WRITING ANIMALS IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH-LANGUAGE LITERATURES: A POETICS OF INTERRELATEDNESS

by

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(Under the Direction of Jonathan F. Krell)

ABSTRACT

Writing animals in literature is part of the modern quest for social justice and redefining the way we relate to each other and to our world. In this corpus, a poetics of interrelatedness between humans and non-humans and between culture and nature that celebrates multiplicity, *différance*, and disbands with any static ideology, is what allows for an ecological reading. Such an interplay underscores our shared existence in nature while also de-privileging fixities in Knowledge. This study focusses on two methods of writing animals in contemporary French-language literatures: animal narrators and interweaving presences of animals and humans. First, animal narrator storytellers in Patrick Chamoiseau's *Les neuf consciences du Malfini,* Alain Mabanckou's *Mémoires de porc-épic,* and in Patrice Nganang's *Temps de chien* emphasize the importance of imagining animals' point of view; such work lends itself to considering perspectives of other disregarded, especially "animalized," beings in societies. Secondly, in interweaving the lot of animals together with that of the humans in Stéphane Audeguy's *Histoire du lion Personne,* Marie NDiaye's *Trois femmes puissantes* and Olivia Rosenthal's *Que font*

les rennes après Noel? colonized, enslaved, female, and queer identity experiences are highlighted as well as similarities in circumstances. All six works offer a mode of viewing the interconnectedness of humans and non-humans *being* on earth. The authors' representations show the plurality of value in our world and challenge habits of oppositional thinking-imagining. Dualistic views, especially a Cartesian-inspired humanism where "Man" masters and possesses "Nature," have served as foundational pillars for "isms" such as racism, sexism, and speciesism, have reduced groups, and consequently led to many modern horrors such as slavery and the holocaust. A poetics of interrelatedness in the six stories reinforces the call for a change in relations *between* and *among* beings following Derrida, to adapt to ever-changing realities in the world we share. And, on the strength of both types of approaches, as well as situated differences, the corpus of French-language literatures embodies the type of shared, relational work needed to contribute to the field of ecocriticism in ways of relating among the living world (humans/non-humans) and the world in which we live.

INDEX WORDS: 21st century French-language literatures; ecocriticism, postcolonial ecocriticism, animal narrators, *animalité*, human-nonhuman relations, nature-culture representations, language and identity, social and environmental justice

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DEDICATION

My mother Johanna Wynter

My husband Clay Parks

Our son Ethan Parks

Our lady cat Smushy who has been beside me, on me or on my papers throughout the research and writing process

And to all beings that are imagined or represented as being ‘without’… may they soon ‘become’ and flourish.

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Vocabularies of citizenship in this world that rely on binary hierarchical oppositions will always lead to excluding or denying some groups ethical considerations of belonging. The figure of the animal helps us to see the violence in such constructions and the need for the opening towards and the appreciation of all (of our) knowledges of being and sharing in this world. My journey of understandings has taken me physically to various lands in this world, encountering many fellow creatures, both human and non-human. I have also gone to places through my imaginary, powered by the words and the stories of people before me and people who are still here.

I see myself in Patrick Chamoiseau's narrator hawk, *le Malfini,* because I too came into consciousness - as a student and as a scholar. I have many people to thank. I have been guided through adventures in the lands of linguistics, digital literature, African and Caribbean diasporic literature and theater, Renaissance, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, postcolonial literatures and language pedagogy by professors Diana Ranson, Jonathan Baillehache, Emily Sahakian, Jan Pendergrass, Francis Assaf, and Nanette Mosley. If the Animal Question in contemporary French-language literatures has come to be favorite stomping grounds for me, it is because I can draw on such experiences. My dissertation committee members Catherine Jones, Rachel Gabara and major professor Jonathan Krell, in addition to leading me through literary Middle Ages, Francophone and *Écocritique* turf respectively, have read drafts, provided feedback and guidance as well as sharpened my skills through the final epic rounds of PhD quests such

as the comprehensive examinations and the dissertation. Like the Malfini, although I did not start from a position of assumptive superiority vis-à-vis the academic species that I encountered during my studies, I admit to being humbled and awestruck in the realization of what I did not know and in how much I would have to learn on my journey to 'becoming' in academia. I have yet to attain the Nirvana, as coined by Édouard Glissant in his *Poetics of Relation,* that my committee members and their peers in the department embody in their academic professionalism and expertise. I especially appreciate the genuine encouragement of my committee members throughout the process, which included coming to presentations and talks. My major professor, Jonathan Krell, kept in touch even while travelling and doing his research, and he was always available, generous and timely with advice and feedback. To my committee: thank you, you are the Foufou to my Malfini.

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INTRODUCTION

"We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly".
Martin Luther King, Jr.*, "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,"* 1968.

King's image of interdependence goes to the heart of the ecocritical approach in exploring the diverse relations between human beings and the environment (nature) of which they are a part. Cheryll Glottfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glottfelty xviii). Although ecocriticism first started out as foregrounding or emphasizing nature in literary texts, ecocritical theory and practice, traditionally oriented in the Anglophone world since its origins in the 1970 s, has advanced over the past few decades to include a variety of subgenres and interdisciplinary engagement. Scholarship in ecocritical inquiry is starting to expand to include cross-cultural perspectives, which are further contributing to ecocriticism's evolution and growth in understandings of cultural influence on environmental thought. Stéphanie Posthumus is one example of building "a French écocritique on the premise of cultural difference" (*French écocritique* 3). Recognizing the fact that cultural differences impact the development and focus of a field of theory, especially an emerging one, has obvious implications for issues such as range and objectivity. In the American and British academies, issue-driven discourses such as

feminism and postcolonialism are prevalent in university departments and scholarship whereas in France, university departments have been reluctant to embrace such discourses deemed "political," preferring to rely on formal theoretical strategies for interpreting the text/world, such as structuralism, poststructuralism or deconstruction.

There has also been an evolution in the kind of landscape that counts in the ecocritical approach: Posthumus, along with others such as Ursula Heisse and Marnie Sullivan for example, hold the view that literary texts need not have as their focus a specifically "natural" landscape to qualify for ecocritical reading, and she argues "that a French *écocritique* needs to examine a mix of representations of environments and landscapes in literary texts, from industrial and urban to mixed and rebuilt, from devastated and contaminated to flourishing and exuberant" (*French écocritique* 6). She points out that an ecological reading takes inspiration from the original etymology of the word ecology referring "to the study of the physical world as web-like, made up of many interrelated organisms," and such a reading can be had by concentrating on "multiple responses to the text as material object" or paying attention to "the specific contexts of writing, production and circulation of a text" (*French écocritique* 6). Indeed, the ontological argument of ecology holds that everything is connected to everything else, therefore looking for the web-like, interrelated organisms in a literature work and analyzing their values as it relates to environment or "literary ecology" per William Rueckert (*Literature and Ecology* 16) is what ecocriticism is all about. Her final point on an ecological reading is one that is at the crux of this study:

> Third, the question of interrelatedness is foundational, so that reading becomes a way of making connections between texts, readers, interpretive

> communities, authors. The choice of connections gives rise to a contextual and situated politics, one that reflects the orientation and perspective of that particular reading (*French écocritique* 7).

Because the corpus under analysis is constituted by texts written in French by writers from France, Martinique, Cameroon, and the Republic of Congo, the choice of connections as well as the variety in the language will be influenced by and reflective of the perspectives and the environments of each writer.

I adopt the approach that Posthumus endorses for what constitutes an ecological reading in my analysis of the fictional worlds set up by the authors in this study. I will show the ecosystems in each work and how they privilege marginalized perspectives that destabilize oppositions while emphasizing interdependence. What this means for each work is relative to the context and orientation of each writer's own cultural environment, locally influencing languages and expressions and personal aesthetics. Broadly speaking, my analysis further reinforces work done by Posthumus, Sullivan, Heise, Annie Smart, Nathan Germain and others in situating reading practices of French-language texts within the larger ecocritical literary theory conversation as well as further diversifying the pool of culturally different French-language texts. The debate on *littérature-monde* is evoked in the ecocritical readings of how these six authors write non-human and human animals in their works. Also evoked is the debate between deep ecology thinkers from Arne Naess to Bruno Latour and those like Luc Ferry who criticize deep ecology. Deep ecology takes the view that human exceptionalism stemming from philosophy as far back as René Descartes has taken too much (plundered and dominated nature) from our environmental ecosystem and the quality of life for the rest of earth's inhabitants, whereas the opposition

to deep ecology's viewpoints are formulated as being anti-humanist. My analysis of these approaches to writing animals then, must situate the positions suggested through the authors' respective fictional ecosystems within the discussions of humanism/anti-humanism as well as *littérature-monde* and colonialist/anti-colonialist frameworks.

French as an "environment"

Since the process of colonization is responsible for the varieties of French that exist in the world today, how the Caribbean, Africa and other previously colonized spaces on earth are viewed by European imaginaries is in the vein of orientalism as Edward Said described it. It is therefore difficult to speak of ecocriticism in French without treating the history of the language because of its effect on the various French speakers' relationship to that language. Specifying "French-language" before the word literature helps to convey the common linguistic "environment" (French) in which such speakers and writers imagine and work. Further still, designating the plural with an "s" for literature is important for conveying the *multiplicity* or the *pluriverse* of fiction written in French. Language acts upon the expression as much as creativity, exchange and interactions act upon language. In this way, the French language can be conceived as the *matériau de la littérature* or the material/physical environment for the ideas and aesthetics or poetics of each writer. The relationship writers have with French can be thought of as a background from which to create and start fresh, as well as engage with in terms of writer ideas interacting with the schemas of the language and of their physical living world. For example, the house schema will be different for each locality and people will adapt language to express the material reality befitting that house. The word

house in the mind of a Caribbean person, living as s/he does in a hurricane-prone region, will likely conjure images of a structure built out of concrete blocks more readily than a person from a region where hurricanes are not commonly part of the weather patterns. The French language variety spoken in France may not "capture" the reality of that aspect of another context's environment: the inadequacy of that variety of French to convey and communicate the schema becomes clear at the same time that ownership is established by the variety of French that *does* communicate the representation in the context.

Employing the term "French-language" is more neutral than employing the term Francophone in contrast with French (especially for terms like writers and literature) because it covers any fiction or writing expressed via the French language regardless of ethnic origin, residence or maternal language of the writer. Another advantage is the term's inclusivity because hints of previously colonized territories do not reside in the term French-language and it covers territories that were never colonized, such as Québec, equally well. In this way, the term designates a linguistic space for writers. Although there are instances where specificity will come into play in designating national identity of a writer, for example when discussing a work in French from a writer that is in fact of French nationality, it should be obvious that the same specificity is permitted with the coining of the phrase French-language literature for a work written by a writer who is not a French national. Terms in literature that evoke a nationality are problematic since even a writer that may be of French nationality may not even feel "French" (as determined by the parameters of geographic space and culturally-sanctioned views of identity contained within that space) in his/her soul but writing in the French language need not limit that person to having his/her writing limited to that category. Even though most people

assume it is not needed, there could be an opening up for French nationals too, such as those French nationals who write and express this need for realignment and *ouverture* of national identity (Rosenthal, NDiaye and Audeguy come to mind for me) as expressing a need for some widening of the boundaries established.

The issue with using the term Francophone to designate writers is not only that it merely covers the linguistic space of that writer, but also, that it is like saying "the French person" or "the French writer," "the French woman," and "the French man". Is there in fact only one kind or are there several varieties? So, I proceed with the same approach as I do for ecocritical studies in that I conceive of the French language as the "environment" that individual writers engage with in expressing their local poetics blended with their own individual aesthetics. Francophone literature by itself can mean literature written in French and can include French nationals. When the term Francophone literature is used right next to French literature, such as "French and Francophone literature", the distinction is felt, and this is problematic in light of the colonial past. There are several varieties of literature written in French. I prefer to limit my use of the term "Francophone" to contexts that would have a differentiation between Francophone, Anglophone, Hispanophone, Lusophone, Japanophone, and Sinophone so that it is clear we are comparing speaker(s) or writer(s) of French to speaker(s) or writer(s) of English, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese, and so on.

Animals in literature

Animals in literature have always captivated readers. Writing animals in literature is part of the modern quest for social justice and redefining the way we relate to each

other and to our world, celebrating multiplicity, *différance*, and disbanding with any *fixité*, or fixed ideology. Discourses of animality construct the categories of "the human" and "the inhuman," for example, in relation to structures of power at various historical and cultural moments. As an element of our shared environment, animals have figured in human cultural imagination in art forms such as literature since Antiquity right through to our contemporary moment. With the continuing growth of an ecocritical practice, we can read the evolution of thought through these representations as techniques of responding to social concerns between us as well as the socio-material concerns of environment.

Literature's Power

Although practices of resistance manifested in literature may be considered non-violent from a physical standpoint, literature has the power to cause a mental shift in consciousness or in the consideration of the well-being of another individual or of another group. The literary tactics may even be violent from an emotional point of view. Literature's power or effectiveness to question, to destabilize the fossilization of old behaviors or attitudes that prevent the flourishing of an individual or of a group of beings, lies in its ability to cause the mental and or emotional shift that is necessary for the actual physical shift -- the action--to take place, or for laws to be changed and implemented. To this end, literature's power lies in its ability to engage with themes relevant to context and to behavior, and such an engagement materially adds to the socio-political environments in which we operate. When Celia Britton points out Édouard Glissant's engagement with the "growth of a new relationship with the geographical environment as slaves" (Britton 6), it serves others in distinct postcolonial contexts too, not merely the unique case of a

Martinique that never gained independence proper, and not solely for those who were formerly colonized. Adapting to new realities affects all, and going through an experience in fiction can serve or be applied to yet another set of circumstances. The human mind and spirit must be ready to accept the necessity for the change before driven to action, and this holds equally true for those in positions of power to effect the change, as for those in oppressed positions needing to fight for the change.

Literature's influence also lies in revealing "who we are," to borrow Hannah Arendt's words (*The Human Condition* 11), because the stories authors put out in the public sphere amount to "action" as they engage with common interests, question precedents while seeking solutions for present circumstances, and allow us to take the perspective of others. Put another way, in emphasizing the relationship writers have to the world using Jean-Paul Sartre's words, "à chacun de nos actes le monde nous révèle un visage neuf" (*Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* 46) we understand that through their writing, the world is revealed in unique and important ways. The understandings expressed by Arendt and Sartre on literature's potential for interventionist discourse on topics of concern in a given space and time, (and even over different spaces and time) through the exchange between reader and writer is at the center of this study.

In analyzing the potential for interventionist discourse in the corpus, I am also concerned with locating these 'French-speaking' novels in the larger postcolonial ecocritical conversation. Although the authors here use different methods to sound the alarm for sociocultural concerns that impact our relationships with other living creatures and our environments, when considered as a collective voice in the French ecocritical conversation or tradition of inquiry, all these differences and varieties of 'acting' in the

world through writing, amount to a powerful whole, and importantly, not only from metropolitan France. This whole, despite the specificities in their various representations of writing animals in French-language literatures, is united in its emphasis on clouding assumed frontiers between groups of beings. Thus, yet another categorizing boundary is made indistinct in the process: the one set up between French and Francophone literature as it relates to identifying the inherent violence in exclusionary practices based on supposed inferiority of a group. The key to understanding the input from this corpus lies in seeing the implicit acknowledgement of the fact that though we as living beings on earth share responsibility through our relationships with each other and with our environments for the condition of the planet, we nevertheless have different ways of relating to our respective local environments on earth. Literature in French engages in the broader literary and artistic postcolonial ecocritical discussion through its own diverse ways of examining assumptions inherited from influential French thinkers such as René Descartes that have been used to set up destructive divisions.

Theoretical framers: Arendt, Derrida, Glissant

The analysis of this corpus benefits from thinkers Jacques Derrida, Hannah Arendt, and Édouard Glissant, especially for framing the above-mentioned central arguments, and secondarily, but not with less importance, on theorists such as Michel Serres, Elisabeth de Fontenay and Cary Wolfe for specific explications on thinking the Animal Question. Jacques Derrida's work focuses on tracing the destructive path of our thoughts and systems for our contemplation. The "question of the animal," or the Animal Question to take his phrase (*The Animal* 8), which may itself have been fashioned from

the phrase “the Jewish Question” (Toury 85), is only one area of possible examination of the power of literature to bring about the mental shift needed for change. Writing about animals, and writing animals into our consciousness through storytelling especially, is what I hope to prove will be one of the most effective ways of resisting pernicious, fossilized behaviors and attitudes towards classification of not only animals, but of other groups of human beings as well. It is in fact *precisely* because an attitude of human superiority over animals has been written (and accepted) into the codes of law and into western cultural thinking, that other acts of violence and attitudes of dominance towards other groups of living beings have been justified. Literature counterattacks using its storytelling powers through the human imagination to tell stories that hope to undo or that respond to the stories that were written into law.

With language, literature resists using the same tool of speech to create new meanings for words that were (and are) used to harm, to oppress, or to subjugate, by associating them with new notions that are meant to liberate, include, and validate others instead. Literature, in short, uses systems of exposure, of destabilization, of throwing beauty and light onto an individual or group of beings by bringing them to life so as to capitalize on the human mind and spirit, and allow that mind to see what is being killed and left in the shadows by the behaviors and attitudes that are driven by the cultural and economic systems in western capitalism. Derrida’s idea of humans making their own autobiographies, and especially any dominant class of humans in a given context, allows us to see *how* such a group can *figuratively* write its own dominance and power into the fabric of a society.

While Derrida traced the power behind the constructions in language and the writing of knowledge, and here for my purposes as it relates to setting up divisions like the human/animal frontier, Arendt focused on the systems that have driven the behavior and confirmed or reinforced the "knowledge." Arendt's attention to "the setting for politics rather than politics itself" (*The Human Condition* ix), resulting in her socially conscious formulations on power as a function of human relations, and her idea of public space, allows us to understand the *dynamics* of these conditions. Seyla Benhabib, reading Arendt, interprets Arendt's expression of "making public," as making an issue or concern accessible to debate, reflection, action and moral-political transformation on the other; "To make issues of common concern "public" . . . means making them increasingly accessible to associative (collaborative) models of political interaction; it means to democratize them" (Benhabib 102). This understanding could be applied to the influence literature has in a collaborative democratic process on issues that concern us all. Similarly, Arendt's emphasis on the importance of maintaining meaningful distinctions among the concepts of "power," "strength," "force," "violence" and "authority" -- and on the need to employ the word "revolution" sparingly and concisely, is tremendously important in the legacy of how we come to our definitions, as well as to the work of revising or rethinking them. In her mind, blurring the distinctions in these terms "not only indicates a certain deafness to linguistic meanings, which could be serious enough, but it also has resulted in a kind of blindness to the realities they correspond to" (*On Violence* 43).

If I use Derrida and Arendt to form the basis of pinpointing key concepts in history that humans have inscribed into the way that we now relate to each other on this planet,

Édouard Glissant, in his formulation of a poetics of Relation, adds to both by pointing to a pathway, a process of relating differently. Glissant's poetics serve as a conduit for *negotiating* new relationships in the changing landscape of our world. He argues that writing is the ignition that starts the fire of our actions because through literature our imaginations start to shift our perspectives. Action then may follow, but not first without this crucial shift.

Importantly, Glissant's poetic process is not fixed, else it could be mistaken and rightly criticized as yet another *fixité* in categorizing beings. His poetics stress the fact that as we beings undergo shifts in living conditions and relationships by entering into contact with each other – voluntarily or forced- so too must we be open to adapting to these very real changes, and in real time. This process of relation allows for a relation of belonging, and destabilizes the boundaries established by the economic and philosophical drivers of "knowledge" as understood and set up by dominant groups. His work on thinking independence and decolonization processes through this theory, grounded in an ontology of multiplicity, can expand our understanding of the world as we live it now. Glissant's rationale underlines the necessity of comprehending how all the parts of such processes interface, affect and constitute the whole, which make up the global landscape today. His poetics is described by Michael Dash as dismantling the "heroics of self-formulation" (*Writing the Body* 609) and goes against totalizing impulses. Sylvia Wynter refers to Glissant's root metaphors as "blocking" with the primary metaphor being "the industrial model of human auto domestication" wherein for Glissant "domestication" means models that are institutionalized through dominant discourse (*Beyond the Word of Man* 638). This aligns with Arendt's view "of systems" economic models and drivers

(*Totalitarianism* 469), but also integrates the psycho-cultural drivers and barriers that prevent full flourishing and belonging of the "colonials" (*Totalitarianism* 387).

