on race. The last chapter moves the discussion from these groups excluded because of race, gender, or species, to another group which demands response in the subject of refugees, as, being people without a nation-state, they, like the Others of man, occupy a position where rights are not guaranteed.

Chapter 1. Materialist Subjectivity: “Becoming With” and “Becoming Animal”

This chapter will argue for a posthumanist subjectivity as central to responding more ethically towards animals and the environment. A materialist notion of subjectivity emphasizes the embeddedness of our bodies and subjectivities in assemblage with other humans and nonhumans, and nonhuman matter. For critics like Jane Bennet, Philip Armstrong, and Val Plumwood challenging the notion of the human as fixed and independent from its environment fosters an important critique of notions of mastery and practices that instrumentalize the nonhuman. As I mention in a previous paper on “becoming animal,” how one construes subjects correlates with one’s ideas about nonhuman matter: the notion of a subject as something to be easily mastered or managed pertains to a view of nonhuman matter as passive stuff awaiting human action or narrative. Rather than viewing the nonhuman as simply waiting to be turned into capital, a posthumanist subject, or in Braidotti’s approach a nomadic subject, acknowledges the interdependence between humans and the nonhuman.

In this vein, this chapter will begin with a critical analysis of *The Impressionist* by British novelist Hari Kunzru. While the novel is not South African per se, the novel quite consciously

performs an intertextuality with Deleuze and Guattari's "becoming animal," which works nicely to set up this theory for a discussion of it in later chapters. Also, the novel touches on important questions of sexuality, race, "becoming with" animals, refugees, etc. that will also prove useful in later chapters. Deleuze's "becoming animal" figures importantly in this dissertation as a critique of the logic of Sameness in favor of positively valuing difference in line with the poststructuralist project after WWII. Such a project attempts to critique the logic of humanism where man is defined positively against his "others." Becoming-animal at once moves away from a fixed notion of being towards a more fluid notion of becoming where subjects do not pre-exist their "intra-actions" (Barad) with others and also attempts to undermine racist, anthropocentric, and phallogocentric logic by viewing difference in a positive light. This chapter will close by introducing how "becoming animal" and "becoming with" (Haraway's term) animals feature throughout the literature under question in this study.

Chapter 2. Bestiality Or Sensuality between Humans and Animals

The theme of bestiality, and sexuality more generally in relation to animals, appears in several recent South African novels. The taboo against interspecies sex offers an obvious place where the culture-nature divide is maintained. As a character from J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* argues, we do not sleep with them: that is what separates us from the beasts. In this light bestiality and the question of sexuality more broadly offers an important theme for examining the messiness of the categories of culture and nature. In other words, sexual desire and sexuality across species lines brings together animals and humans in ways that counter normative notions of these categories. Bestiality also renders a possibility towards changing views on animals as absolute others or as not worthy of our consideration, into beings with whom it is possible to know and interact with intimately. It is one thing for Derrida to write about meeting his cat's

gaze while naked in the bathroom; it is quite another thing for a somewhat wild adult male baboon to gaze with sexual desire on a naked male human in a novel as is the case in Michiel Heyns, *The Reluctant Passenger*.

This chapter will draw on several theorist's positions on bestiality including Carol J. Adams position that any form of bestiality is domination on the part of the human. In contrast H. Peter Steeves wonders whether there might be some kind of consent involved in relations between a human and an animal where it is a kind of mutual relationship. Alphonso Lingis views bestiality in a more general sense, not necessarily a sexual act between a human and an animals, but viewing all relationships between humans and animals as containing an element of sensuality, as for example, in the stroking of a pet. While she doesn't seem to draw on the term bestiality directly, Donna Haraway also describes the importance of touch and the exchange of fluids, a kind of contamination, that occurs in her relationship with her dog Cayenne Pepper, whom she explains she exchanges tongue kisses with.

Starting from these theorist's positions, this chapter will examine Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller* for its treatment of the relationship between the protagonist and his love interest, Sharisha, a southern right whale. Obviously, due to questions of habitat and scale, the lovers must improvise. As the pair engage in a kind of auditory exchange through calling and responding to one another from the shore to the bay, they enact a kind of sexual release through their working up excitement in each other that might be described as version of the more commonly known practice of phone sex. The protagonist's alternative lifestyle devoted to following whales and his relationship with Sharisha is contrasted with the Whale Crier in the novel, who rather than direct his attentions towards the whales, sings to let tourists know when the whales are close and able to be viewed. The relationship between Sharisha and the

protagonist then offers a more creative, interesting way for approaching animals than just as tourist attractions, which seek to capitalize on the animals and which some have argued merely replaced the hunt.