The importance of these three thinkers in the interpretation and explication of this corpus is reflected in their individual approaches and attention to the levels of thought creation and organization behind the violent, destructive, exclusionary economic and social systems in place today. Their approaches, centering as they do on the underlying structure of the Western epistemology that allows for "isms" such as ethnocentrism and anthropocentrism to exist in Western metaphysics, reveal the politics behind textual representations. Collectively, they represent yet another counter to the imperialistic competitive mode of thinking and viewing place and culture: whereas imperialistic modes seek to anchor, claim and draw boundaries to define, these thinkers' arguments are focused on the processes. Indeed, as Dash states, "[i]n opposition to a reassuring wholeness, Glissant focusses on an inexhaustible diversity in reality" (*Writing the Body* 610). This kind of openness to process and *becoming* (in an adaptive sense) is unsatisfactory and unsettling to critics who prefer, and need, to see culturally *fixed* definitions of our being in this world. The impulse to predetermine, to fix, to anchor knowledge and power on cultural and economic levels has been responsible for the globalized chaos today; this problem is discerned through all three thinkers' approaches.

The question of the animal is a natural place to focus the reading of the impulse to fix powers of knowledge and culture because the unfairness of this socially constructed divide may be recognized in the stories of the literary worlds of this corpus. We may then reflect upon and make connections to the quotidian stories of our own lives. But while the use of animals can be viewed as one such tool of maintaining power and control of a

dominant group—the *how* of fixing power relations—it is also important to explore the *why*. After tracing the origins of such behavior and coming to understand the *how*, we cannot deny that there is commonality of violent behavior (to animals and to other humans) across the human race, and it cannot be attributed to a specific dominant group. This identifies a fault line in human behavior: that it could come to this point is not a surprise if modes of competitive thought such as imperialist drives to dominate and to establish power over others are repeated by groups of humans around the world. What is laid bare is *fear* as a driving force behind the adoption of modes of thought that fuel competitive, hierarchical behavior. When humans insist on always perpetuating this model of putting themselves on top, they will always feed into the fear that drives them on, as if the accumulation of wealth in terms of territory and domination over nature will guarantee survival.

In trying to explain this concept to colleagues, family and friends, I regularly encounter questions that implicitly acknowledge how ingrained is the acceptance of this human dominant might-is-right behavior. Questions such as "What about the fact that animals kill other animals too? or "Don't animals display hierarchies in their "societies" too? I posit that this is the aspect we may recognize in ourselves, yet notice a difference: not only do animals kill for survival, which is clearly no longer the case in many of our industrially advanced nations today (especially those in the West) animal communities also *make room* thus affirming differences in the various animal communities. We humans in "advanced" nations such as France and the United States are taking far more than is needed, and we do not make room for those other humans and societies to have a chance at moving out of survival mode to organized, cooperative modes of sharing

resources for the larger good. Holding a form of power over another group of beings is (temporarily) easier (or more natural?) than the work of sharing resources and collaborating with and considering the well-being of others.

Why should any of us believe that this driving fear might change in human behavior? Perhaps what will do it is the recognition of a *real fear*, that of the reality of the end of the spoils of "winning" – when the ways of living come to an end because there will be no more territory to fight for, no more fruit of nature to eat. This is where the "eco" part of ecocriticism comes in, and where the actual reality becomes a galvanizing necessity. The destabilization and insecurity of contemplating other modes of being for those in power is frightening because of the uncertainty of outcomes seen to be beneficial to them, but if the certainty of how their current dominating modes of thinking and operating contribute to the actual, inevitable destruction can be made visible, perhaps this is the only self-serving way of shifting the models of operation from dominating and hierarchical to cooperative and holistic.

Betty Jean Craige's call for transnational cooperation proposes what must be done to counter the effects of the might is right, hierarchical modes of thinking that the opinions of Derrida, Arendt and Glissant warn us about:

> The global society has accelerated the emergence of holistic thinking in the West, replacing the model of individual autonomy for international relationships with one of interdependence. Easy travel and widespread migration contribute to an intermingling of races and cultures in all the industrialized countries and in many of the developing nations; and instant communication connects all parts of the planet. More than ever before,

> cooperation among the planet's diverse inhabitants is necessary if the human race is to survive through the next few centuries. (60)

Although Derrida, Arendt, and Glissant offer many more insights in their collective body of work, for my purposes, the emphasis will be on the three aforementioned areas – Derrida's concept of humankind's autobiographical work, Arendt's notion of action and public space, along with Glissant's poetics of Relation that seeks to redefine the cultural map, - to illuminate literature's role of writing animals in the broader environmental conversation. Under the influence of these three thinkers, considering the nature of literature's contribution to the animal question, and to the larger cultural question of how we share in this world, can be fruitful. To this end, in the novels under examination, the central questions at hand are: How do humans relate to animals (and by extension other humans) today? Specifically, how do we (continue to) justify violence to other living beings in a world where traditional modes of thinking/Western epistemologies handed on through generations, no longer hold up, where adherence to such modes of thinking and accompanying actions is revealed to be for profit or out of habit (tradition)? And, what role can fictional representation play in this process?

Mario Ortiz-Robles says "Animals are as old as literature. This is to say that animals have been represented in literature since its beginnings. From the earliest epics, fables, parables, and plays, animals have donned a great variety of disguises to become the privileged presences that show us how to be human". (Ortiz-Robles 2). In reading fictional representations of non-human animals, I pay attention to the textual politics of fictional animals through the way their authors have positioned them vis-à-vis humans in their stories. Do the encounters between humans and non-humans in the stories reinforce

or destabilize distinctions between superior human life and disposable animal bodies? Are imaginary literary animals placed in standardized, reductive categories? What kinds of human-animal distinctions exist in the stories, and how are these distinctions handled? I look at the motivations the writers provide for their characters in their plots. I also look at how the writers have their characters relate to their local environments. Finally, I seek to apply the "lesson" gleaned from each of these figurative plots to the realities we face now.

Humanimals

The literature under examination here represents work done by six authors that in an ecological reading may cause a shift in considering (both in the sense of "seeing," placing ourselves in another being's circumstances, as well as how Elisabeth de Fontenay understands the word, as "being considerate to") animals. This is work that concerns all living beings on this earth. Redrafting our language and the codes of behavior and thinking that have been written into laws and cultural practices concerning animals is a move to help animals certainly, but also us humans. What I am calling the "source problem" of violent and dominant attitudes is our way of seeing animals' share in our world. If the source problem is modified to recognize, include and consider the right we all have to flourish on this planet, it follows that modifications can then be made to violent and dominant practices driven by economic profit by, and for, those who are in power.

In the spirit of literature's interventionist discourse capacity, the writers in the corpus have in common a focus on the central question of the animal, seizing on a symbol that

can translate their respective messages. I hope to show that the authors' respective ways of writing animals in their stories as a thought starter are representative of the attitudes of consideration of another's point of view, and of inclusion and recognition of another being's share in the world. I also hope to show the eco-friendly potentialities (both socially and environmentally) that lie in encountering, contending with, and considering, the authors' points of view. These potentialities run counter to modes of thinking that encourage and maintain economic profit as the driving force of validation for nations and for individuals, allowing as they do for the idea of *making room* on earth as well as for the notion of recognizing that mankind's idea of progress needs to undergo change. Animal representations are effective in communicating to humans because humans are, well, animals too. Ortiz-Robles's phrase "humanimals" in his *Literature and Animal Studies* is a wonderful term that captures why humans can recognize themselves in patterns of animal behavior. The expression provides an image that helps to remind us of our biological part in the natural world. Whenever the notion *seems* unnatural it is precisely because of the conditioning effect of inherited thought that has justified the distancing of humans from the natural world, and has served to define us logically and ethically as superior to that world.

But the effectiveness in animal representations to teach humans lessons lies also in the differences. In chapter 4 of this study I bring in Elisabeth de Fontenay's observation of this difference - 1% between humans and apes to ask what humans will do with this difference for the good. We have run out of room and resources for all on earth and cannot afford to be satisfied with the ecosystems as defined through hyper capitalism. Furthermore, literature as represented in this corpus, contributes to the blurring of the

typical borders established by "canons" and "languages". The authors' writing of animals include them *using* the very tool that has been held up to justify separating animals from humans, which reminds us of authors writing from within the same language that has had a historical record of imperial linguistic domination. The animal's importance in the stories fronts the idea that not only are animals "good to think with," (*Totemism* 81) as Claude Lévi-Strauss famously said, but we also need to think about them.

That the corpus engages with the Animal Question further begs the question of its contribution to the broader socioecological conversation. The analysis of this corpus participates in the work of integrating postcolonialist and ecocritical thought through acts of literary writing in French. Stephanie Posthumus maintains that the traditions, philosophies, and representations of the non-human world that influence and are influenced by literature create important cultural differences that do not allow for a global ecocritical perspective. The work of French theorists Jacques Derrida, Bruno Latour, Elisabeth de Fontenay, Michel Serres and Félix Guattari among other theorists and philosophers is the best-known in the non-French speaking world such as the United States and Canada, Britain and Australia. The contribution to French ecocriticism that this study makes joins the work of these French theorists as the expression of the *writers' acts of engagement.* The intertwining of other animals in nature with humans in the corpus not only underscores humans' embeddedness in nature but also the fact that the partnership with nature is a shared problem. The earth we share is plundered and sick due to the current modes of relating with nature and among ourselves, and the corpus of this dissertation advocates – through storytelling -for a change in these relationships. Correspondingly, diversity in writer narrative style, cultural setting and language, makes

the case for the multiple manifestations of such literary engagement in the French speaking world.

Corpus Cultures

Of the six writers, three are from metropolitan France: Stéphane Audeguy, Marie NDiaye and Olivia Rosenthal. The other three hail from Martinique, Congo-Brazzaville and Cameroon respectively: Patrick Chamoiseau, Alain Mabanckou and Patrice Nganang. All six authors contribute to the animal question with their stories by using different narrative approaches as well as utilizing the French language in ways that speak to their manner of seeing, and that honor their circumstances and local settings. We then see what they see. I argue that the works contribute to showing the beauty of the earth and our right to share it with one another, as well as the subsequent potential contribution of the works to causing a shift in thinking on the animal question.

This corpus embodies the share and contribution, regardless of difference, (maybe even *owing* to difference?) that everyone can make to a central concern. Literature's part in the cause of animals and what changing our attitudes to the share animals have in their earth means, can be likened to an interlanguage[1] of becoming for all creatures on earth. If animals are allowed the right to flourish and share in this earth, we too benefit because we flourish in the sense of opening up fully, not meanly or jealously withholding the

[1] The term interlanguage was introduced by the American linguist Larry Selinker to refer to the linguistic system evidenced when an adult second-language learner attempts to express meanings in the language being learned. The interlanguage is viewed as a separate linguistic system, clearly different from both the learner's 'native language' and the 'target language' being learned, but linked to both and by interlingual identifications in the perception of the learner. For my use, I liken the linguistic process to other processes of "becoming"- in doing so I conceive of the "target language" as linked to the learner (person, community, nation) becoming (or coming into his/her own) in the world.

earth's resources. As the epigraph from Martin Luther King Jr. indicates, there is limited viability for us humans by withholding such resources, for the resources of the earth are exhaustible, and violence and domination from jealously withholding resources from other groups is the path to exhausting the earth's resources. A chance for perpetuating earth's resources is only found by choosing a path that mutually sustains, that is inclusive and considerate of all living beings -- and in the long term allows humans to be emotionally and morally viable. The authors and works under examination here demonstrate literature's role and share in anticipating a more ethical, political social order for the future.

Frontiers: human/animal and nature/culture

Why the focus on destabilizing the human/animal divide? Because the way humans view animals has important corollaries in the way humans have constructed other constituents of nature in this world. Linking the systems engendered by this view on the part of humans to the destruction and chaos around us is necessary for people to realize that we indeed face these horrors, that they concern us all, and that they can only be tackled if we collaborate and are willing to share in the world's resources, rather than compete for them. The fact that animals are so central to us is seen on multiple levels of inquiry, because the question of the animal has been and is being investigated across disciplines and movements: the sciences, philosophy, the humanities, and animal rights. The place and value of animals in society is culturally determined, sanctioning why some animals may be sacred in some societies but can be eaten in others. Humans then use cultural differences in how animals are used and regarded when encountering humans

from other societies to set up ethnic differences, resulting in discrimination and dehumanizing of groups that do not respect their own established cultural boundaries. This reasoning amounts to using animals and associated practices of societies as a means of extending the cultural imperialistic model of competition to guarantee the continuation and authority of the dominant group. All violators of the dominant groups' culturally imposed practices and views in relation to their animals disqualifies such peoples from being considered legitimately worthy and civilized, and the power hierarchy is thus justified.

The theoretical body of work that engages with the complexity of literary animal production in French-language literatures is still small, especially in French-language literatures of the non-French authors and contexts, but already the 2015 compilation *French Thinking About Animals* on this issue from Louisa Mackenzie and Stephanie Posthumus brings to an Anglophone world the work being done by French theorists. The Animal Question has garnered much critical attention in France and disciplinary work on animals ranges in scope from philosophy in Jacques Derrida, Élisabeth de Fontenay, and Dominique Lestel's work to ethology in Boris Cyrulnik and Georges Chapouthier, to animal ethics in Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer. As they examine the relationships, imaginative frameworks and ethical concerns encoded in animal representations, the trend seems to be towards an opening up of previously exclusive representations, representations that uphold the humanist (exclusive humanism) tradition of insistence on our separateness from the rest of the animal community.

Ever since Darwin's theory of evolution in the nineteenth century where a continuum pointed at the possibility of many kinds of consciousness and perception developing since

life forms' existence on earth, thinking through with animals has become associated with undermining the basis of a traditional conception of human being as *animal rationale.* In fact, Vilmer shows us that the general resistance to "les animalistes" in France is still the majority perspective: "Plus d'un siècle et demi après les premiers débats philosophiques et juridiques sur la personnalité des animaux, la résistance est immense" (*Diversité de l'éthique animale* 17). Vilmer reveals the reason for the resistance: " Si elle (this resistance) est plus forte en France qu'en Angleterre ou aux États-Unis, c'est d'abord parce qu'elle s'ancre dans l'humanisme, qui depuis Descartes non seulement domine les études philosophiques mais aussi définit "l'esprit français", c'est-à-dire l'image que la France aime se donner d'elle-même….cela fait partie de son image morale, ce qu'Aristote appelait son *ethos*" (*Diversité de l'éthique animale* 18). So, if as Vilmer contends, the legacy of humanist philosophy in defining France's image of herself is so pervasive that theoretical arguments from philosophers, ethologists and the like have made precious few indents into the mindset of the average French citizen, the rationale of this study is to defend the power of literature as a form of cultural production that can counter "original Humanist thinking that power captured and made an instrument of oppression (Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture* 14) in contexts that are not only postcolonial but the source of such philosophy.

Like other forms of cultural production that the French are proud of in their traditions and identity, literature is one of them. This study aims to make visible the evolution of new, ecocentric concepts and ways of writing animal representations in twenty-first century French-language texts. In this way, the study contributes to rounding out an eco-cultural critical ethos of the French speaking world that is reflective of its

multidimensional culturally-specific worldviews. The literary acts of engagement manifested in this corpus focus on the kinds of change needed at the cultural level, which is where responsibility lies for the current global environmental crisis affecting all living forms. Importantly, while the corpus may agree in tracing the location of the source problem to mechanistic, hierarchical and monological models of thinking, it also affirms differences in the ways and intensities that the effects of such thinking have manifested themselves according to local geographical and cultural contexts.

Approaches

In this corpus, we receive these ideas either through a close-up view--the eyes of an animal narrator, a human narrator-- or further out, more panoramic, where animals and humans are interacting together. Whether close-up or panoramic, we see that animals are constructed in culture primarily for the use of humans through the interactions between animals and humans and through the animals' points of view in these stories. The traditionally held view of animals being here to serve humans is thus countered precisely in the staging of these interactions and in the way that they arrange the "telling" in their writing.

On the animal narrator side, or the close-up interior view, Chamoiseau has his Malfini (a hawk) come to consciousness much like what is called for to occur in mankind. Mabanckou has his porcupine first participate diligently in violent activities endorsed by myths and beliefs of his community, then come to question the rationale of such behavior as he weighs up other belief systems with their own justification for violence. Nganang's dog narrator Mboudjak conducts his social science or human science

experiment on the streets of Yaoundé exposing the chaos that affects both humans and non-humans as well as the *animalité* of the humans in daily life. The ridiculous nature of blindly following belief systems, and importantly, that such unquestioning behavior is what sanctions violence, is laid bare thanks to some of the funniest characters invented by these three authors. They are letting us in on a secret in their trips and discoveries, and they are well rounded and perfect characters in the sense of possessing everything, including flaws, that allows us to identify with them in some way. The effect is that of story-tellers who are very self-aware and comment on what they see going on around them, but despite their good nature and intelligent wit, they are very serious about us taking their meaning, much like the writers who created them. The message via these characters is communicated in a style that is reminiscent of their cultural contexts' oral storytelling legacies. The authors create this impression by having their narrators speak to us readers directly, as well as interact with other characters in their stories. The effect then of literature's exchange between writer and reader is doubly enhanced by their narrators' direct address. We are part of the immediate conversation. The characters are created as icons of "resistance identity"' to the traditionally constructed imagery or view humans have of animals ingrained by ethics and philosophies in the European discourse, but also resisting the break between the oral tradition and the written word that occurred in pre-Enlightenment rational thinking Europe where the written word was given preeminence.

And for the writers who provide us a panoramic view of interactions between animals and humans, we see the contemporary effects of these long-held traditional ontologies play out in the stories, on both humans and animals. NDiaye's method of

placing birds and humans together as these characters negotiate mental traumas and economic conditions left behind in the wake of colonialist and patriarchal systems, forces us to consider the shared existence of beings on earth – and the damage our behaviors and attitudes cause. Rosenthal juxtaposes the treatment of animals in their various forms of utility and servitude for humans alongside her female narrator's existence to show how the same constraints, intensity and hold of traditional expectations built into societies, exist for women. In Audeguy's narrative, written in the third person, he paints his human and his animal protagonists with equal color and detail, but since the three human friends of the lion Personne and the dog Hercule fade out of their lives for various reasons, Audeguy brings us closer to the animals' experiences as they move through stages of their lives, specifically the impact at each stage on these animals of decisions taken by fictitious and historical humans in positions of authority, knowledge and economic power. Thus, he finds space in the history books for the account on animals by detailing these historical stages in the same way as humans of the period had been recorded.

These approaches honor the manner of telling that fits each writer's cultural context. The authors in this corpus also treat the underlying fundamental notions of human superiority (and by extension any one group's claim to superiority) and the ways in which their conceptualizations affect and condition societies' attitudes and responses in founding political authority, community and knowledge. We are placed in the experience of beings on the other side of such founding conventions. Their excavation of the culturally diverse, the multiplicities that exist within us and among us, and the deviations from "normalized" systems and attitudes, also places before us the question of whether these norms are legitimate as organizing principles for all parties involved on

earth, and in relation to earth.

"Neque enim numquam inter se leones aut inter se dracones, qualia homines, bella gesserunt". "For not even lions or dragons have ever waged with their kind such wars as men have waged with one another."

Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 12:23.

CHAPTER 2

TITLES AND CONTENT

Corpus Overview

While there are many approaches to using animals in stories, the techniques and representations in this corpus reveal the "constructedness" of myths and philosophical beliefs in societies and communities. A revelation such as this matters on two levels. First, such a spotlight allows us to see fundamental systems of belief that permit societies to act in ways that are harmful to all but a privileged few. Secondly, the resulting awareness, with help from the stories, leads us to imagine more inclusive ways of organizing and managing our interactions with each other and the rest of the living world. The titles of the six novels all point to the work we need to do to "see", albeit in different manifestations according to the particularities of each novel's geoculturally-specific fictional worlds. Even as cultural specificity influences the poetics of the authors, their novels taken together represent a sampling of a French-language whole: the different specimens in this corpus contribute to furthering understandings of relationships towards our environments, and ways of negotiating relationships and *being* on our common planet. This is so because the authors question the logic of strict oppositional thinking between culture (humankind's social ecosystems) and the natural living world to which we all belong.

ANIMAL NARRATOR STORYTELLING

Patrick Chamoiseau : *Les neuf consciences du Malfini*

Malfini is the Martinican name for a hawk, and he is the titular character in Chamoiseau's novel that undergoes a transformation – the nine stages of consciousness per Buddhist understanding. The Malfini's appearance in Chamoiseau the raconteur's garden bookends the novel. He seeks Chamoiseau out at the start to pass along an important understanding. Thus, we are transported into "story time". As he makes his self-satisfied, imperious rounds high above the forest of Rabuchon, his life is forever changed because of his encounter with an infinitesimal *chose* that is the Foufou. Through the Malfini's observations of the Foufou - a hummingbird whose worldview is the antithesis of imperial, hierarchical and dominating. The Foufou proves to be the only being able to adapt and grow by relating with and incorporating other species' ways of doing: he recognizes how to combat *la mort lente*, an ecological crisis affecting all beings. The Malfini learns the power of a relational approach in life as well as not to discount supposedly inferior beings. Patrick Chamoiseau's *Les neuf consciences du Malfini* has us come into consciousness through the same process that his hawk the Malfini undergoes in seeing, coming to know, and understanding a *chose insignifiante* like the hummingbird Foufou.

Alain Mabanckou : *Mémoires de porc-épic*

Mabanckou's narrator porcupine confesses his life experiences to a baobab tree, specifically the episodes of his work as a *double nuisible* to his assigned human, Kibandi. Porc-épic's *Mémoires* come to the world as a cautionary tale about the effects of cultural

myths and beliefs that exist in both animal and human societies and that are drivers of violence. And porc-épic should know: his forty-two years qualify him as a Congolese elder, and via the credential of his lived experience between two worlds, animal and human, Mabanckou's usage of myth offers readers a perspective on any kind of culturally in-between subject in today's societies and linguistic spaces. That porc-épic confesses verbally to a baobab tree and in writing via his *Mémoires*, is the author's *mélange* of content and style embodying the different ways of knowing acquired through exposure to, and navigation of, different cultural ecosystems. Porc-épic's *Mémoires* read quickly thanks to Mabanckou declining usage of any punctuation save for the comma. With not even a capital letter to start sentences there to slow us down, and with a nod to Congolese oral tradition, we are transported into a "story-time" experience. Since porc-épic simply means porcupine in French, the juxtaposition in Mabanckou's title of an intimate account such as the genre of memoir and the impersonal species category of porcupine speaks to pernicious universalizing tendencies and insists that every being is particular and has an individual story.

Patrice Nganang: *Temps de chien*

Mboudjak is a dog narrator who is confounded by human nature and resolves to take on an errant *sciences humaines* study by observing human behavior and attitudes in Yaoundé, Cameroon. On his walkabout through the various Yaoundé *quartiers*, his burning question "Where is Man?" is a profound one that continues to stymie us even today. Through Mboudjak, the observer *d'en bas*, we see not only the particularities and effects of a corrupt Biya-run government in post-colonial Cameroon, we also see the similarities existing between human and non-human societies if every being operates

with a dog-eat-dog mentality. His observations reveal it is as much his kinds' time as well as the worst of times for us as beings in the way we currently relate. We are all stray dogs.

HUMANIMALS: FIGURES OF *COMPLICITÉ*

Stéphane Audeguy *Histoire du lion Personne*

Audeguy takes us back to the period of revolutionary France to write in a history for his "nobody" lion Personne and his canine friend Hercule. His backdrop is as historical as it is geographical since he traces relationships between human and non-human characters, economic trade routes as well as historical figures during colonialism and slavery between Senegal and France. A view of France's colonial enterprise in Saint Louis, Senegal and the revolutionary fires that were being stoked in France, is provided through the odyssey and encounters of Personne. Writing Personne into human consciousness also includes by extension all other "nobodies" that were not considered by the historical record and in the social imaginary.

Marie NDiaye: *Trois femmes puissantes*

Three stories, three women. NDiaye's novel is a triptych formation of three independent novellas eerily linked by associations of place, history and kinship through the lens of the broken family that shines a spotlight on female and migrant conditions. She redefines the male-constructed conception of power in having readers follow the lives of three women and coming to know what is *also* power. Narrated in first person by three different narrators provides different perspectives on the effects of cultures in

contact. First strong woman Nora, the daughter of a Senegalese father and French mother, tells the first story. The second is narration by a white Frenchman Rudy the husband of black Senegalese Fanta (the second strong woman), and the third is narrated by third strong woman Khady, widowed and expunged from her deceased husband's family, who must take on the treacherous journey from Senegal towards Europe. The three-stories-in-one overlap and testify via interior reveries and a "birds-eye" view of human and bird subjects. The characters that navigate strained filial relationships deliver a view of ruptures, migrations, movements, trauma and adaptations across social contexts: the intimate, non-linear, disjointed reminiscences of experiences embody the sense of disconnectedness and fragmentation experienced under those *chaos-monde* conditions. The entwined existences of birds and humans and suggested metamorphoses and migrations reinforce the atmosphere of beings trying to regain their footing, trying to fly normally rather than *battre de l'aile*.

Olivia Rosenthal : *Que font les rennes après Noël?*

Olivia Rosenthal's female narrator questions and probes societal expectations for women alongside testimonies of people who work with animals held in zoos, for science experiments in laboratories, for breeding, slaughtering and other human ends in France. As the *narratrice* grows up, each life stage is paralleled by a consideration of animals and their existence in captivity for human use. Alternating paragraphs reveal two narratives: one has us journey with the narrator since we are in her thoughts as she observes and compares what happens to animals in French society, and the other is comprised of the accompanying interrogations of the human family unit that "conditions" her existence.

The parallels are striking. Rosenthal's narrating strategy of likening her female narrator's lot to that of the animals, speaks for the general condition of women in similarly bound roles in society. The narrator's emancipation and flourishing as a queer woman comes at the price of betraying her family upbringing, values and socially sanctioned expectations for women. That she no longer believes in the titular fairytale raises the comparable question: Is it not time for the fairytale of humans' superiority over other animals to be also put to rest so that any other marginalized being may have a chance to flourish?

CHAPTER 3

ANIMAL NARRATOR STORYTELLING

"Nous devons décider la paix entre nous pour sauvegarder le monde et la paix avec le monde afin de nous sauvegarder."

Michel Serres, *Le Contrat naturel*

The novels by Patrick Chamoiseau, Alain Mabanckou and Patrice Nganang in this corpus all feature animal narrators. This move can be seen as self-transformative activity, of animals authoring their own stories, to (re) examine values transmitted for centuries by dominant European discourse. This discourse is founded in the customary opinion where "man" dominates Creation because he was made by God in his image. Such an order of things was retained by the Renaissance, sustained in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in defining all philosophical conceptions, and served in the justification of horrors such as slavery. With Rene Descartes' concept of *cogito* as a cornerstone, this long tradition of thought gave birth to the conception of relations between animals and humans. "Exclusive" humanist[2] structures of subjectivity preserved a spirit of classification, of categorization and of designating rankings or hierarchies and is responsible for the construction of human relations with the natural world.

[2] "D'une part, l'humanisme 'inclusif' désigne un ensemble de valeurs, de normes et de vertus morales qui sont à la base d'une extension constante du cercle de la moralité. Il défend l'égalité, la liberté et la solidarité et se préoccupe des plus vulnérables. Il est inclusif, car il ne restreint pas a priori le champ d'application de ces valeurs. C'est l'humanisme de Voltaire et de Rousseau, de Jeremy Bentham et de John Stuart Mill, de Martin Luther King et de Gandhi. D'autre part, l'humanisme 'exclusif' consiste à limiter la considération morale aux seuls membres de l'espèce humaine. La justice, l'égalité et la bienveillance, oui; mais seulement pour ceux qui ont la carte VIP. L'humanisme exclusif est donc foncièrement spéciste et il se confond avec le suprématisme humain" (Gibert 174).

It is precisely this "foundational relationship," [3] to use the term from Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, that thinkers today find it necessary to reconfigure in the hope of slowing the destruction and forcing a re-thinking of how to live. Patrick Chamoiseau, Alain Mabanckou and Patrice Nganang offer in their respective novels *Les neuf consciences du Malfini*, *Mémoires de porc-épic* and *Temps de chien*, the opportunity to encounter the point of view and the presence of an animal narrator and to live its (his/her) belonging/being in the story and, in the larger sense, in History. Putting these three novels into dialog, my analysis focuses on two devices employed by the authors who trouble this hierarchical model of the dominant European discourse. First, all three concentrate on the question of reducing the place of animals coming from the theological and metaphysical tradition of the *propre de l'homme* by having an animal narrator *speak*. *Speaking* captures not only the capacity to speak (or to recount or to tell), but also the capacity to see (what they apprehend in observing, the position from which they make their observations, the effect of their gaze on others), and to reason (think about, analyze what they see). In other words, they are endowed with the *logos* so preciously esteemed in humans.

The second way of countering this hierarchical model is to bring out the reality of interdependence of all living beings in a community. In disturbing the old Cartesian philosophical notion of the "animal-machine," these three authors align themselves with those who distinguish a world made of symbiotic rather than hierarchical relations. Michel Serres, in *Le Contrat naturel*, underlines two key words of Cartesian thought: mastery and possession, which he says perfectly constitute the driving force of men in

[3] " [A] radical re-drawing of this foundational relationship has occurred" (Huggan and Tiffin 134).

their attitude of conquest towards the world.[4] In corroborating this notion, the authors express the necessity of changing our relation in the world. In considering the first literary method of decentering Eurocentric models of reference, the question comes up: why make an animal speak? Élisabeth de Fontenay might answer that it is important to do so since "Les philosophes ont pensé que, les animaux ne pouvant pas passer de contrats, puisqu'ils ne parlent pas, il n'y avait plus de rapports de justice entre eux qu'entre nous et eux" (*Abécédaire* 33). It follows then that to give voice to an animal in a story creates an opening towards traditionally marginalized perspectives. It is a way of authoring animals' own ethical representation of themselves. Even though the use of animal narrators in literature is not new (Aesop, Ovid, La Fontaine), the use of an animal protagonist in a story allows for the liberation of animals (at least in literature) from the Cartesian metaphysical tradition that makes animals *objects* rather than *subjects*.

This symbolic rescue then extends to other "objects" that can be, and are, comprised in the *modèle qui permet* [5] - the Cartesian model of thought that would allow for anything and any being classified as object to be dominated and possessed. If the importance of the positioning of an animal narrator in literature rests in the possibility to "…souligner l'aveuglement de notre tradition métaphysique 'anthropo-centrée', c'est-à-dire obsédée par la prééminence de l'humain sur les autres vivants" (Birnbaum 9), we must also understand in the notion of speaking, the notion of seeing for the reader. Two elements of communication that are the most human, language and sight (gaze), are applied in the testimonials of each animal narrator.

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[4] "Maîtrise et possession, voilà le maître mot lancé par Descartes, à l'aurore de l'âge scientifique et technique, quand notre raison occidentale partit à la conquête de l'univers. Nous le dominons et nous l'approprions" (*Contrat* 58).

[5] Catherine Larrere's term in her essay *Des animaux-machines aux machines animales*, quoted in Birnbaum to describe "la valeur heuristique du modèle cartésien (…) Mais l'important est ailleurs, dans ce que ce modèle permet. Dire l'identité du naturel et de l'artificiel, c'est inviter à un même traitement : on peut démonter les corps comme on le fait des horloges " (Birnbaum 93).

First, with language, these authors add to the fabular tradition varieties of the language left by the structure of colonization. The adaptation of the colonial language, manifested in variations in style, in the incorporation of Creole and African words, recognizes the historical contact of peoples as well as the right of these peoples to invent and to transform a language for the expressive needs of their communities. The animal narrators of these narratives recount in their own contexts, a universe in each novel that is decentered from that of the former colonizing power. Anchored in the geographical and social contexts of the communities of Rabuchon forest on the island of Martinique, Séképembé in Congo Brazzaville, and Yaoundé in Cameroun, the authors have their narrators bear witness, which exposes not only the comportment of humans as seen from their respective positions, but also that of other living beings belonging to those communities. Hence, the way the living beings express themselves in these decentralized contexts is foregrounded (or centered). The authors incorporate words belonging to the surroundings specific to their narratives as well as the manner of communicating, which is in harmony with the social and physical realities of these contexts. Due to this language usage, their universes are animated by the Caribbean and African imagination respectively.

In Chamoiseau, flora, fauna and species such as *Foufou*, and "le *vonvon* (bee) vonvonnant" (145) in the forest of Rabuchon embody the Creole spirit in the narrative. Since Chamoiseau's narrative foregrounds animals, and there are no humans who speak, the idea of communicative adaptation is embodied by the Foufou, a hummingbird that the hawk (the Malfini) observes, and who is the motivating factor behind the Malfini's

evolution of consciousness. The Foufou demonstrates dynamic adjustment to change in the environs and the capacity to develop and to transform as needed.

> "Soudain, le Foufou opéra une volte stupéfiante et fondit sur la bande folle en poussant son incroyable stridulation. C'était devenu quelque chose que je n'avais jamais entendu de sa gorge, ni dans celle d'un quelconque colibri, ni même dans celle d'aucun oiseau connu. Les merles fous, tétanisés, s'égaillèrent comme des poules" (Chamoiseau 124)

For Mabanckou, words such as *mayamvumbi* (initiating drink) and *féticheurs* (traditional healers) like Tembé-Essouka (nod to ethnic belief) in his text help in the representation of quotidian practices of the people of the area. Mabanckou draws from the oral folklore tradition, where people grew up listening to versions of tales or myths from their parents and elders, in the conception of his own version of the story of the porcupine. The inscription to his mother who had told him her version is the first hint and he confirms this in an interview.[6]

With Nganang, the historical complexity of Cameroon is indicated by the linguistic complexity that he reproduces in the neighborhoods of Yaoundé visited by Mboudjak, his dog narrator. The incorporation and repetition of words from African languages such as *kongossa* (gossip), *Bia boya* (Cameroonian expression signifying "what is one to do?") or *choua* (efforts at making a friend) or *koki* (traditional dish) express, just as in the narratives of Chamoiseau and Mabanckou, a reality fitting to the place, a Cameroonian everydayness. Nevertheless, because Nganang's narrative is

[6] http://evene.lefigaro.fr/livres/actualite/alain-mabanckou-renaudot-memoire-porc-epic-734.php "Oui, c'est une légende très populaire en Afrique centrale. Notamment au Congo-Brazzaville. Chaque groupe ethnique avait sa version. Celle dont je m'inspire dans ce livre me vient effectivement de ma mère. Les parents se servaient de cette légende pour faire rentrer leurs enfants, à la nuit tombée, afin qu'ils aillent se coucher.'Attention à toi, disaient-ils, sinon le porc-épic va passer et te lancer ses piquants.' Et donc à partir de cette histoire, j'ai tissé mon récit, construit mes personnages. Et je me suis également efforcé d'y rajouter une dose de pastiche littéraire de ma propre sauce."

situated in the capital city, it is also necessary to be fully aware of the registers of people in these neighborhoods and sub-sections where the choice of language specific to the situation constitutes one of the socio-political realities of that city. It is impossible to ignore the presence and the use of the different languages in his text. Nganang opens his novel placing in the mouth (the thought) of Mboudjak the following:

> "Je suis un chien. (…) rien qu'un mot, un nom : le nom propre les hommes utilisent afin de me désigner. Mais voilà, au fond je m'y suis habitué. J'ai assumé le destin qu'il place sur moi. (…) "chien" fait partie de mon univers puisque j'ai fait des mots des hommes les miens. J'ai digéré les structures de leurs phrases et les intonations de leur parler. J'ai appris leur langue et je flirte avec leur manière de penser. " (1)

We see that he is explaining the necessity to appropriate and to manipulate the language so that it will belong to a community.[7] In the context of our three novels, the effect of this manipulation of language is the same: these narrators allow us to look through a window into their universe represented by the spirit of appropriation of the language of the former colonizer to make it speak *for* them. We also see the connection between *uttering* (as opposed to truly speaking) a language that adopts senses joined to words of said language, and hence, the thoughts brought together in that language.

Linked to this notion is the question of naming living beings. In Chamoiseau's narrative the hawk is the Malfini, a Martinican name for a hawk of the region. The same is true for the hummingbird – obviously, there are species of hummingbirds elsewhere in

[7] « Pour ce qui est de mon écriture, et de son enracinement dans le terroir de chez nous, cela vient de ma conviction que nous avons, moi, vous et tous les Camerounais, l'obligation de dire notre histoire avec les mots qui sont les nôtres, en suivant la perspective que nous lui avons donné, sans honte, simplement comme cela, car si nous ne le faisions pas, nous aurons alors à subir les mots et la perspective des autres. » Vounda Etoa, Marcelin. "En Toutes Lettres : Patrice Nganang." *Patrimoine : Mensuel de la Culture et des Sciences Sociales* 37 (mai 2003) :8-9.

the world, but the hummingbird hero of this narrative is revealed to us as the Foufou, a local name for the Antillean crested hummingbird. We are intimately connected with the universe of Rabuchon. Mboudjak the dog explains to us the relationship with his name, which means "the outstretched hand":

> "Je ne sais pas pourquoi ce nom me flatte, ou pourquoi je le préfère à 'chien' tout simplement. Il aurait dû me révolté autant puisque, comme 'chien', il ne réussit pas à me libérer de la longue laisse humaine. Mais ne suggère-t-il pas que j'ai une main propre à moi ? " (Nganang 8).

Unfortunately for Mabanckou's porcupine, his human double Kibandi called him Ngoumba, which "dans la langue d'ici cela veut dire porc-épic, Kibandi se faisait à l'idée peut-être que je n'étais qu'un porc-épic, un porc-épic ordinaire, c'est évident, il était humain, et comme je n'aimais pas ce petit nom aux sonorités désagréables, je faisais semblant de ne pas avoir entendu lorsqu'il m'appelait ainsi, mais il insistait, tu comprends maintenant pourquoi dès le départ je n'ai pas voulu que tu saches ce nom" (Mabanckou 214). He introduces himself in this way to the Baobab at the *end* of his confessions, and it is effective: as he recounts his story (always with the assumption that the Baobab listens to him) and at the same time speaks to us directly, we imagine ourselves listening to what he tells us. And one does not interrupt someone in the middle of a story. By the time he raises the subject of his name, and the explanation underlining Kibandi's condescending attitude towards him, we don't want to even use this name in our analysis. We have come to know him before learning this name that has this effect on him, or any designation or label for him at all. It throws into question the reductive nature of dominant discourses surrounding animals, primarily that animals can be grouped as a

homogenous collective with no need for an individual identifier, in contrast with humans such as Kibandi, who has his individual identifier. Plus, these authors annul the justification of exploitation of animals that cannot defend themselves via the mechanism of language, and they also demonstrate the animals' capacity for adapting to new realities specific to them. The three novels affirm the importance of this adaptability. The authors show the great variety of internal relationships and characteristics that exists within the animal world, and this serves to symbolize the variety of relationships existing within the human social context. Such use and evolution of the French language in decentralized contexts from France is emblematic of the adaptability born out of circumstances and realities specific to the contexts and to the usage of individuals of these communities. Just as it is logical to note that the French of Molière cannot fully serve the needs of communities outside of France, likewise, the cry for a change in relations that adapts to realities of those living in the different contexts outside of France is appropriate.