In some cases, bestiality is given a more normative or traditional treatment in that it is viewed pejoratively and sometimes used in light of or for comparisons to taboos about miscegenation as in Mphahlele's short story "Mrs. Plum." Mphahlele seems to offer the character of Mrs. Plum as an indictment of hypocritical white South Africans who are for black people's rights and interests in a general and public sense, but who still maintain borders in a personal sense. Mrs. Plum disapproves of her daughter's intent to marry a black man, and Mphahlele portrays a somewhat ambiguous scene where Plum seems to engage in a sexual act in her room while her dog is present, or perhaps even with her dog. The critique here develops further on the theme throughout the story that Plum treats her dog better than her black servants, and therefore her suspected sexuality with an animal renders her pronouncements against miscegenation absurd as she seems to uphold a boundary on the question of sexual intercourse when it comes to race, but not when it comes to species.

Chapter 3. Animals & Sexuality Part II: the Instrumentalization of the Other

Treating animal sexuality more generally, this chapter will discuss the problems of reproduction and rape in Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Marlene van Niekerk's *Triomf*, and Anne Landsman's *The Devil's Chimney*. In other words, this chapter will look more at the issue of domination in relation to sexuality that Carol Adams describes in both *The Pornography of Meat* and *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. At various points in these novels, human and animal sexuality overlap or are caught up with one another. Landsman's novel features an alcoholic female protagonist who looks after dogs, struggles with an abusive boyfriend (who at times interacts

with the dogs in unethical ways sexually), and obsesses over the story of a woman ostrich farmer, Miss Beatrice, from the early twentieth century in South Africa. In the story of the ostrich farmer, her husband's leaving of the farm enables her to take charge and she forms much stronger relationships with the animals, the black South African workers, and her neighbors. Her freedom from her husband also extends to the realm of sexuality as she engages sexually with both her married Jewish neighbor and takes part in a ménage-a-trios with the black South African servant couple. Through portraying the figure of Miss Beatrice's capitalist husband who planned to get rich in the ostrich feather market, Landsman critiques phallogocentrism, racism, and anthropocentrism as her husband is abusive to his wife, all non-white characters, and the animals.

Niekerk's novel offers, from my view, a kind of South African take on Faulkner's *The Sound & The Fury*; however, the poor white family during apartheid consists of two brothers and a son, the product of incest, who regularly engage in incest and rape with their sister and mother Mol. There is a commentary on the relationship between animal and human sexuality in Mol's reprimands of her female dog's, Gerty's, son Toby for his attempting to mount his mother. In this sense, while Mol fails to stop the legacy of rape and incest in her life, she is able to protect Gerty in a way that positions her as more of a member of their community than that of her own family who seem to instrumentalize her for sexual pleasure. In light of the postcolonial theme of land as feminine and conquest as penetration, the family's moving into the bulldozed former community of black South Africans following the Group Areas Act suggests that both the lives, bodies, and environments of women and "native" peoples are regarded as more disposable to white males. In this light, Mol's coping with the dogs and her great care for Gerty during her period of dying suggests a positive valuation of animals and difference.

Rape and penetration also figure as important themes in Coetzee's *Disgrace* as the aging white male professor, David Lurie, often views the (usually non-white) women he sleeps with in terms of territory or space. His arguments that women and livestock don't own their bodies, but that they must be shared with the world, confirm a view of them as blank spaces to be instrumentalized. His sexual interactions with others fail to consider his position of privilege and authority (as white male, as professor, as teller of much of the story of the novel) as necessary factors in deciding on the ethics of his behavior. In other words, while he compares his sexual behaviors to animals and describes his sexual desire in terms of animality, he neglects considering his position and actions of domination as rape. The comparison of animal and human sexuality appears here as well, specifically in relation to dogs, their specific breeds, as Lurie participates in euthanizing them at the animal hospital with Bev Shaw. This chapter will also discuss the possibility of Lurie's "becoming animal," which some critics have noted. As Lurie relates, in the new South Africa it is "A risk to own anything... Too many people, too few things... Cars, shoes; women too" (98). The quote describes a view of women as objects in line with Lurie's misguided view, but also importantly points to questions of biopolitics and sustainability in terms of the management of sexuality and reproduction, of life and death. Closing with a brief discussion of biopolitics here transitions nicely into the discussion of biopolitics and law which is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 4. Sustainability & *Zoe*: "Outside the Imperative of the Law"

In this chapter, I'll draw from recent discussions about biopolitics and biopower--*bios* and *zoe*, and address the question of rights alongside other creative approaches towards sustainability. It is necessary to address the question of rights in terms of South African Animal Studies scholarship given that Wendy Woodward's *The Animal Gaze: Animal Subjectivities in*

Southern African Fiction (2008) specifically argues for the recognition of animal rights in the South African Constitution, suggesting that since all humans are now afforded rights in that document, it is now the time of rights for the animal. In this context, Rosi Braidotti's critique of the rights approach, which is not an outright dismissal of it, in *Transpositions: Nomadic Ethics* will be a useful theoretical lens for discussing this topic. Equally important for entering this discussion of rights will be her positive appraisal of zoe (or nondiscursive life) and theorization of an ethics of sustainability. I find Woodward's book to be impressive in terms of the scope of her project and level of insight into South African politics and literature and yet, some of her readings of Southern African Literature that features animals, in my view, fail to offer what Cary Wolfe might call a "robust account" of what occurs between the animals and humans represented there. That is, her approach of identifying animals represented in literature as subjects and therefore deserving of rights seems to fail to take into account the other creative ways in which these authors think about responding ethically to both human and nonhuman animals.