In addition to working the language to speak *for* them, these narrators speak to us directly by their "Je," signifying that they are *subjects* in the stories they tell. It is the very refutation of the Cartesian objectification of animals. We the readers follow them closely thanks to the style of relating their adventures in their stories. Each testimony invokes the oral tradition of recounting: in *Les neuf consciences du Malfini* it is the Malfini who seeks out the raconteur Chamoiseau to pass on the story of the Foufou in a human language; in *Temps de chien*, Mboudjak sometimes speaks directly to the reader ("vous riez?") as if we are in an oral story-telling session; in *Mémoires de porc-épic* the porcupine verbally confesses directly to the Baobab inside of his written confessions to

us. They each live a grand adventure that leads to a *perfectibilité* [8] defined by gaining knowledge and understanding. We are as close as possible to their mood using their "Je" and almost beside them while they describe. In addition, as Derrida reminds us in *L'Animal que donc je suis*, "Quiconque dit "Je", s'appréhende ou se pose comme "Je", est un vivant animal capable de s'affecter soi-même, de s'autobiographer" (75-76) and so each could easily reply to Descartes : *This is who I am.* Not only does the animal narrators' *je* negate the Cartesian *mechanical* conception of Nature held to be outside of human beings, the use of the pronoun says not only am I conscious, I am aware of who I am in my context. This application of the Cartesian dualist position of interactionism alludes to the differences that exist in contexts and in the socially constructed meanings derived from and attributed to the world around us. What is understood by the axiom of consciousness philosophically speaking, is extended through these animal narrators to represent the emerging waves of awareness, of consciousnesses, in the world, as applied to different beings and situations. Per the sociologist G.H. Mead's social theory, [9] they are conscious of their existence and of others in their worlds, as well as the development of self and self-reflection made possible by communication with others. Dignity is accorded to the animal narrators who are determiners in their lives rather than the pure products of conditioning.

The observing (the making us see) is done from different positions in the three novels. The Malfini, a hawk, observes from above, symbolizing a being who, blinded by

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[8] "Mais quand les difficultés qui environnent toutes ces questions laisseraient quelque lieu de disputer sur cette différence de l'homme et de l'animal, il y a une autre qualité très spécifique qui les distingue, et sur laquelle il ne peut y avoir de contestation, c'est la faculté de se perfectionner ; faculté qui à l'aide des circonstances développe toutes les autres et réside parmi nous tant dans l'espèce que dans l'individu, au lieu qu'un animal est au bout de quelques mois, ce qu'il sera toute sa vie et son espèce au bout de mille ans, ce qu'elle était la première année de ces mille ans. Pourquoi l'homme seul est-il sujet à devenir imbécile" ? (Rousseau, *Discours* Première partie, p.55).

[9] *Mind, Self and Society* (42-43 & 47).

his belief in his superiority, must submit to a process of spiritual awakening (the nine stages of consciousness referenced in the title) through his encounter with the Foufou. The porcupine, the harmful double of his human Kibandi, is fused to him and thus in position to attest to the behaviors of beings in the two worlds: the animal world and the human world. He represents the culturally in-between identity[10] of animals and humans, and from this, we have only to make one step to see the allegory of the culturally in-between identity of migrants or of refugees. Mboudjak the dog observes the comportment of humans from below, often invisible to them due to the attitude of superiority manifest in the human characters over dogs.

> "J'appréhende le monde d'en bas. Cela me permet d'appréhender les hommes au moment juste de leur émergence de la boue primordiale. De la même manière, j'appréhende les phases de l'annihilation de l'humanité ; Mais hey-o, il est difficile d'être un chien ! Une chose était devenue parfaitement clair : les hommes n'aiment pas les chiens qui pensent ..." (Nganang 29, 31).

The characters undergo a change as they "come to know", which means that the readers too, learn the same lessons the characters draw from their observations. The simple explanations provided to readers by the narrators as they witness behavior in others on their adventures, allow the authors to engage readers in the broader debate of consequences derived from traditional Cartesian-inspired thought. The Malfini is reborn when he learns to conquer his Alaya, his old ways of carrying himself and of negotiating

[10] "Votre œuvre aborde les thèmes du déracinement, de l'entre-deux culturel, de l'incertitude identitaire, toutes expériences existentielles qui sont le lot de la diaspora africaine, comme celui des exilés, des réfugiés et des migrants dont notre actualité est pleine." Antoine Compagnon's introduction of Alain Mabanckou for the inaugural lesson at the Collège de France : "Lettres noires : Des ténèbres à la lumière," 17 mars 2016.

his universe, thanks to the example of the Foufou. As for the porcupine, at the death of Kibandi, he is forty-two, which makes him old for a typical porcupine, and therefore it is believable to conceive of him now as one of the elders of the oral folklore tradition of Congo, and that now it is his duty to communicate his wisdom. And Mboudjak, who spends the length of the novel searching "the Man in man," retains hope that man is reborn when finally, with blood spilled and violence, and especially with the murder of the child Takou, the beings in the neighborhoods rise together against injustice. The sense of humility for the lessons learned that accompanies each animal narrator serves to deliver their analyses in a convincing manner and therefore leads to a sense of identification.

Equally important as speaking, or having the animal narrators speak, is the effect of their gaze upon the other living beings in the narratives. The animal gaze is brought out in each story, thus evoking Jacques Derrida's philosophical reveries when he found himself naked in front of his cat in *L'animal que donc je suis?* (40). The Malfini, before the encounter with the Foufou, believed himself superior, at the center of the living, and at the very top step of the ladder of creatures: "Cette magie d'une existence qui semble naître du ciel pour associer la puissance et la grâce…Eh bien, sans aucune vanité, c'était moi…moi, cette merveille que je croyais être à nulle autre semblable…" (Chamoiseau 18). He is thus stupefied realizing he does not frighten the Foufou with his attentions while observing him:

> "Je n'en finissais pas de le guetter, de planer autour de lui, de me poser pour scruter ses gestes et ses errances. Mais le plus consternant, c'est ceci : alors que mes déplacements provoquaient des émois, que ma silhouette focalisait tous

> regards de Rabuchon, le seul à ne pas s'émouvoir de mes rondes, mes poses ou mes approches, était le Foufou. Je dus envisager cette idée impensable : *il ne s'intéressait pas à moi* " (Chamoiseau 53).

We are with the Malfini in the quest of understanding this *chose* and at the same time on the pathway to consciousness or *consciences* in the title of the novel. It is easy to laugh each time he reacts while observing the Foufou and the other beings heretofore considered *insignifiants* because his reaction, sincerely perplexed, betrays the attitude of superiority and the arrogant assumption behind his thoughts. And we recognize ourselves in it, because the Malfini represents man who places himself at the top step of Aristotle's Great chain of being. In the other two novels, the effect of the narrator's gaze on another is the reverse. In his work with his human double Kibandi, the porcupine is in intimate contact with him, especially his thoughts. A moment when Kibandi wanted to dress himself is revealing in its similarity with Derrida's instance with his cat: "il se réveilla, se mit debout, je le vis s'habiller, me tourner le dos afin que je ne voie pas son sexe" (Mabanckou 134). The contrast in Kibandi's attitude towards the porcupine is remarkable because Kibandi is embarrassed here, but ordinarily he treats the porcupine as an inferior and a species that is subordinate to him. The embarrassment here is equal to that described by Derrida where the porcupine can see Kibandi in his vulnerability. The irony is that the porcupine is already keenly aware of Kibandi's vulnerability: to be naked and to turn his back makes no difference in the calculation. Kibandi's reaction betrays his guilt. Likewise, Nganang's Mboudjak learns to keep himself hidden while observing "le spectacle du vice humain" by the reactions of people. When he observes Docta, one of the patrons of his master's bar, with a married woman in a dark corner of the bar, the

woman is disturbed by the gaze of the dog. " '*Mouf*, va-t'en, elle m'a sifflé, en plein milieu de son plaisir coupable. 'Mboudjak, fous le camp!' . . . Docta, tu as vu comment il nous a regardé?'" (Nganang 30). Whereas the Foufou displays courage and pride under the penetrating gaze of the Malfini, Kibandi and the adulterous woman with Docta demonstrate shame in front of the gazes of the porcupine and Mboudjak. The guilt of people is obvious in the stories and this culpable conscience is extended to address the behavior of men towards animals.

The final aspect dealing with *faire parler* or making animal narrators speak, occurs in their self-reflections and on what they observe. *Logos* is seen in the quality of their analyses on what they apprehend, but what is formidable in these animal narrators is that they deconstruct what they see in a simple and/or humorous way. Wisdom delivered with simplicity and humor is an effective combination to make us see. After all, didn't Rabelais write in *Gargantua* that to laugh is the *propre de l'homme*? There is in this combination enough wisdom to annul traditionally dominant thought but not so much that would render the gaze and the analyses arrogant and dogmatic.

The Malfini states:

> "Je n'étais qu'une brute.
>
> Un massacreur.
>
> Un possédé de sang et de violence.
>
> J'avais fait très exactement, avec beaucoup de plaisir, ce que le Foufou avait voulu éviter, et *qu'il avait su éviter*. . . Il ne donnait aucune chance aux parties sombres de l'Alaya en lui. Il ne lui cédait rien. Il se maintenait hors d'atteinte, quel qu'en fut le prix à payer. (…)

> [E]t je passai la saison des chenilles à regretter le temps des souveraines inconsciences…" (Chamoiseau 126)

We see here humility as well as the *leçon* interiorized by the Malfini. The substance of this lesson—that everyone, even an exemplary Foufou, possesses an Alaya within him or her—and the difference in behavior, and in outcome, is due to the desire to not give in to it. The words *maîtrise* and *possession*, or mastery and possession, if applied here, pertain to a mastery of oneself, and not of another being. The way in which the lesson is conveyed is as important as its substance.

In his retrospective narrative, we learn that the porcupine lived experiences that brought him into direct contact with humans and other doubles in carrying out the missions granted by Kibandi, which were acts of vengeance. He accrued first-hand knowledge of humans' motivations and their habits. During his confessions to the baobab, while he comments on the cowardice of men, specifically Kibandi, he also demonstrates the ability to repent and reflect

> " nom d'un porc-épic, qu'est-ce que le temps passe vite, j'ai la voix enrouée, la nuit est déjà tombée sur Séképembé, voilà que je pleure sans comprendre pourquoi, la solitude me pèse pour une fois, je me sens coupable de n'avoir rien fait pour sauver mon maître, en étais-je capable face à ces deux gamins qui ne l'ont pas ménagé quelques semaines avant sa mort, hein, je n'en sais rien, je voulais d'abord sauver ma propre peau même si j'étais persuadé que la mort de Kibandi entraînerait la mienne, et, dans ces conditions, les hommes ont raison d'affirmer qu'un lâche vivant vaut mieux qu'un héros mort, disons que je ne suis pas traversé par le

> chagrin que me cause l'absence de Kibandi, je ne suis pas non plus gêné par la chance que j'ai de vivre jusqu'à présent, de te prendre comme mon confident, j'ai honte de ce que je t'ai rapporté depuis ce matin, je ne voudrais pas que tu me juges sans tenir compte du fait que je n'étais qu'un subalterne, une ombre dans la vie de Kibandi, je n'ai jamais appris à désobéir, tout se passait comme si j'étais saisi par la même colère, la même frustration . . . et je n'aime pas mon état d'esprit actuel parce que les visages de nos victimes ne cessent de me hanter, ces gens disparus sont plus ou moins là devant moi…" (Mabanckou 188)

While the porcupine proves assimilation of human knowledge, he exposes how these traits, these capabilities and knowledge are exploited to harmful ends. The porcupine knows everything that Kibandi knows via the pathway of being his double. When Kibandi uses his powers to learn how to read and write, he also confers these same powers to the porcupine. Therefore, the porcupine can offer us reflections into our human ways. His confessions to the baobab allude to the custom of "s'adresser aux ancêtres" (Mabanckou 149). He also admits to the ancestors the error of taking on the same patterns of jealousy. If he learns to operate in human ways, he is conscious of it and comments on it : "mais peut-être me suis-je un peu éloigné de mes propres confessions en parlant de toi, hein, c'est encore ma part humaine qui s'est exprimée, en effet j'ai appris des hommes le sens de la digression, ils ne vont jamais droit au but, ouvrent des parenthèses qu'ils oublient de fermer" (Mabanckou 151). This is the kind of oblivion/omission that Mabanckou addresses through his writing. The non-closing of parentheses via meandering thoughts hides the ultimate objective: the justification of subjectivity.

Mabanckou goes straight to the point (*droit au but*) through his porcupine who, though he owns his share of harmful behavior, contrary to men, he is *conscious* of it as well as the consequences. It is this consciousness that completes the knowledge of the porcupine, and he may well have been spared because of it.

In Nganang's text, Mboudjak's adventures consist of exploring the Yaoundé neighborhoods to understand the motivations and thought behind humans' actions. He decides to submerge himself in the work of *sciences humaines*, or the social sciences, which already makes us laugh; he searches for the humanity in men, a profound question indeed, both for the men in the story as well as for us in our own reality. But in the mouth of Mboudjak, we are not affronted, we voluntarily follow him in his quest to find the answer to the question: "Où est l'Homme dans tout ça? Une question et une seule " (23), while capturing all the instances of inhumanity. Nobody would want to hear the message if it were delivered through preaching:

> "[S]i je voulais vraiment être protégé des mauvais actes des semblables de Massa Yo et son fils, mieux vaut ne pas s'enfuir. Oui, je me suis dit que si je voulais me fuir pour de bon de la rage des hommes, il était nécessaire soit de trembler moins devant leur regard ou bien de me perdre à jamais dans la forêt, ou bien *choua* : chercher de manière systématique l'amitié problématique de mes camarades, qui à vrai dire, m'avaient déjà rejeté. Mais je savais que . . .[a]fin de fuir les crimes des hommes, je me suis dit, j'avais besoin de réunir le courage de retourner au cercle dangereux de leurs définitions et de demander de la justice." (Nganang 23)

Making these animal narrators speak encompasses several elements and they are interlaced to bring out the strength of each character. It is a way of inviting us in to listen and to see. We are with these narrators in the lived experiences they speak of, achieved through their modes of delivery: understandable, funny and sorrowful, but especially because we can see ourselves in what they say.

The second way privileged here by the authors of countering the hierarchical model in dominant European discourse is to place the emphasis on the interdependence of elements of a whole. In his study on ecocriticism, Greg Garrard explains the important insight coming out of biological sciences and animal studies: "The great insight of animal studies, in its productive encounter with the biological sciences, is not that there are no differences between humans and other animals, but that differences are everywhere: not only are individual humans and animals different to each other, but all species are different to each other as well" (Garrard 149). In the context of our three novels, the value of this difference between species is highlighted and the authors put in motion the idea of working in an inclusive way for the health of the whole community inside their literary universes. Chamoiseau even proposes via the Malfini that the notion of difference is the only certainty that exists:

> "En découvrant un lieu, je parvenais très vite à les distinguer, un à un, au seul bruit de leurs vols, au seul mouvement d'un bec. Ce n'était plus pour moi des blocs d'espèces invisibles, mais un poudroiement d'individus dont je ne retenais que l'infini des variétés…Pas un n'était la réplique d'un autre, et, quand quelques-uns relevaient d'acabit similaire, chacun déployait des manières personnelles, presque un art qui lui était

> particulier…*Hinnk*! J'appris ainsi la différence. J'appris aussi, par extension, que la différence constituait la matière la plus vive, la plus vaste, la plus sûre et la plus stable de toutes les choses existantes…" (Chamoiseau 106)

In one section of the Malfini's account entitled "La descente des Nocifs " (the fall of the Nocifs) Chamoiseau draws on the idea of humans learning from animals. The Nocif (the name that the Malfini gives to a man, derived from the adjective *nocif*, "noxious" or "harmful") also helps in the task of taking care of the earth by following the example set by the Foufou.

> "Le Foufou s'en vint au-dessus de sa tête comme pour l'encourager. De cercle en cercle, ils atteignirent la rivière où je vis le Nocif ramener sur la rive une famille de lapias morts, ou tomber en arrêt devant une clique de crabe-violons qui moussaient de la gueule. Je veux bien avoir été victime d'une illusion d'optique, mais, par des arrêts, des voltes orientées, des plongées insistantes, et autres tapotements sur tel bord de son crâne, le Foufou guidait le Nocif à travers Rabuchon, de petit désastre en petit désastre, au fil de la mort lente…" (Chamoiseau 144)

Just as the Nocif descends the slopes of Rabuchon, philosophically speaking, taking lessons from another animal has lowered man from his pedestal. And just as the Malfini learns from the Foufou, who in turn embodies the notion of observing and learning from other species of the biosphere, the idea of an appreciation of the different attributes of each kind is reinforced. The Malfini repeats throughout his observations: "Je finis par comprendre "--I came to understand—a sentence that captures the spirit and the reward

of efforts to know *l'autre*, the other. But there is also the notion of working together towards a common goal. Dominance by force no longer works. The hegemonic Cartesian discourse privileging the human thinking subject is combatted by the evidence of the Foufou and his organization. The Foufou, and the other flying species inspired by his example, participate actively in the world. Chamoiseau refutes anthropomorphism through the example of the animals. The Foufou is the reference point indicating the way and leading by example, inspiring the others "sans sermon ni conseil". The œuvre of the Foufou and the others that sowed "aidaient aux semailles" (Chamoiseau 179, 206), attracts the attention of all, including the Nocifs, who, thereafter, also do their part in the project. This triggers the remark from the Malfini: "J'avais l'impression qu'une force s'était mise en mouvement et que ses ondes se répandaient doucement dans la matière du monde…" (207). The reconfiguration of Rabuchon in the mind of the Malfini from a territory to an *intention* (207), is proof of the power of the collective that works together towards one objective, the difference being that all do their part within their own capacities, and without being forced. Chamoiseau seems to evoke the importance of being awake to the homework and duty that concerns all the beings on the planet, and to the necessity of accomplishing this work together while respecting individual contributions and talents to achieve the goal. The Malfini distributes the plants, the insects and the remains of mature flower pollen by transporting them according to his own attributes, while the Foufou and the Nocifs accomplish the task in their own ways. In restoring life and beauty to Rabuchon, to the corner of the world that is their own, the collective succeeds in respecting the cycle of life, in living together while respecting each other, and in understanding the regeneration in themselves. The harmonious relation

between the earth and all the beings is understood by all—and benefits all. For the Malfini, "…apprécier ces existences (lui) rendait attentif à (son) existence propre, d'autant mieux que celle-ci se voyait restituée, sans hiérarchie ni prétention, au faste général…" (Chamoiseau 176). Cohesion is created in the recognition of a common objective linked to the notion of common suffering of all beings and all types of being (the word *engeances* as used by Chamoiseau can capture types in categories as well as ways of being even inside of "types"). The environment is shared by all, the good, the bad and the ugly, and thus its condition affects all.

The Mabanckounian way of bringing out the interdependent relationship is to show the effects of the double relationship that exists between the porcupine and the human Kibandi. Kibandi is initiated into the sorcerer tradition by his father who was himself one. In using Kibandi's animal double to take revenge against people every time he feels insulted, Mabanckou can have his porcupine repeatedly reflect on the violence of men. The porcupine not only observes the animal but also the human world, thanks to his position as a double. He also shows the porcupine's share in the acts, even when the porcupine is aware of it : "qu'il agissait désormais avec une légèreté qui me laissait pantois, la prudence était plutôt de mon côté, il était convaincu que braver ces interdits le hisserait au sommet " (Mabanckou 193). In this collaboration, Mabanckou shows the porcupine following tradition even when he knows better, which is just as irrational as the non-reasoning in Kibandi and blaming others for the failures of his life. And beyond this intimate relationship between porcupine and human, there is also the violence to nature evoked by this relationship of harmful double. Kibandi's father, who had initiated his son into the harmful double tradition, had killed his niece: "on retrouva au coucher du

soleil le corps sans vie de Niangui-Boussina sur la rive droite" (Mabanckou 92). This example of violence reminds us of the point made by Michel Serres on Achilles's—and humanity's—war against nature, and the price that everyone pays if we continue to wage all manners of war:

> Achille, roi de la guerre, lutte contre un fleuve en crue. Étrange et folle bataille! . .
>
> [A]u fur et à mesure qu'il jette au fil de l'eau des cadavres innombrables d'adversaires vaincus et tués, le niveau monte de sorte que le ruisseau, débordé, vient le menacer jusqu'aux épaules. . . Gagne-t-il si complètement que répugnante, sa victoire se renverse en échec? A la place des rivaux font irruption le monde et les dieux.
>
> La rivière, le feu et la boue se rappellent à nous. (*Contrat naturel* 14-15).

The river symbolizes a necessary resource for all the beings of the community. Through the porcupine's observations we witness the natural rhythms of life where each group, animal or human, comes to take part of the river and leaves space for others, all taking their turn. Mabanckou shows the social constructions and ingrained habits of two traditions, African and European, and the work of the porcupine, who is now separated from Kibandi after his death, is to communicate his testimony, so that the senseless violence issued from myths and belief systems constructed out of communities does not repeat itself. The image of a porcupine writing his memoirs summons Derrida's evocations of humans being autobiographical animals, [11] thereby serving as a reminder of

[11] *L'animal autobiographique (Autour de Jacques Derrida*) (Actes du colloque de Cerisy de juillet 1997, publiés en 1999).

the socially-constructed nature of myths and belief-systems we hold dear. It is also testimony that fuses the two traditions: while speaking to the baobab we recognize the oral tradition, and as we can see in the title, he also transmits his confessions by writing down his *mémoirs.* A testimony transcribed in the oral rhythm via the almost exclusive use of commas, his writing reaches a readership outside of Séképembé. The porcupine and his human Kibandi depend on each other in the logic of an animal-double relationship where the porcupine and his human work together (for evil). The porcupine, the harmful double, is shaped by his human Kibandi. The story is about an African myth, but Mabanckou takes up other myths along the way- that of the Bible where God shaped Adam in His image for example- to show the socially-constructed nature behind legends in our communities, and any resulting rules of conduct from them. Even though the porcupine is obliged to be of service to his double, and by this, commit acts of vengeance, he is troubled and observant in his role. At the end of the confessions to the baobab, he swears to eradicate harmful doubles after the experience he has had, which is symbolic of his choice to be possessed by good spirits and act for good.

Mboudjak has us discover the diversity in each neighborhood he visits on his trips. What the inhabitants of the Cameroonian city have in common is suffering and the battle to survive, but Mboudjak also perceives cowardice. The wickedness of men in the streets of Yaoundé, generated by the Biya regime, repeatedly manifests itself. Nganang has Mboudjak look straight on into the consequences of internal sociopolitical quarrels – evoking the interconnectedness of destinies of all the citizens of the city – humans and animals. When Mboudjak visits Mini Minor's yard/compound to tease her dogs that are « prisonniers » the question he asks, "vous êtes attachés?", receives the response from the

dogs that "ils ont fait leur choix" (Nganang 108). Both men and animals struggle to eat and this fight could serve as metaphor for the struggle in the general sense for earth's resources. In this way, Serres's interpretation of Francisco Goya's painting *Duelo a garrotazos* » (*Two Men Fighting with Clubs*) is conjured and is fitting to describe the lot of desperate men in misery where, in fighting each other, they both perish in the quicksand. The same effect is achieved when Nganang does not let the Cameroonian citizens forget their duty: through the philosophical character, the man in black-black, he lets it be known that all living beings have a responsibility, even under oppression, to find their humanity. The question Mboudjak asks himself— "Where is Man?" repeated throughout the narrative, is in effect a call for justice, or at the very least, a sign of effort from the beings of the neighborhood, the entire city of Yaoundé, even the country, to mobilize and demand justice. This act would show their humanity. The philosopher in black-black, nicknamed the Crow, labeled as the opposition to the Biya regime, is the lone human to provide a bit of hope to Mboudjak in this fight. The man in black-black represents the writer, and echoes Mboudjak by posing the question to the members of Massa Yo's bar courtyard:

> "Vous tous là qui me regardez avec vos gros yeux, combien de fois m'avez-vous raconté que vous souffrez ? Mais êtes-vous seulement prêts à souffrir pour votre frère ? Non, vous m'avez tous laissé croupir en prison, alors que c'est pour vous défendre qu'on m'y a mené. Où est passé l'homme en vous? Qu'êtes-vous devenus? Où est votre tête? Vous ne savez même plus revendiquer la justice? Vous ne savez plus ce qu'est le

> droit? Des loques vous êtes ! (...) Combien sont morts dans des prisons alors que vous soûliez d'indifférence dans les bars ?" (Nganang 205).

Mboudjak finally sees Man *rising up* after the murder of the child Takou. This is the last straw for the people of the neighborhoods and they rise to protest this specific injustice. All the beings participate:

> "L'Homme était renaît. Je ne croyais pas les yeux (…) les quartiers se mouvaient : l'homme a recommencé à remarcher. (…) Nous étions unis, l'homme et moi, dans la précipitation saccadée du langage nôtre : dans nos aboiements." (Nganang 366).

The work and solidarity are necessary since every injustice concerns all. In the three novels, the interdependence between humans and non-humans is brought out but the emphasis is also placed on the necessity of *reflecting* and *understanding*. Understanding then, and especially paying attention, is the pathway privileged by these authors, and is the specific song of these voices that rise in the narratives. What opposes this spirit of understanding is recognized through claims to a superior position by a given group. Under this kind of demand, harmony is denied, and is contrary to the collective. In the same vein of thought as Serres, speaking of resistance to the idea of changing our rapport in the world, Betty Jean Craige describes opposing reaction to Charles Darwin's theories in the nineteenth century as being the fear of "a nonanthropocentric conception of nature in which change is continuous and undirected, because it contradicted their conception of human society as a God-created, and therefore stable, hierarchy" (Craige 3). Serres's and Craige's points underscore the deep-rootedness of Cartesian thought. In the narratives, the authors show the harmful effects of *movements* or of ideologies: in Chamoiseau,

Foufou's brother, named Colibri by the Malfini, organizes other hummingbirds (except of course the Foufou, who knows to resist) around him in what smacks of totalitarianism: "Colibri lui-même avait senti planer l'haleine froide de la mort. Il avait perdu de sa magnificence. Malgré son activisme autoritaire, il restait démuni devant la lente catastrophe." (Chamoiseau 137). In the face of the ecological disaster, Colibri and his soldiers show themselves to be impotent, and only the ingenuity and the courage embodied in the Foufou knows the way to face the danger. For his part, Mabanckou integrates western and African traditions in the symbolic fusion between the porcupine and Kibandi. Through the observations of both worlds, the animal world and the human world, the porcupine delivers the superstitions and the myths that control the beings of both worlds. Mabanckou throws some humor on a serious subject: in mocking the social constructions that operate in both universes of the story, he succeeds in proving them to be the myths that they are, and that each tradition has them, whether animal, human, European or African societies. He also shows human nature as destructive, as believing in its own superiority, and as wanting to place its own social constructions above others.

In *Temps de chien*, Mboudjak identifies the devastation in the streets of Madagascar and the other neighborhoods, as well as the reaction of men facing the misery of Biya's regime. During an incident where a policeman kills a taxi driver who refuses to give a *tchoko* (bribe) (Nganang 112) the men around the kiosque ask themselves why the policeman had not gone directly to the source of the problem: to the decision-makers who do not pay them. The answer : "Qu'est tu attends, les policiers sont tous lâches ! . . . Ils sont comme les chiens puissants seulement devant les faibles" (133). Mboudjak speaks to us directly : "Oh les hommes ! Quand vous avez faim – et j'en suis

très au courant – vous êtes pire que des rats. Vous ne vous attaquez pas seulement, non, vous êtes prêts à vous dévorer mutuellement. . . .. Je me suis rendu compte des vérités apprises des hommes . . . que ma vie maudite m'a amené à découvrir, se répétaient à maintes reprises partout, déguisées seulement par le masque de la différence" (132). On top of the cowardice and the animality apparent in men in wretchedness, Mboudjak sees that proposed solutions attached to ideologies are powerless. The engineer Docta, frustrated from his efforts to find work, moralizes and carries a book by Aimé Césaire evoking the Négritude movement. There is a dog equivalent in the narrative as well: Mboudjak finds the dog with three legs who had sermonized on the vices of capitalism and who advocated communism, dead in a little stream. "Je me suis rendu compte que derrière moi était un petit ruisseau, barré d'un chien mort . . . Soudain le cri lointain de la liberté chanté par le chien communiste de Madagascar a retenti à mes oreilles" (135). The expression "canitude" or the dog essence of dogs, further mocked the idea of négritude or more precisely, the futility in the idea of fighting in the same way against the target of oppression: one does not resolve a conflict pitting one party against another. Better to find the way of understanding and interconnectedness.

Inspired by the conclusions of our three writers, we may respond to an important question formulated by Birnbaum: "Mais, alors, comment relativiser l'exception humaine sans sombrer dans une dangereuse confusion entre tous les vivants" (10)? How to relativize or balance human exceptionalism without sinking into a dangerous confusion between all living beings? At the end of the three stories, the authors leave the path open—which signals the resilience of the animals, and could also signal hope. Through these animal narratives, the writers recommend recognizing the right of all *others* to live.

What they propose via their animal narrators is a fair estimation or consideration of the other kind. To do this, it is critical to first look inside, to have the courage to face that reality, so as to accept the true evaluation of the other. To really *see*, one must first *know.* The open endings of each novel are indicative of a process of knowing unfolding: the Malfini places the story of the Foufou in the hands of the raconteur Chamoiseau for passing it on; the porcupine wants us to understand "qu'on n'a pas fini d'entendre parler de moi, hein" (Mabanckou 221), in his intention to eradicate harmful doubles and, as he did not die with his double per tradition, he may well be alive to carry it out. Finally, Mboudjak insinuates in sniffing the asphalt where Takou was killed that we will see "Oui, croyez-moi chers lecteurs, l'odeur de son sang y était toujours chaude" (367). The Malfini, the porcupine and Mboudjak all undertook the work to understand—themselves and others—and they did their part in communicating the results of their reflections.

Could the open conclusions be the literary versions of throwing the ball back into the court of humanity? The *bildungsroman* -esque or coming-of-age frameworks of these novels may be ambiguous: a wink-wink to those already in the know of their worth (such as marginalized beings) using the format to convey the message to those that would hold them in the shadows (those in power and those perpetuating hierarchical thinking, and also those who are not "decolonizing" their own minds). Alternatively, the format could be the modern fable in earnest precisely because it also holds lessons for the marginalized to come into their own, on the steam of their own consciousness and the fact that in many geo-cultural contexts outside of mainland France where French is spoken or used officially, the idea of form-shifters and storytellers, both human and non-human, is not uncommon. For example, the opacity in mystique (which is a way of knowing other than

the one-dimensional way of knowing assumed in the European or Westernized humanist gaze) is maintained through the porc-épic conte and *double-nuisible* legend. Thus, these stories can be seen in the light of drawing on traditions instead of dismissed as yet other instances of anthropomorphic telling or of not questioning "the humanist schema of the knowing-subject" (Wolfe, *Human* 569).

Openness and uncertainty is frightening to those who do not want to work to understand because it is easier not to have to change entrenched habits and ideas and also not to make room for others. Denying the animality of humanity in the dominant discourse has its origins in fear and weakness, and represents a way of ensuring a path for humans. We are responsible for our comportment. If, through their stories, the authors show the soul of each animal narrator, it is in the way that each decides to use it that instructs best. The response to Birnbaum's question is not prescriptive, which is the point: responses that are *definitive*, or claim to be *certitudes* or *show only one truth,* do not work. They end up being the equivalent of substituting one *certainty* or *régime* for another rather than accommodate a multiplicity of ways to be. The intimate interlinking itself of our destinies on this planet should serve to reconfigure the rapport between us. The limitless quality of the conclusions of these narratives is aesthetically and philosophically harmonious. The real barrier is the difference in those who are ready to work to understand others and those who are not. And a difference of this kind shows itself to be due to volition, not due to an innate inability or lack in a person, because all people are capable—if we want to be. Glissant phrases it this way in his *Poetics of Relation:* "An attentive observer will notice that such windbags (anyone who espouses discourse depriving populations of cultural identity) are anxiously intent on confining

themselves to the false transparency of a worId they used to run; they do not want to enter into the penetrable opacity of a world in which one exists, or agrees to exist, with and among others." (114) It is up to each community to determine the best way to work together to contribute to the health of our planet.

CHAPTER 4

HUMANIMALS: FIGURES OF *COMPLICITÉ*

"Wenn ein Löwe sprechen könnte, wir könnten ihn nicht verstehen"."

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophischen Untersuchungen*

Whereas Patrick Chamoiseau, Alain Mabanckou and Patrice Nganang use animal narrators to voice the particularity of their respective contexts, the other three novels in this corpus privilege the *being-ness* of both humans and animals in the world. The Wittgenstein inscription above has been, according to Cary Wolfe, "often misunderstood" and also interpreted to suggest the impossibility of lions talking (and all the inferred judgement that comes with such a lack) (Wolfe, *In the Shadow* 1,2). The representations of relegated humans and non-humans in their fictional plots by the three mainland French writers in this corpus indicate a willingness to take on the challenge of showing that there are more ways (than human linguistic systems) to "face up to, the fact of a "consciousness…. beyond ours" (Vicki Hearne quoted in Wolfe, 2).

The main narrative technique of focus here is that these three authors interweave the lot of the animals to that of the humans in their stories. If we visualize potential objectives for each set of novels in the crudest of terms, we could posit that the outside-of-hexagonal France writers aim to make us "see" and "hear" factions of living beings on our planet that we have either ignored or not been able to see as having value for themselves, and in doing so bring such a being from the periphery to the center all the

while embodying prized *logos* for worldly observations and expression that is specific to their cultural contexts. Centering the focus of animal narrators in this way makes sense in allowing for their positionality to be seen and heard in all their value and variety. In contrast, quasi equal positionality of animals and humans in the stories of the "Made-in-France" writers allow the focus to be placed on conditions, thinking and practices that affect all beings as well as the commonality *within* creatures as part of the living world. These writers wish to make their own countrymen wake up to their blindness, or as Édouard Glissant puts it "éveiller un constat" (*Poétique* 27) awaken an observation. In her book *French écocritique*, Stéphanie Posthumus identifies philosopher and literary critic Jean-Marie Schaeffer and writer Michel Houellebecq whose work shifts the traditional humanist paradigm of humans looking for distance from their *animalité* because of negative associations, to instead integrating and owning this aspect of ourselves, and thus the fact that we humans are part of the physical living world: "Schaeffer examines the philosophical problem of human exceptionalism, drawing once again on work in the cognitive sciences, evolutionary psychology, and comparative anthropology to argue for a more integrated concept of human nature. He critiques dualism and reminds he reader that the notion of the human as necessarily anti-natural is a construct of Western philosophy" (135).

La complicité

In the three French novels in this study, interweaving the lot of animals and humans is seen as quasi equal billing in the stories which counters the founding humanist thinking and imagery of human superiority *over* animals. Such a representation of equal share in

this world participates in the above-mentioned paradigm shift and also opens up ways to "see" other ways of being in the world. The logic of imposing one world view and order to speak for everyone, everywhere - what Celia Britton calls "ideological capture" (53), is thereby questioned. Since culture goes hand in hand with governing, the technique of contrasting human and animal lives under a given set of governing conventions highlights what is fair or unfair about those conventions as we see the effects on more than one group of beings. The part the animals play in these three novels is akin to that of a narrative conscience that exposes the inherent conceit in humans' view and subsequent treatment of animals. Vulnerable human characters, such as women, minority groups, the enslaved, and people of lower economic status also suffer under the same socio-political-cultural environment as the animals in the stories are thus seen more clearly. Audeguy's, NDiaye's and Rosenthal's characters are either French or in immediate contact with French characters that affect their lives directly. The events that take place either happen in France or France is a directional pull for the characters in some way. The effect in form and in story content is that it centers around France and any positive or negative outcomes in the stories are therefore attributed to that country and its socio-politico-cultural forces. France's fear of Otherness as exemplified through the social divide over im/migration today is a prime example of old forces contributing to new crises. French identity is constructed in opposition to that of the Other, and this has been in place since the days of the Enlightenment. Revolutionary maxims such as liberty, fraternity and equality were reworked to fit ideologies of progress and *perfectibilité* in the French Republic, and justified the colonialist and expansionist enterprises under the guise of civilizing missions.

Stéphane Audeguy sets his novel in both Senegal and in France during the colonial expansion period and the French revolution but we follow the lives of his animal characters—the lion Personne and his dog bestie Hercule--with their human friends (and foes), from both countries. This allows Audeguy to illustrate key moments of France's imperialistic colonial expansion in two contexts. Marie NDiaye also sets her novels across the same two lands, but hers is in a post/colonial time. We follow humans closely as they face contemporary manifestations of traumas stemming from patriarchy and colonialism and the animals that figure in the three accounts across her novel uniquely mirror—and express in their way—the experiences of the humans we follow. The third novel, Olivia Rosenthal's *Que font les rennes après Noël?* is set solely in contemporary France and juxtaposes conditions of animals in that society with conditions of a female human character. In so doing, she exposes the similarities in circumstances of these two kinds of "imprisoned" beings. The combination of animals and humans in all three novels forces a consideration of the place accorded to animals figuratively, which in turn leads to a questioning of the status quo of inherited philosophical belief in humans' natural and rightful place on the top step of all beings. The authors show this to be illusory. The stories reveal how such thinking and domination over animals not only marginalizes and hurts animals, but also hurts all French society in the practice of adhering to such values.

The questioning of human's superiority *over* animals serves to question the systems of oppression *within* humanity, and these three writers show how those systems of oppression are in play both in the "sovereign" country as well as in the countries France colonized. They show how French society has reaped what it has sown. Another obvious contrast from the first three novels in this study is the way these French novels

play compared to the use of humor in the set of animal-narrator novels. The use of humor in the set of animal-narrator novels is effective and appropriate if we consider that laughter often comes from suffering - we laugh to avoid crying, and it is therapeutic. The animal narrator relieves, retrieves and relates experience for himself as well as for the common good. But here, in this set of novels, the reality of what needs to be realigned is exposed in an almost matter of fact tone, which unites French sensibility of logic and candor with the metronomic rhythm of the French language. This is the French voice of reason pointing out in a matter of fact manner the situation their ancestors have put them in today. Where these authors *do* play though, is in the form that they use, to shake tradition in bringing something new to the literary landscape. This landscape is itself an ecosystem that the writers are embedded in and contribute to in the material sense, interacting as they do with the living world they are a part of. Their collaborations can be seen as adapting to the reality of the living world and the relationships therein, as well as helping to shape such relationships.

Audeguy references Wittgenstein's Lion

Starting with Stéphane Audeguy's novel, his narrative strategy interlaces key past historical events across two territories, France and Senegal, to reveal the effect of these moments on present states and relationships. In his *Histoire du lion Personne,* the French Revolution setting in France and the colonial and imperialist enterprise setting in Senegal is what Audeguy calls *un moment charnière* pour la France. Setting the action in France at the time of the Revolution allows him to develop the imagery of the exact point in time when France opened the door to present treatment of humans and animals. Since

capitalism rested on the back of slavery, he says in an interview[12] that we treat animals the same as slaves were treated at the time, and he would argue, men today. If we are concerned about the abattoirs today, it's because of the violence that is done and that in turn is violent to us socially. He weaves in real historical figures (Bernardin, Buffon, les naturalistes) as well as real sites (Versailles, Jardin des Plantes) from the time of the French Revolution to underscore his point that the Revolution period is the turning point of men changing their relationship towards animals and that thinking stemming from natural science work at that moment in time is also the source of our current relationship with animals.