I'll also draw from theoretical discussions of rights for this discussion including Wolfe's recent *Before the Law* (2012) which takes up Hannah Arendt's critique of rights discourse and its universalism. Postcolonial theorist, Talal Asad's "What Do Human Rights Do? An Anthropological Inquiry" will also figure as an important theoretical piece on the subject of rights in this regard and it is where I take the potential subtitle for this chapter. As Asad argues:

Human rights discourse may not...always be the best way (and it is certainly not the only way) to help remove oppression and relieve suffering among human animals, as well as non-human animals, or to preserve the world's natural and cultural inheritance. Working in hospices, providing comfort for the traumatized, the sick, the destitute, helping to

rejuvenate depressed neighborhoods, are among the activities that help to relieve human suffering. Such commitments remain outside the imperative of the law.

Marisol De La Cadena's "Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections Beyond 'Politics'" also provides a different approach towards rights and politics from an indigenous perspective that will play off some of the more Western-based approaches to rights in important ways, especially her pointing out that indigenous rights approaches do not suffer from the humanist limitations of Western approaches, as well as her use of Stenger's notion of cosmopolitics. The chapters on African Indigenous Knowledge and human rights (especially the chapter on South African Xhosa knowledge by political analyst Somadoda Fikeni) from *Indigenous People's Wisdom and Power* (2006) will also provide important perspectives on the question of rights, proving especially valuable for an analysis of Mda's representation of amaXhosa practices and laws in *The Heart of Redness*.

Several South African novels feature lawyers and characters who appeal to the law for the protection of their futures and environments, including animals. In this chapter, I'll move from the theoretical discussion to examine Michiel Heyns' *The Reluctant Passenger* and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* for the ways in which the characters and communities in these novels work both within and outside the law towards responding ethically to their environments and the animals (human and nonhuman) that inhabit them. At times in these novels, the characters achieve success by appealing to the law but also importantly, construct creative ways towards sustainable futures for their locales by working as a community outside or beyond the law, pointing to the limits of a solely rights based-approach. This chapter should transition nicely from the previous chapters' themes of sexuality, as both of these novels deal with their characters' sexuality in relation to their animality as well, especially in *The Reluctant Passenger*.

In this vein, Barbara Smuts' *Sex & Friendship in Baboons* also offers some background information on baboon's sexuality from a primatologist's perspective that will prove useful for an analysis of baboon sexuality in *The Reluctant Passenger*.

Chapter 5 Refugees: Michael K and the "Prawns"

This chapter continues on the theme of rights and the status of refugees or those considered outside the scope of the law through their lacking a nation-state, by examining South African fiction and film that treats these problems. Moving from the theoretical discussion of the last chapter, this chapter will focus on critically analyzing Neil Blomkamp's film *District 9* and J.M. Coetzee's *The Life & Times of Michael K* for their portrayals of refugee characters in the state. The aliens of *D9* and the protagonist of *Michael K* offer fictional cases of refugees, portraying the South African state's response and treatment of them. In both cases, the refugees are regarded as nuisances and their freedoms of movement and other rights are curtailed in light of apparently practical concerns by those governing them.

Obviously, this treatment of the refugees speaks to the treatment of black South Africans under apartheid who were effectively rendered refugees in their own country and whose freedoms and rights were similarly limited. For this chapter I'll draw on Derrida's work on hospitality. This chapter will comment upon the legacy of these problems under apartheid and connect this with other recent iterations of this problem, like the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis. As characters discuss in *The Reluctant Passenger* animals are similarly positioned as having no status within the law, and therefore this chapter will conclude with some final reflections on moves towards an ethics of sustainability, especially for those positioned as "outsiders," those marked as the Others of Man and therefore outside the sovereignty of the State.

Proposed Timeline

1. Chapter 2 on Bestiality 1st draft - May 10
Chapter 2 on Bestiality 2nd draft- May 30
2. Chapter 4 on Rights & Zoe/Biopolitics/Sustainability—1st draft – June 15
Chapter 4 Rights & Zoe/Biopolitics/Sustainability -2nd draft—July 1st
3. Chapter 3 on Bestiality (Part II)/ Sexuality—1st draft-August 1
Chapter 3 on Bestiality (Part II)/ Sexuality – 2nd draft-September 15
4. Chapter 1 on Becoming Animal – 1st draft -Oct 15
 (This Chapter is, in a sense, already written as my portfolio paper, although I'll need to revise it a bit)
Chapter 1 on Becoming Animal – 2nd draft-Nov. 15
5. Chapter 5 on Refugees-1st draft-Jan. 15
Chapter 5 on Refugees-2nd draft – Feb 15
6. Introduction—1st draft - March 10
7. Introduction—2nd draft- March 25

Revisions through April 10

Defend Dissertation April 15