Form matches content in writing because Audeguy uses a nineteenth century omniscient narrator to marry customary narrative procedure to content since he is going back in history. In this way, the author simultaneously underscores not speaking for others equally in style and in content- but that means *all* others. Equally. Humans and animals. It should not have been done then - a content error so to speak, and he is fixing it by going back in history - except that he is re-writing thought in the style then used. An omniscient narrator harkens back to an older way of writing with a narrator who is assumed to know all. Audeguy, a teacher of the history of cinema and art, infuses historical elements in the chronicle of Personne the lion seemingly as a form of involvement in the critique on culture and History. Audeguy is reminding us that times have changed and we need to let old constructions go and adapt with the reality of our new perceptions. He appears to make a bet with his readers on the back cover of his book: "Il est absolument impossible de raconter l'histoire du lion Personne, qui vécut

[12]La rentrée littéraire http://www.seuil.com/ouvrage/histoire-du-lion-personne-stephane-audeguy/9782021331783

entre 1786 et 1796 d'abord au Sénégal, puis en France. Cependant, rien ne nous empêche d'essayer." S.A. The author could well be evoking humankind's tendency (superiority) to speak for others even though 'il y a une indignité à parler à la place de quiconque, surtout s'il s'agit d'un animal" (quatrième de couverture) as well as taking on the challenge of really trying to understand another being's position in the world. The omniscient perspective that provides for equal subjects-as-individuals billing of animal and human characters in the story-world participates in the philosophical debate of human exceptionalism and his narrating strategy engages with the "narrative" of history with a capital H.

Speaking *for* others is different from trying to *consider* others. Audeguy does not attempt to represent Personne via an interior voice but rather tries to *interpret* the existence of Personne: Through portrayals of interactions between humans and humans and humans and animals and animals and animals, a reader gets the sense of closeness and consideration between such beings. In this way, Audeguy picks up the debate Wittgenstein started in 1958 in §242 of his *Philosophischen Untersuchungen (Philosophical Investigations*) surrounding language and the figure of a lion. When Wittgenstein stated "wenn ein Löwe sprechen könnte, wir könnten nicht verstehen" (variously translated as "When a lion can speak, we cannot understand him" or "If a lion could talk we could not understand him") it was in the context of a discussion on René Descartes' notion of the essential internality and privacy of thoughts and feelings. Since we imagine other people's thoughts and feelings in fictional representations and we do this based on what we know about our own thoughts and feelings, we then project this understanding onto our observations of others. Thus, Audeguy's observations of

Personne (through his omniscient narrator) as a means of interpreting what the lion may be feeling and experiencing need not feel outside of the realm of possibility. In doing so, Audeguy appears to be posing the question "well why can we not try"? He may not place words that humans can recognize in the mouth of Personne, but Audeguy nevertheless has imagination go to work on animals' behalf when he depicts Personne dreaming and even having recurring nightmares about "l'un de ses semblables [qui] s'éloignait de lui, sa mère peut-être" and its effect on him as he "se réveillait en gémissant" (91). And, just like humans, "Personne n'oubliait son rêve, jusqu'à la prochaine fois, comme nous les oublions" (91). It seems as though the point being made is about humans and non-human's mutual intelligibility through body language and behaviors and the language(s) that exist in addition to verbal human language systems.

The call for interpreting and considering another being's perspective, especially such beings that are "relegated" to nature or the natural world, is reinforced when Audeguy has Pelletan think about reading Rousseau, or carry "un volume de Rousseau en poche" (93), and the association between styles of thinking about humans and the natural world is made. Pelletan's actions and interactions themselves seem to substantiate Rousseau's inclusive humanism. Pelletan shows himself to be capable of successfully navigating "ces jeux inextricables de pouvoir et d'argent qu'on appelait Saint-Louis" (82) all while harboring the dream of abolishing slavery, being kind and having genuine relationships with inhabitants of Senegal such as Yacine and Adal, as well as with animals such as Personne and Hercule. The color of humans' skin matters not, the nobility of origin matters not as evidenced through these relationships. His lover Adal is described as "un homme singulier, à la peau d'un noir profond, presque violet" from "un lointain désert au

nord, [et qui] avait grandi dans une tribu guerrière et nomade" (84). We also see this Pelletan's brand of inclusive thinking towards animals because on the event of Hercule's birth we learn that "on ne sut déterminer qui était le géniteur" (87) and he is described as "tacheté" and "corniaud" (88, 90). The certainty and nobility of birth is shown not to be as important to Pelletan as character. Hercule is so named by Pelletan because of his daring and precocious personality evidenced through his friendship with Personne as well as his visits to the *Compagnie* kitchen to abscond with delights reserved for humans: "Pelletan décida que le nom d'Hercule resterait au corniaud. N'avait-il pas, de plus, montré, comme son homonyme, une vigueur miraculeusement précoce" (90) ?

Content-wise, Audeguy takes us to … *en plein coeur de la révolution* of his novel in France as well as in a colonial territory. We find out what happens to a people in revolt and hungry through the human character taking care of the lion Personne and his canine best friend Hercule, among other animals at the menagerie in Versailles:

> Jean Dubois nourrissait avec peine les occupants de sa petite arche, et particulièrement les carnivores, car les paysans de la région, comme naguère les employés de Pelletan, trouvaient de plus en plus mauvais que des bêtes venues de l'Afrique ou de la Chine fissent meilleure chère qu'eux. (Audeguy 181)

Audeguy's moment of inquiry corresponds perfectly with the ironic revolutionary call of the *liberté, égalité et fraternité* to reveal the beings that are excluded from these ideals. Tracing the loophole of exclusion that existed at that historically heralded moment allows us to understand the underpinning for exclusionary practices of other denizens in the country today. If we look at the term "revolution" in the same way as Hannah Arendt

understood the term – that is, to be reserved for identifying fundamental changes in human ways of thinking and relating – then Audeguy's move to set his novel in "revolutionary" France, taken in this light, corroborates the turn in human attitudes and Arendt's concept of authorizing power.

He also shows what life is like on the ground in Senegal while the economic and political dissent of the French Revolution proper is brewing in France. The story opens in Senegal tracing the beginnings of the lion Personne, first found outside of his pride by a young Senegalese boy, Yacine. We are with both young living beings as they embark on the next stretch of road of their lives in the Senegalese trading town of St. Louis, at one time in that period the headquarters of trading ports for France. The structure of society is laid out for us in all its colonialist operations, as seen through the life of a young boy identified from his village by a Frenchman as having some promise for his mathematical abilities, through to life for him and for others colliding in the slave trade and colonialist enterprise in St. Louis. The fact that a young Senegalese boy could be identified as gifted in mathematics exposes culturally conditioned values of reason and pursuits of the mind symbolized by père Jean, "un saint homme" (Audeguy 10) but nevertheless, French, therefore representative of the colonizing nation. Later in the novel, we learn the locals in his village did not "see" this as a beneficial opportunity, or not in the same light, thereby reinforcing the imposition of assuming the same standard of values as a one-size-fits-all.

The lion cub also serves to highlight behavioral similarities in the animal and human worlds. In lion prides, if one is "tainted" by contact with humans the pride rejects that member. "De toute façon, le lionceau était promis à la mort si on le laissait là. Yacine savait qu'imprégné de l'odeur des hommes, il subirait l'hostilité de quelque habitant de la

savane : un lion, incommodé par sa puanteur, le déchirerait avec colère ; une hyène famélique lui broierait la gorge" (Audeguy 21). This alludes to the same pattern of being a social "misfit" or "outcast" of sorts that occurs when one member of a community is educated and cultured in another, such as would happen with Yacine being educated in mathematics and schooled by French standards. His physical displacement towards St. Louis, a trading port under the influence of Western economic pulsations, is representative of the break in his community traditions by the presence of Europeans and their systems and values. When Yacine brings the lion cub with him, they both physically move closer to a Western sphere of influence. Indeed, it is from the port of St. Louis that Personne will gain France later in the novel, and when he is brought to the Versailles menagerie, his presence serves as a reminder of the "exotic" life in the colonies. Walter Putnam in his essay *The Colonial Zoo*, says exotic animals "brought to Europe and North America served as living, visual, kinetic proof of Western hegemony over distant lands" (Putnam 31).

"Diasporic" Humanimals

Audeguy's colonial and imperialist enterprise setting is telling. His historical point of inquiry hints at history repeating itself (or continuing) the legacy from that historical juncture. Again, Walter Putnam:

> Although they came largely during the colonial period as tokens of empire, their continued presence in the West underscores the persistence of the colonial relationship long after political decolonization had taken place. "Animals," especially as captured representatives of their species,

> remain flagrant reminders of the epistemic violence of colonialism as it subsists in our postcolonial world. Indeed, if one takes "postcolonial" in a temporal sense, the "post" invites a misleading conclusion that we have moved beyond colonialism. To the contrary, the institutionalization of speciesism, the death and diaspora of countless animals, the degradation and deprivation of habitat, as well as the ongoing exploitation of animals for human purposes mirror many of the worst practices of colonialism. (Putnam 31-2)

Putnam's allocation of the word "diaspora" to animal populations brought over from colonized territories echoes the displacement, the interruption and the violence perpetuated on human populations from the African continent and elsewhere during the process of colonial expansion and the institution of slavery. Thinking of animals scattered around the globe, brought over from faraway lands, held in captivity, and "collected" is violence enough to animals but it brings home the *fact* of the dispersion of peoples, especially that the practice was socially sanctioned due to African peoples being animalized or conflated with animals and therefore considered "nobodies". Like animals, such peoples' own social lives were never considered in the moral equation. Audeguy points the finger at the movements of thought that are responsible for the acceptance of justifying practices of imperial expansion with attendant violence to the conquered lands and their respective inhabitants.

Naturalism is one such target in the naming of historical *naturalistes* in French society in the moments of imperialist expansionist and colonialist practices. Readers cannot ignore the names that Audeguy places in the narrative, and must make the

connection that the premises and explorations of the natural scientists lead to the normalization of boundary lines between humans and animals. Of course, by extension, this in turn leads to the boundary becoming applicable to other kinds of inhabitants of colonized territories. Why Audeguy's finger-pointing at this moment of history is important in reader consciousness is because as Cary Wolfe explains in his *Animal Rites*, "the effective power of the discourse of species when applied to social others of whatever sort relies, then, on a prior taking for granted of the institution of speciesism -- that is, of the ethical acceptability of the systematic "noncriminal putting to death" of animals based solely on their species (7).

Audeguy's technique of interweaving the lives and fates of his human and his animal characters is done with the help of real historical places in both France and Senegal as well as with the names of real historical figures. In this way, he gives his animal characters and his ordinary Senegalese characters historical significance by placing them alongside those names that made it into the history books. The names he assigns to the lion and his canine friend place them into view as subjects and further, give pause, since the names themselves have significance. There is an ironic effect in the name *Hercule* being attributed to a tiny dog yet it suits his courageous character, and there is double meaning in the name *Personne.* Both are fitting literally and figuratively: on the one hand, appropriate for the larger body of animals they are meant to evoke and symbolize as "nobodies yet somebodies," and on the other hand fitting too for the way in which they are dismissed as tiny (or small, irrelevant) when they are truly brave and courageous. The name Hercule inspired by Greek myth was used for naming a French ship in the imperialist mission and Audeguy repurposes the name and inspiration to serve a

contemporary mission of having people today see courage and valor in such a being as the little dog. As the title of the novel suggests, it is "a" or "the" *story* about the lion named Personne, as well as it can be the *history* of the lion named Personne. The play on both words in French – *histoire* and *Personne*—is meaningful. "A" or "the" story, or "a" or "the" history, alludes to the constructed nature of a story as well as of history. History's reporting depends on who is doing the reporting, and thus, the version of historical events that ends up being reported, which means that this kind of record is just as constructed as any story. Personne is an unusual name for anyone since it means no-one (both in the French language as well as *Kena* does in the language of the tribe in which Yacine grew up; see Audeguy 27) and that leads us to reflect on which beings may be considered "no-ones" or nobodies". It also has us think carefully about the fact that if one isn't recorded in the history books, or History, one is effectively, "no-one", or "personne", as if non-existent. Audeguy ends his novel with the ominous words "Alors nul ne se souvint plus de Personne" (217) as if to remind us that how it ended for Personne is part and parcel of the process for all "nobodies" (as branded by the dominant ruling power) permitted in the thinking from that period.

In Audeguy showing the dispersion of animals through the process of colonialism / imperialism, he excavates the fault lines –exactly where we went wrong—following both human and non-human characters as they negotiate during the colonial era in two countries. The experience Personne and Hercule undergo echoes the slave experience aboard ships being transported from their homelands towards a new territory. Personne was caged and transported like cargo "dans les entrailles surchauffées et puantes du *Centaure*" (131), and given unclean water in terrifying weather swells. Hercule, separated

at the beginning of the three-week passage from Personne, found him as he was chasing the captain's cat as well as rats to eat. The lion was ravaged by vermin and trapped below deck just as slaves were. Audeguy also paints the picture of the sights along the way that Personne misses out on in his captivity– not seeing "ni le jour, ni la nuit ; il n'aperçut ni Gibraltar ni les côtes d'Espagne, ni l'embouchure large du Tage, ni les blanches façades des maisons de Lisbonne; il manqua également les cieux étoilés du golfe de Gascogne, et les côtes douces et grises de la France" (132), which further reinforces the tragic, traumatic and disorienting conditions of such treatment of beings considered "not human." The experience of captive African peoples being transported in the bellies of ships in unclean conditions and in full terror of not knowing where they are going, is recreated via Personne's caged journey. Also potent is Audeguy's meaning of setting the destination for France, the mother country, rather than one of the colonies. Personne and Hercule end their days being incarcerated animals on display in the zoo, with their eventual demise coming at the hands of the white worms that eat from the inside, introduced into their bodies through the unclean water on the *Centaure*.

> Cependant Hercule et Personne avaient été empoisonnés à bord du navire de la Compagnie des Indes et de la Chine, par l'eau croupie qu'on leur avait si parcimonieusement fournie, et qui était la même qu'on donnait aux nègres. L'eau en question abritait à la vérité de petits vers blancs invisibles, et ces minuscules animaux avaient d'abord élu domicile dans les intestins, sous la peau, dans les poumons des deux bêtes (Audeguy 210).

The death by internal destruction signals the manner in which we humans will also go

down if we continue the same path of domination. The way the little worms wreak such devastation– “Puis ils y avaient crû et prospéré, selon leur nature, aveugles et sourds aux dégâts qu’ils provoquaient” (210) – sounds eerily similar to the blindness and deafness humans are capable of on the path of “progress.”

The backdrop of the political regimes that come and go in mankind’s cultural environment and how such change affects all beings is plain to see. Audeguy shows the Empire maintaining menageries during flush times and apogees of power, as well as the flip side, when feeding of animals becomes an issue for poor humans worrying about where they will get their next meal. Each moment of discontent due to conditions in humans’ lives, whether in Senegal or in France, is registered through how it affects Personne, Hercule and the humans around them. In Senegal the domestics hate the fact that the lion was better fed at the Compagnie than they were : “Les domestiques d’ailleurs, le haïssaient pour cela, disant qu’il était mieux traité et nourri qu’eux ; et ils avaient raison ” (89). Once in France at the menagerie in Versailles, famine provokes riots:

> Un après-midi du mois d’août 1792 ils virent arriver dans les jardins des paysans qui brandissaient des piques et des fourches, ainsi que des hommes en chemise qui portaient des rondelles colorées de bleu, de blanc et de rouge : pendant quelques semaines il ne fut plus question de s’aller promener dans les allées royales. Il arriva enfin qu’une section locale des jacobins se mit en tête d’envahir la Ménagerie, d’en briser les clôtures, sans qu’on sache très bien s’il s’agissait de libérer des malheureuses bêtes victimes de l’arbitraire royal ou de détruire des symboles de la monarchie,

de son luxe indécent, de son oisiveté congénitale (Audeguy 182).

Since what happens to his two animal characters unfolds in the course of historic moments, we readers may live the political and economic consequences of the period as they affected those that were there to serve the most powerful – such as these animals symbolized (for entertainment). What is more, Audeguy's placement of Personne as the target of blatant inequality between social classes and people in two contexts, emphasizes two main ideas. First, the vulnerability of animals at the whims and winds of change of those in power is reflected in the ups and downs in Personne's life – he enjoys comfort and love as well as endures loss and hard times. Second, the relationship model of the dominant to the dominated in practice under colonial rule is effective and transportable across territories. But whereas the dominated people may revolt and retaliate one day, Audeguy does not have Personne fight back when at the head of the frustrated hungry *émeutiers* is Thibault, "fils d'un jardinier que Jean Dubois …avait même pris en affection, et qui avait cotoyé Personne" (183) and who pulls on Personne's mane. Personne is more in control of his emotions than is Thibault since he cries out in pain "mais ne répliqua pas" (183) thus showing more dignity than mankind.

In setting his story in a period where the fate of animals as we know it today in the cultural imaginary is cemented through the intellectual heritage from the period's *Philosophes*, Audeguy shows the damage caused to animals through an emphasis on reason and the scientific method. This dovetails with Derrida, who traced the escalation of human cruelty to other living beings back to the period of scientific progress and accumulation of knowledge through the Enlightenment thinkers and naturalists:

Au cours des deux derniers siècles, ces formes traditionnels du traitement

> de l'animal ont été bouleversées, c'est trop évident, par les développements conjoints de savoirs zoologiques, éthologiques, biologiques et génétiques toujours inséparables de techniques d'intervention dans leur objet, de transformation de leur objet même, et du milieu et du monde de leur objet, le vivant animal : par l'élevage et le dressage à une échelle démographique sans commune mesure avec le passé, par l'expérimentation …et supposé bien-être humain de l'homme. (*L'animal que donc je suis* 46)

The events that play out on the ground so to speak, for Audeguy's characters – humans and nonhumans alike – represent the effects in practice of such theoretical knowledges. The author suggests that we learn the truth, and also from the truth in writing into history "nobodies." Except for Pelletan and Yacine, Personne and Hercule have no voice that any human hears or grants, and this serves to illustrate the kind of treatment of other humans in the institution of slavery and in the period of colonial expansion.

NDiaye's lens

For Marie NDiaye's *Trois femmes puissantes*, the setting is also France and Senegal, but her stories are placed in contemporary times. She excavates female and migrant voices that are silenced today generally, by anchoring her characters in concrete traumas that are located in a specific ex-colony of France and in southern France. We follow humans closely as they face contemporary manifestations of traumas stemming from patriarchy and colonialism. NDiaye's migrants and women are left to fend for themselves in culture as animals must in what is left of nature. The combination of birds of prey with

her human characters tells a story of the effects of these systems of thought on individual and collective levels in those countries today. She speaks from the female experience through her method of interweaving the lot of humans and nonhumans in life and the commentary on the effects of colonialism can be seen in the migratory experience – on the side of those who attempt the journey as well as those who land in France. NDiaye's treatment of female silencing through patriarchal structures comes through a redefinition of how we typically see power. Power is seen as resilience through the experiences of the women in her stories – those who withstand abuse and unfairness in body and spirit. The animals that figure in the three accounts across her novel uniquely mirror – and express in their way- the experiences of the human characters we follow.

Her animals are noticed through the interior accounts, or reveries, of her characters and in this way help the characters and the reader make sense of the traumas they are working through in their own minds. In the first story Norah is caught between belonging to divorced parents, one French and one Senegalese, and also suffers the pain of abandonment and separation from her father, who not only left her family in France to return to Senegal while also kidnapping her brother. NDiaye shows the pain of this abduction on the other females (her sister and her mother) in the family who were likewise abandoned by the father figure, but importantly, the consequences are additionally revealed on Norah's brother Sony: "N'était-il pas, malgré l'argent et les facilités, un pauvre garçon" (61)? An inter-cultural and inter-racial marriage has its consequences on members of the family unit as all members must negotiate its viability in a France where such an alliance is culturally difficult. The Senegalese father's act of abduction, as selfish and as dishonest as it is towards the rest of the family, is also a

manifestation of feeling culturally out of place in France, and as such, a reminder of intolerant attitudes towards accommodating the Other.

In the storyline, Norah comes to terms with her trauma in helping her brother in her professional capacity as a lawyer— at her father's request— and she also symbolically disproves the low value attributed by her father to women because she is the savior of the legal situation that father and son are caught in. A decaying and aging bird of prey that is likened (in Norah's mind) to her aging father, who is powerless in the legal situation, symbolically signals the end of the reign of the predatory hold her father's abandonment had on Norah's mind and life. Norah is at peace and determined to free Sony from prison, and also free Sony (and the family) in a larger sense. Her acceptance of the situation is symbolized in the repetition "Car c'était ainsi" which covers the reality on the ground in her work to free Sony, as well as acceptance in the sense of facing the messy truth of past trauma in their lives.

> "Car c'était ainsi.
>
> Elle veillerait sur Sony, elle le ramènerait à la maison.
>
> C'était ainsi" (97).

We see the traumatic hold that Norah's father had on Norah expire in the imagery of her father roosting in a tree whose flowers are dying. In the *contrepoint*, it is Norah's father who perceives the breath of another – "Il percevait près de lui un autre souffle que le sien, une autre présence dans les branches" (98) – which signals the father acknowledging and accepting Norah's presence and value. NDiaye shows the growth of both characters and allows for the potential of healing between the two parties as they share the tree together. Indeed, NDiaye's use of animalistic verbs for the human

character's actions and thought articulates the animality in humankind, and places the focus on sharing, and the peace that comes with the recognition of considering others.

> Mais il n'en éprouvait pas d'irritation : sa fille Norah était là, près de lui, perchée parmi les branches défleuries dans l'odeur sure des petites feuilles, elle était là sombre dans sa robe vert tilleul, à distance de la phosphorescence de son père, et pourquoi serait-elle venue se nicher dans le flamboyant si ce n'était pour établir une concorde définitive (98) ?

The second story effaces the titular second femme puissante, Fanta, because we only see her through the minds' eye of her husband Rudy. Rudy, a French white male, is inhabited by guilt for misrepresenting to his black Senegalese wife Fanta, what her life would be like in migrating to France. Rudy sees his guilt for "silencing" his wife Fanta in the buzzard that torments him because NDiaye writes the bird in as a type of narrative conscience for the character. Shrieks and cries from the buzzard torment Rudy but also render Fanta's silence as obvious that she cannot be heard nor seen in France. As Rudy interprets the buzzard as a sign from Fanta – "speaking" for her – NDiaye has the bird speak for the violence perpetrated on women and migrants. The buzzard's shrieking may be what Fanta is feeling inside, because of Rudy's deception, and what Rudy sees in the buzzard is his guilt.

> Pourquoi Fanta lui était-elle revenue, morne, désespérée, comme si, captive d'un rêve implacable et sans issue, elle s'était vue imposer l'aberrante responsabilité de laisser filer sa vie dans une maison qu'elle n'aimait pas, auprès d'un homme qu'elle fuyait et qui, depuis le début, la trompait sur ce qu'il était réellement en se faisant passer pour un homme

> intègre et clément alors qu'il avait permis au mensonge de loger en son cœur? (NDiaye 165).

> Il n'avait pas su défendre Fanta. Il s'était prétendu le veilleur, en France, de sa fragilité sociale, et il l'avait laissée tomber (179). Et cependant ne le quittait jamais cette certitude qu'il l'avait trompée en l'attirant ici, puis qu'il avait détourné son visage du sien, qu'il avait rejeté la mission, implicitement acceptée lorsqu'ils se trouvaient là-bas, de veiller sur elle (180).

In NDiaye's character accounts are shocking sections of bodily functions that outwardly betray the traumatic interior such as peeing involuntarily (Norah), anus itching (Rudy). These bodily reactions subside once the character accepts reality head-on and works towards resolution of the trauma. Looking at the truth and the freedom that comes with facing truth is also the commentary from NDiaye of society as a whole today. What is illustrated in Rudy's case where Rudy notices that "Il avait si bien travaillé à se persuader du contraire qu'il n'était pas encore sûr de la réalité de la vérité" (184) coupled with the flashback of him attacking the boys in schoolyard (185-89) and that his four years of choosing to not look at the truth has cost him dearly, is also applicable to French society at large when old philosophical paradigms are held on to for navigating an ever-changing reality. France must face up to the reality of her intolerance for the foreign Other today in looking at the structures that govern and reinforce intolerant thought. When Rudy is reconciled to his part in denying the truth, his awareness of the tormenting and tormented buzzard haunts him : "Il songeait, effrayé, évaluant prudemment d'un

doigt la blessure de son front : Il n'était plus besoin, Fanta, de m'envoyer cet oiseau punisseur — vraiment, il n'en était plus besoin… " (194).

The sounds in the text that come from the birds, contrast with the silences in the text attributable to the women and migrants who are effaced. These silences then speak loudly (they are almost deafening) allowing for reflection on the female condition as well as the refugee and im/migrant condition because they are combined in this text. Rudy's coming to consciousness is evoked when the shrieking of the buzzard subsides. This only happens when he has worked on himself internally and acknowledged his actions and part in silencing his wife Fanta. The end of the buzzard intimidating Rudy symbolizes his recognition of him having misrepresented himself to his wife. The unnerving encounter with the bird's being (and gaze) is reminiscent of encounters that colonizers would report when they experienced the humanness of a slave's gaze. Rudy is guilty of silencing his wife in terms of the life she would be able to lead in France, and this represents the difficulty migrants face in transplanting their lives in Europe. They are just as effaced as Fanta is in NDiaye's story.

The final story's *femme puissante* is Khady, who must take on the treacherous migratory journey towards fortress Europe having been turned out by her in-laws after her husband's death. Khady is at mercy of her husband's family structure especially with no heir after her husband dies. In Khady's story, there are different types of birds: pigeons, seagulls, sparrows, jacdaws and crows, that are the reflections of the different humans that are affected in the migratory process towards Europe. The crows are used to symbolize the "arranger" or human smuggler that preys on the circumstances and profits from the chaos, and they are also used to symbolize a larger group of people caught up in

the chaos. NDiaye is able to use this kind of bird on an individual or close-up level as well as on a collective or wide-shot level in her story. When she zooms in on the individual level, we are in the mind of Khady who sees similarities in her handler's eyes and behavior and that of crows. When NDiaye provides us a larger "shot" of the scene that Khady is a part of, we see the crows and other birds circling the chaos trying to survive in much the same way as the group of humans in the scene are trying to survive the migratory journey. Every being is caught up in the same chaos: all are trying to catch some scraps or find a path to survive, the birds as well as the humans. Human-bird likenesses signal the shared fate of humans and animals on this earth as well as the human to human preying to represent the relations between humans. Margarete Zimmerman, in her reading of NDiaye's œuvre, sees a dialog of intertextuality (a treatment that in and of itself would also represent an ecosystem of materiality of engagement with ideas) and the regenerative potential in NDiaye's use of birds: "En effet, en dehors de la problématique de la famille et de la quête identitaire, nous percevons, avec le motif de la métamorphose (momentanée) du père de Norah en oiseau, quelques échos de son roman *La Sorcière* et retrouvons cette hésitation entre une forme anthropomorphe et animalière de l'être humain, si caractéristique de l'œuvre de cette auteure. Le motif des oiseaux est également présent dans *Les Grandes Personnes* où l'instituteur finit par « s'envoler » " (Zimmerman 293).

The view is at once intimate through following Khady and being in her mind's eye, as well as panoramic because many more characters are involved in the migration process towards *Festung Europa* (a Hitler term) or "Fortress Europe" a term used to refer to the state of immigration towards the European Union. The immigrants from African nations,

in this story Senegal, are in a chaotic state, and appear as a collective that parallels groups of animal species such as birds migrating. On the personal level, NDiaye also invokes the gaze of the other through Khady's likening the crow's beady eyes to her human handlers' own darting and furtive looks : "Dans la pénombre ses yeux très noirs semblaient très ronds et luisants. L'ancienne crainte reprit Khady, que l'homme eût à voir avec les corbeaux" (NDiaye 290). The human "crow" feeds off human desperation and the debris of crumbling systems just as those predator birds scavenge in life. The inhospitable, brutal terrain that Khady encounters along the way could be symbolic of the fact that what is left in Senegal is not fertile ground for Khady (and larger still, for other females like her as well the hordes of male migrants trying to make the journey. Although Khady never makes it to Europe, she never gives up her sense of who she is or at least, she tries to by repeating her name to herself so that she can hold onto her sense of self through every new obstacle on her way. In an interview given for *La Grande Librairie*, NDiaye explains to François Busnel how she sees magical mystery imagery (such as a demon sitting on the characters' chests) functioning in her work "Il me semble que souvent la magie aide à rendre le réel encore plus réel ou du moins à nous montrer des facettes moins visibles du réel. C'est un autre éclairage, plus clair, plus évident sur le réel". [13] The bird motif throughout *Trois femmes puissantes* can be seen as having such a clarifying function on our picture of the reality of humankind's belonging to the living world as well as embeddedness in the natural world. Following on Derrida's idea of an interruptive force of encountering the singularity and vulnerability of animals, the

[13] *La Grande Librairie :* François Brusnel reçoit Colum McCann, Trinh Xuan Thuan, Marie NDiaye: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWgOrLXGGtY&t=1079s 24 septembre 2009.

manifestation of the birds in this story provide the added dimension(s) of understanding to reader encounters with the vulnerabilities of the human characters.

In setting Khady as effectively orphaned or cut off from any viable life in her homeland (no more blood family and her husband dead) once her husband's family turns her out, the migratory attempt towards Europe represents the lack of opportunity that pushes many migrants to undertake the treacherous trip. The desert like, dried-up landscape reflects the bleakness in prospects for Khady and other would-be migrants in her position. We learn that she tried to have children while her husband was alive, and the failure in this aspect of her life amounts to a barren-ness felt within as well as without. In the face of her journey, the only thing keeping her alive is the love that she did know, that of her husband as well as her grandmother, who raised her. Sexual politics then, is examined within a postcolonial environment where Khady's "failure" to conceive a child confirms or allows the in-law family unit to get rid of her – there is no blood tie to the husband that obliges them to look out for her. For Khady, the interruption in her personal life experience of love and hope for a life can also apply to the interruption during colonialism of her country's path. Reading the character experiences of Khady also illustrates different pressures that may be felt by a woman that identity construction is experienced differently by men and women because the responsibility for the group's survival is usually assigned to women, creating specific challenges to which men might not be subjected. Khady helps Lamine get to France, or rather Lamine gets there on her back so to speak (or Khady in a way gives birth to his new life in France) and this reminds us of how unfair it is that women are taken advantage of even though they are major contributors in some ways than other groups. We know Lamine made it in

NDiaye's *contrepoint* to that episode of the novel because he thinks of her and thanks her for his new life (although a hard hustle) as a migrant in France:

> Chaque fois qu'en donnait de l'argent à Lamine en échange de son travail, que ce fût dans l'arrière-cuisine du restaurant, Au Bec fin, où il lavait la vaisselle le soir, dans l'entrepôt où il déballait les marchandises d'un supermarché, sur un chantier, dans le métro, partout où il allait pour louer ses bras, chaque fois que les euros passaient de mains étrangères aux siennes il pensait à la fille, il l'implorait muettement de lui pardonner et de ne pas le poursuivre d'exécrations où de songes empoisonnés. … Et quand, à certaines heures ensoleillées, il levait son visage, l'offrait à la chaleur, il n'était pas rare qu'un demi-jour tombât soudain inexplicable, et alors il parlait à la fille et doucement lui racontait ce qu'il advenait de lui, il lui rendait grâce, un oiseau disparaissait au loin (333).

Khady herself fails to make it over the wall but as she falls and her head hits the ground she maintains her sense of self and NDiaye ties the metamorphose in spirit of Khady symbolized by the bird that does make it over the wall to that of the spirit of the migrants and their origins, those left behind:

> C'est moi, Khady Demba, songeait-elle encore à l'instant où son crâne heurta le sol et où, les yeux grands ouverts, elle voyait plâner lentement pardessus le grillage un oiseau aux longues ailes grises — c'est moi, Khady Demba, songea-t-elle dans l'éblouissement de cette révélation, sachant qu'elle était cet oiseau et que l'oiseau le savait. (333)

The refrain "C'est moi, Khady Demba" is used as a coping mechanism throughout the long and arduous crossing, and reminds the reader of her individuality and vulnerability.

The regeneration aspect becomes explicit when, at the moment of her death, she sees a bird making it over the grilled wall, and the reader connects the bird to the one seen by Lamine in France in the following *contrepoint*. Khady and her failed odyssey to reach Europe may represent the duality of the African woman torn between tradition and modernity. Her sense of self despite all the hardships can be analyzed through having (briefly) experienced love (her grandmother and her brief marriage) as well as thought of as symbolically representing giving birth to opportunities for others, while being exploited and abused. This view echoes patriarchal and colonialist consequences on a human level as well as on a national level if we think of Khady as representative of Senegal being exploited. Senegal, like Khady, once knew love before her traditional pathway was interrupted by colonialism. Khady's grandmother provided love but her mother's absence represents the break or interruption of colonialism of Senegal's' traditions. Yet, Senegal may still have a sense of self as symbolized through Khady, and the hope that despite the interruption and violence she has had to absorb, that she may still persevere, and shine with dignity, and in light of Senghor's notions of reinforcing Senegal as mother country, the possibility of Senegal rebuilding is there. An emerging female subjectivity can still happen…and an emerging Senegalese subjectivity can still happen. Since the female characters' lot in life span French and Senegalese communities and cultural structures, the forms of oppression each female character endures and negotiates differ – indeed, NDiaye has three different women confirm the range in female experience. Nonetheless, she does show that the multiplicity in experience proceeds from the same founding molds of hierarchical thought and systems. She brings into focus the manifestations of trauma through the trilogy of her three strong women and she redefines

the notion of women that are *puissantes* in her title in showing their resilience and how they withstand their treatment in life. As these women negotiate the traumas and violence, their resilience tells us that their circumstances will not break them. They are each "seen" in the *contrepoints* after each story. Their determination in the face of the conditions they face redefines what women are thought to be, and thought capable of, and serves as a counter narrative to traditional thinking and understanding.

The overlapping and interweaving of the fate of animals and humans in her tripartite story corroborates the fact that all systems and beings overlap and intersect thus causing related and complicated consequences. These consequences are shared by all. The combination of humans and nonhumans trying to negotiate and survive desperate natural conditions such as the scarcity of food and other resources, and going up against weather and turbulence in the sea evokes the fragility of these resources as well as creatures' lives. Like slavery, there are ripple effects - to the colonizer and the colonized and to the descendants and subsequent communities and institutions. The numbers of people trying to enter Europe affects not only those that journey there but also the receiving lands as they try to absorb and integrate them, and success on this level will be determined whether or not lives can flourish individually and as a collective whole.

Rosenthal: countering mastery and possession of animals and females

In Olivia Rosenthal's case, her juxtaposition of passages from people who work with animals and inner mind passages of her female narrator shows how the domination of being shaped in society is a fight. She associates what happens to animals in French society to an interior experience of a female narrator who comes into her own, queer,

sexuality. Rosenthal counters the narrative of mastery and possession relating to the female condition in French society in arranging two parallel stories unfolding at the same time, separated by paragraphs and point of view. We realize the paragraphs using the second person plural subject pronoun "vous" tells the story of her female narrator as she is growing up in France – we are inside the thoughts of this female narrator during these paragraphs. The contrasted paragraphs tell the stories of both animals as well as their human "handlers," such as lab technicians, zoo workers, trainers, butchers and breeders, as if responding to questions asked of them in an interview on their respective job responsibilities. We are immediately jolted into paying attention because the disorienting style, switching as it does from one story to the next, alternating paragraphs, is different. And of course, that is the point. The format of her technique forces us to align the content of both stories, which places the history of what humans have done to animals in direct correlation to what humans do to themselves. In a section on "le phénomène d'imprégnation" (Rosenthal 89), the interview paragraphs with an unnamed zoo worker explains how this works and the narrator interior paragraphs make a comparison of her circumstances to that of the animal under discussion:

> L'imprégnation consiste à habituer un animal sauvage à la présence humaine depuis son plus jeune âge en le nourrissant à main. L'animal prendra son nourricier pour sa mère, il intégrera l'image de l'espèce par laquelle il aura été élevé, il se prendra pour un homme. Si on l'oblige ensuite à partager la vie de ses congénères, il aura bien du mal à admettre la ressemblance entre eux et lui et les considérera comme des étrangers ou pire comme des ennemis.

> Vous vous habituez à laisser votre chambre ouverte, vous n'éprouvez même plus le besoin de vous enfermer. Vous reconnaissez la mère en votre mère, en votre père le rival et l'ennemi, vous reproduisez les schémas, vous intégrez les fonctions, vous vous imprégnez. (Rosenthal 93)

The narrator tone is flat lined, as though she is the walking-dead, in a state of inertia and too weak or paralyzed to do anything about what she observes happening to her. In this way, Rosenthal conveys the sense of a slow, unfolding (almost imperceptible) violence perpetrated by systems and institutionalized beliefs in social order and behavior. The white space on the page left by Rosenthal between the "interviews" (or fieldwork per Dominique Viart) and the "internal experience" of the narrator allows for the reader to try to catch his or her breath between stories. The reader must consider the experiences offered by the interview paragraphs alongside the narrator experiences but may use the space between them to reflect on his/her own experiences, and whether this might inform, or allow him/her to relate. Even if (or especially if?) the reader's own experiences tend towards heterosexual norms, this combination is what allows Rosenthal to draw out the complexity of being queer in the French societal landscape. Patriarchal modes of thought, institutionalized through such mechanisms as the family unit, are exposed in a reflection that is as much on the human condition as on humans' treatment of animals.

Rosenthal alternates the passages as if the animals and the humans are discrete multiplicities, which is exactly how they are thought of in the commonly accepted binary.

But taking Gilles Deleuze's understanding of multiplicities[14] reworked from Henri Bergson's ideas, two types are distinguished: numerical or quantitative which can be counted, and continuous or qualitative. The first type is similar to reason, where items may be accounted for in discrete varieties. The passages of the animals in different examples of physical captivity (and corresponding emotional distress) fall into this category. The narrator paragraphs that depict her in societal captivity (and corresponding emotional distress) align with the notion of continuous multiplicities. The different forms of abuse the animals are subjected to at the hands of humans are countable in an objective way, whereas the (continuous multiplicity) of the narrator's experience of imprisonment due to societal conditioning cannot be counted in any objective way. Rosenthal's form also "captures" the similarity in experience-in content. Her novel advocates for the fight for queer recognition even inside of the feminist fight: her development of difference inside of the feminist cause refutes a one-size-fits-all view of feminism without diluting the impact of the overall feminist battle of getting Universal man to "see". The author illuminates the violence that exists for two main groups - animals and queer females; due to Western thinking stemming from a philosophical framework that allows essentialist categorizing of groups, hierarchies and a general denial of multiplicities. The normative definition of female gender presumes heterosexuality. In *Toward a Queer Ecofeminism,* Greta Gaard makes the point that

> The rhetoric and institution of Christianity, coupled with the imperialist drives of militarist nation-states, have been used for nearly two thousand years to

[14] "One is represented by space (or rather, if all the nuances are taken into account, by the impure combination of homogeneous time): It is a multiplicity of exteriority, of simultaneity, of juxtaposition, of order, of quantitative differentiation, of *difference in degree*; it is a numerical multiplicity, *discontinuous and actual*. The other type of multiplicity appears in pure duration: It is an internal multiplicity of succession, of fusion, of organization, of heterogeneity, of qualitative discrimination, or of *difference in kind*; it is a *virtual and continuous* multiplicity that cannot be reduced to numbers" (*Bergsonism* 38).

> portray heterosexuality, sexism, racism, classism, and the oppression of the natural world as divinely ordained. Today, although twentieth-century Western industrialized nations purport to be largely secular, those countries with Christian and colonial origins retain the ideology of divinely inspired domination nonetheless. (122)

A Christian influence embedded in a system of dualisms such as the Cartesian form of humanism makes it very difficult indeed for a female queer narrator in France to break out of her societal shaping to assume her own authenticity as a lesbian. Rosenthal's narrator frequently fluctuates between wanting to rebel against family structures and acquiescing through her repetitions of sentences such as "Vous continuez à être sage" or "Vous êtes bien elevée. Vous le restez". Gaard, referring to Val Plumwood, identifies the source problem that Rosenthal's narrator encounters as she grows into her independence and becomes, when she writes, "The master identity, [which] according to Plumwood, creates and depends on a "dualized structure of otherness and negation" (Plumwood quoted in Gaard 118). Dismantling the system of dualisms then, is at the core of the novel in order to shift or transcend such thinking, and Rosenthal shows the necessity of this through the narrator's own struggle to flourish along with other beings affected in the same way by the dualistic thinking and structures that uphold it in society.

It becomes clear to the narrator during her first encounter with a young man, adopted from another country, of whom her mother does not approve: "Vous expliquez vos sentiments à votre mère qui n'apprécie guère que vous vous entichiez d'un garçon aussi exotique. Entre lui et elle, il vous faut choisir" (109). The either-or choice that the narrator faces evokes dualistic thinking structured by thinkers such as René Descartes.

The family filiation would be affected if allowed to become involved with just anyone, so overseeing the narrator's love interests is a family matter. *Que font les rennes après Noël*? emphasizes that the societal/patriarchal control of women's sexuality and reproduction parallels the societal control of animals, and Rosenthal pushes us to think through those intersections. Her exposition of the patriarchal treatment of women by likening it to the animal industry sets up a theoretical framework by which women do not have the right to life in the sense of full flourishing as determined by women.

> Vous découvrez que, contrairement à ce que vous disent les spécialistes des animaux en captivité, l'ennuie n'est pas pire que la mort. Il en constitue la forme lente, la lente mesure d'un temps qu'on ne sait utiliser parce qu'on n'a pas appris à penser par soi-même, à agir par soi-même, à sentit par soi-même, à souffrir par soi-même, à vivre par soi-même. On s'ennuie de ne pas être indépendant et de ne voir devant soi aucun moyen de le devenir. En captivité, l'imaginations'épuise. (123)

Family structures explain why people adhere to certain ideologies and the narrator's relationship with her living conditions in her society, as shown through her childhood family unit, then later as she grows up and has a husband, has the effect of questioning the relationship women have in their society and their own flourishing. If the narrator feels trapped in societal expectations, as imprisoned as the animals caged in the zoo, we are forced to reflect on how those societal expectations do not serve her and question the rationale of those expectations as it relates to different women. The narrator feels alive only when she meets another woman on her work trips and realizes that going towards her constitutes the flourishing she needs, but at the cost of going against her upbringing.

Indeed, the narrator's repetition of "Vous continuez à être sage" throughout the stages of her life as she observes what animals undergo in the various roles laid out for them in French society, gives us the impression of an oncoming revolt, of the narrator biding her time. Her time of continuing to be a good girl or to behave per expectations will soon come to an end, but the sheer repetition of the mantra across the novel shows the cultural pressure as well as the strain of conforming to it.

> Le conditionnement consiste à apprendre à un animal donné à faire ce qu'on lui demande sans avoir besoin de le torturer et comme s'il s'agissait de son plein gré. C'est un travail d'apprentissage long et difficile que le manipulateur préfère, de loin, à l'usage de la violence et des coups. Personne n'aime avoir le rôle du méchant.
>
> Vous ne sortez jamais du cadre, vous rentrez aux heures fixées. Votre obéissance endort la vigilance de vos parents, vous pourriez très bien profitez de la confiance qu'ils ont en vous pour les trahir. Vous vous préparez. (144)

Rosenthal's use of the second-person plural *vous* speaks to other women as well as suggests she and (women at large) have the right to own to their own story. Her spacing and alternating paragraph technique breaks the hold of traditional literary form and therefore symbolically breaks the hold of societal expectations over women. Here, the controlling unit of family on the behavior of women is likened to the conditioning technique preferred by the animal trainers of their charges. In thinking of controlling family units in this way, the question of the appropriateness and purpose of these

conventions, or conditioning behavior in females, is raised. What constitutes ideal societal behavior in females has historically been formulated and controlled by men. Females are traditionally thought of as meant for reproduction and the preservation of the family unit is a form of stability in the fabric of society. Thus, any deviation from this idea would be considered as misbehaving. For the female narrator here, repeating the words "vous vous préparez" as she often does, signifies her desire to break free from these constraints. Linking the animals' conditioning to female conditioning further advocates for the need for natural and social freedom. The narrator prepares to break free of her confinement in the patriarchal mold.

> Vous quittez enfin le domicile familial mais vous n'éprouvez pas le soulagement escompté. Votre métamorphose n'a pas encore eu lieu. Vous avez peur.
>
> Pour certains mouvements de libération des animaux, on ne peut limiter l'exercice du droit aux êtres capables de le revendiquer. Il faut étendre cet exercice à tous les êtres vivants qui ne peuvent s'exprimer, comme les bêtes, les enfants, les handicapés mentaux, les comateux et les embryons. Les militants de la cause animale sont aussi bien souvent des contempteurs de l'avortement. Pour eux, la nature a toujours raison. (166-67)

Rosenthal takes us through stages of the narrator's coming into her own consciousness about her own well-being. Parallels of well-being for the narrator and the well-being of pigs as told by a worker help to illuminate the intersectionality of familial and patriarchal set-up of expectations for females who are effectively controlled by males, with that of

societal expectations of animals used for human purposes. Men control women's place and family units through patriarchal institutions and through the philosophy of animals being considered "less-than" vis-à-vis humankind, the fate of animals is likewise controlled in society as well as in nature – or rather, what remains of nature. Rosenthal points to paradigms that need to shift with the contemporary reality of actual differences in being that *are* and to work for natural and social sexual freedoms as interrelated, rather than put into categories, sectioned off or eradicated. She communicates the female point of view generally as well as the individuated point of view of marginalized sexualities within the contemporary female experience when she evokes the complexity of animal subjectivity and captivity at the hands of humans and influential Enlightenment-era philosophies. The multiplicity of animal imprisonment and destruction for human use parallels the multiplicity in women's issues and experience. Rosenthal's female narrator looks through an animal mirror to climb out of the socioculturally-induced apathy of expectations laid out for her life. In her narrator's self-conscious reflections Rosenthal also advocates for others to break free and awaken to the other "contraintes auxquelles vous êtes soumise sans même les connaître" (171). Her narrator, after moving out of the house and marrying, realizes the difference between going through the motions and really embracing authentic self:

> Malgré vos exercices d'autonomie, vous imitez vos aînés, vous répétez les comportements des autres membres de votre espèce depuis au moins les premiers siècles de l'ère chrétienne. Sans le vouloir, vous êtes une adepte et une praticienne de l'éthologie humaine. Vous êtes bien élevée, vous vous mariez. (171)

Since these reflections come in a section of the novel on animal *élevage*, the parallels with animal behavior and following custom are obvious, but Rosenthal also adds the price the narrator pays in continuing to be well raised.

> On vous a dit que le bonheur avait un coût, vous acceptez cette idée, mais malgré vos faibles compétences en arithmétique et en économie, vous avez parfois l'impression que le coût est supérieur au bénéfice. Vous n'arrivez pas à distinguer ce que vous devez et ce qui vous est dû, vous avancez à l'aveugle, vous êtes liée par un contrat dont vous ne connaissez pas les termes exacts et qui s'applique à vous de l'extérieur. Vous peinez à vous dégager, à vous connaître, à vous appartenir. Vous êtes bien élevée. (172)

Greta Gaard points to the interconnectedness of the conceptual apparatus that persecutes not only queer females such as the example Rosenthal provides us in her novel, but also other beings like people of color and animals.

> Salient events in Western history reveal the foundations for a queer ecofeminism. More than any other period, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries clarify the conceptual links between the oppression of women, the erotic and nature. As Carolyn Merchant (1980), Susan Griffin (1978), and Evelyn Fox Keller (1985) have so clearly demonstrated, in a patriarchal system that conceives of nature as female, there is a clear and necessary connection between the development of science as the rational control of a chaotic natural world and the persecution of women as inherently irrational, erotic, and therefore evil creatures. Such connections have provided the conceptual foundations for ecofeminist theories. ("Toward" 132)

Indeed, in French society, even though there is official separation of religion and state there is still evidence in societal structures of thought for a religious sensibility stemming from Catholic doctrine. Rosenthal's narrator feels the pressure to conform to expectations of taking a husband and does adhere to the implicit rules until her senses are overwhelmed by her encounter with "la jeune femme de dix ans (sa) cadette" (179-98). When finally, she divorces her husband, this is just the first step. She realizes more and more that she does not want to have children, also an expectation of society "Vous renoncez à entrer dans le rang, à faire plaisir à vos parents, à mettre au monde des enfants, à raconter des contes de fées, à faire l'éloge de la maternité" (200). Not only is it an expectation upheld by her parents, the family unit expectation acts as a miniature of the community one, the whole fairytale aspect alluded to in the novel title is also evident in comments of her gynecologist who is confounded by her sexual orientation: "toujours pas de rapport sexuel? demande-t-il d'un ton gêné à chacune de vos visites. Tout vous énerve" (203).

Rosenthal alternates the narrator's emancipation and awakening with passages of "La chaîne, c'est un truc industriel" thereby evoking the parallel of the abattoirs "circuits du vif et du mort (qui) ne se croisent pas et …(qui) avance" (201) to the operations of societal institutions and traditions such as marriage and raising a family per ecclesiastical norms. The gynecologist's sincere confusion suggests the danger of the "chaîne" being broken in society, and the narrator's decision to not enter into this line, to not please her parents, reinforces the imagery of having kids as standard operating procedure for women in society. Here again Greta Gaard is helpful:

> The foundations for queer ecofeminism, then, are established by restoring and

> interrogating other aspects of that historical period: I am not suggesting that "co-occurrence equals causality"; rather, I am arguing that a careful reading of these several movements of domination—the persecution of women through the witch burnings, of nature through science, and of indigenous peoples through colonialism—which reached a peak during the same historical period in Western Europe, will lead to the roots of an ideology in which the erotic, queer sexualities, women, persons of color, and nature are all conceptually linked. ("Toward" 132)

Although Gaard's point about conceptually linked roots of an ideology was made in her work for queer ecofeminism, it is pertinent to more than just Rosenthal's novel. All three authors combine form and content to bring their country into alignment with the new reality of interdependence. This means forsaking old paradigms built on France's deep-rooted tradition of Eurocentric logic of mastery and domination of the ethnic other and nature. In many ways, the content under analysis shows that it is society that needs to come of age, and a *bildungsroman* model could apply. Rosenthal's narrator could also be viewed in the coming of age structure with the twist of making a stark contrast in closures for the alternating storylines. Whereas the *narratrice* achieves fulfillment in terms of moving towards her authentic self despite the growing pains cost to her of family members and friends not understanding her choices, there is no reported improvement in the various circumstances of the animals that she observes in French society. Thus, the parallel plot of the animals illuminates their *huis-clos* situations at present.

If France as a nation-state is in turmoil over its identity, it is because of the reluctance to accept or to see the consequences of her previous economic colonial and

culturally imperialist acts. Facing the challenges emanating from globalism means seeing the colonial apparatus that contributed to our current hyper capitalistic state and also recognizing that it is still intact. Colonialism and imperialist expansion were "successful" from the perspective of the colonialists because actions fulfilled thinking. Today, Audeguy, NDiaye and Rosenthal tackle shifting thought to move their France towards completing the total act of accepting responsibility and the cultural, economic and political reality of multiplicity and interdependence.

> "Si tous les hommes doivent être heureux un jour sur la terre, soyez convaincus que toutes les bêtes seront heureuses avec eux. Notre sort commun devant la douleur ne saurait être séparé, c'est la vie universelle qu'il s'agit de sauver du plus de souffrance possible."
>
> Émile Zola, *Nouvelle campagne*

CHAPTER 5

TOWARDS RELATIONAL THINKING

Nul imaginaire n'aide réellement à prévenir la misère, à s'opposer aux oppressions, à soutenir ceux qui "supportent" dans leur corps ou dans leur esprit. Mais l'imaginaire modifie les mentalités, si lentement qu'il en aille.

Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation,* 1990

If Édouard Glissant uses Deleuzean rhizomatic imagery for capturing his poetics of Relation, it is because he seeks to shift the view of thought from being fixed and predetermined before ever encountering an Other, towards a process of spatio-temporal weaving where each and every identity "s'étend dans un rapport à l'Autre" (*Poétique de la Relation* 23). In chapter two I sketched the image of the writers outside of hexagonal France centering the focus squarely in their respective contexts, external to France. We have seen in chapter three that the writers of hexagonal France focus on how living beings relate to each other in reality and the questioning of old relationship paradigms as it concerns the France of today. While this is a rough rendering of the directional concentration of the six novels, it does allow me to show the possibility of two "halves" of the corpus that differ in narrative approach to writing animals in their stories, yet make up a unified whole in philosophical focus. In conceiving of two halves, I know I run the risk of employing the same divisional lines I have been arguing against through my examination of the corpus' message and strategies, but I intend to use the familiar French

and Francophone frontier to show how we can think beyond it. I want to highlight the work the authors themselves do in working with existing systems of thought and literary writing to move beyond the persistent standards in our mental processes by revealing how these two halves end up being unified in their differences. Just as Glissant thinks of his poetics of Relation as a relational practice, or a system of reference that can (for example) take a concept such as *métissage* (originally used in the narrow sense of racial mixing) and expand it to affirm the multiplicity and diversity of its components as they relate to each other, so too does the body of work here expand on the concept of literature written in French. In the Glissantian sense, working with existing systems does not mean subversion in the sense of overturning the order of the world, but rather working to shift space, to move over and to accommodate. Even though the works in this corpus are selected, it nevertheless represents fiction written in French which is traditionally divided into a French and a Francophone side, yet the philosophical focus that unifies this body of fiction affirms the multiplicity and diversity of what Stephanie Posthumus terms the "French moment" of engagement with the animal question. She reminds us in *French Thinking about Animals* that if there is a lag behind Anglo-Saxon thinking and movements on the animal question, there are three main reasons particular to the French cultural context that in the various Anglophone contexts may not apply so forcefully: humanism's influence, gastronomical art (French cuisine which traditionally has a heavy focus on meat) and also representation in political bodies that protect activities (hunting) and products relying on animals (France's luxury goods sector).

> These three reasons— philosophical, cultural, and political— influence how the animal question is asked in France because of the obstacles they

> represent. On the one hand, these obstacles have created a lag in animal ethics that has given rise to far fewer books, articles, conferences, university courses in France than on the other side of the Atlantic or on the other side of the Channel. On the other hand, these obstacles lead to the creation of new pathways as thinkers explore ways of going around and over blocked routes. (Posthumus, *French Thinking*, xi)

How the animal question is asked in France then, is perfectly embodied through literature in this corpus. The creation of new pathways that Posthumus refers to is seen in Audeguy, NDiaye and Rosenthal's works, and, in adding the pathways created by Chamoiseau, Mabanckou and Nganang, since they too exemplify working around some of the same obstacles – certainly the first philosophical challenge - the diversity in pathway creation expands the contribution of the "French moment" in terms of literary work on the animal question.

The interrelatedness demonstrated in the writer's strategies is what allows for social and environmental ecosystems to be visible and opens up the potential for new ways of relating, something that Glissant himself would agree with. At the beginning of his *Poétique de la Relation* in the section entitled *Imaginaire*, Glissant links thought to place ("la pensée s'espace") and since thought is associated with the imaginary ("For Glissant the imaginary is all the ways a culture has of perceiving and conceiving of the world;" translator Betsy Wing, *Poetics* xxiii) and language, this linking move then mobilizes or expands thought. As languages convey thought, this means also communicating the linked space and poetics. Such movement, or dynamism of thought, is an action by Glissant that counters traditional philosophic notions of thought, which hold

thought to be by itself, standing alone or fixed, regardless of space. Linking thought to space is key to understanding Glissant's concept of Relation. For Glissant, in any one space, a people's imaginary ("l'imaginaire des peuples") and their diverse poetics ("poétiques diversifiées") exists, where diversity in expression is due to relation between thought, place and imaginaries of people living in that space. The imaginaries of people represent cultures in evolution ("*les* cultures en évolution"), rather than culture being fixed ("*la* culture"), so the interaction of people involves diverse poetics in constant motion and it is this contact, and the transfers arising out of such contact, that creates constantly evolving cultures ("*les* cultures en évolution"). Literature, finally, joins in this negotiation, representing as it does the thought and the poetics of each author as the work also encounters readers.

Animal representation in literature (culture) and human-animal relationships is an important way to explore the trend of the ecocritical, sociocultural, and political interactions between ourselves and our relation to other elements of nature here on earth. The way the authors in the corpus are writing their storied animals is reflective of our changing world (which we inhabit together) as well as their own specific culturally-informed way of life. It is the philosophical underpinnings that have engendered the current set of relations and social order that are being questioned by these writers. Stephanie Posthumus explains that the "French moment" of engagement with the animal question is comprised of two main orientations:

> In truth, conservatism in France has not prevented the birth of what might rightly be called the "French moment." … This "French moment" has two main orientations. First, a philosophical position has been emerging in

> opposition to humanism's anthropocentrism that aims to decenter the human subject. The fathers of this approach are Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Derrida. … A second orientation of the recent "French moment" has been the introduction of animal ethics.… As Leonard Nelson put it, animal ethics is not an attempt "to champion altruism in relation to animals. It merely reaffirms the principle of justice." (*French Thinking* xi)

But, is it necessary to choose between the two main orientations? The writers' works here can be seen to straddle both orientations if we consider the didactic function of art. The ways in which the stories take up the philosophical position of countering humanism's anthropocentrism as well as the presentation of the animal question as an order of justice draw from categories of philosophy (such as a phenomenological approach) and social studies (ethnographic approach). Contending with modernity's legacy of anthropocentrism and ecologically disastrous relationships forces us to rethink an existential terrain set by an ontology that reflects a Christian, rationalist interpretation of the world; out of the rethinking of those foundations, the alternative to hierarchical ordering is being proposed. In contrast to dominant hierarchical ontology, and as a way of defamiliarizing ourselves from it, these authors' styles of thinking as expressed through their writing approaches are *relational* and *inclusive* rather than *hierarchical* and *exclusive*. It is one thing to ask philosophically how a relational ontology might open up a different way, or even ways, of understanding and experiencing our relationship with our world, ourselves, and other non-human beings, and it is another to ask how such a worldview can be expressed in literature to convey new ways of knowing and processing our world and each other. Celia Britton's explanation of Édouard Glissant's "anti-

essentialist thrust of his theory of "Relation," (Britton 9) helps us to envision how the philosophical underpinnings might be expressed in a literature work:

> Glissant …accords greater weight to the action of the *imagination* (her emphasis) in creating freer societies, referring for instance to "the necessity, of course, of supporting political and social struggles in the places in which one finds oneself, but also…the necessity of opening everyone's imagination up to something different, which is that we will change nothing in the situation of the world's peoples if we do not change that imagination (Glissant, quoted in Britton 9).

Strategies of resistance as manifested in literature then, hold the key to investigating how, taking Glissant's meaning, "opening up the imagination" in stories is accomplished.

Perhaps the first step is to zero in on the ways in which humanism's anthropocentric thrust fails groups of beings in our world as we live it today. This is what Aimé Césaire did when he was asked about colonialism and civilization. He started by discussing what colonialism is *not* in his *Discours sur le colonialism.* Using his example can help situate the focus and contribution of this corpus to the French moment of engagement on the animal question; what humanism's anthropocentrism is *not* in practice as far as the animal question and its relevance to our relationships with each other and world (and this corpus) is concerned:

> Cela revient à dire que l'essentiel est ici de voir clair, de penser clair, entendre dangereusement de répondre clair à l'innocente question initiale : qu'est-ce en son principe que la colonisation? Déconvenir de ce qu'elle n'est point ; ni évangélisation, ni entreprise philanthropique, ni volonté de

> reculer les frontières de l'ignorance, de la maladie, de la tyrannie, ni élargissement de *Dieu*, ni extension du *Droit*; d'admettre une fois pour toutes, sans volonté de broncher aux conséquences, que le geste décisif est ici de l'aventurier et du pirate, de l'épicier en grand et de l'armateur, du chercheur d'or et du marchand, de l'appétit et de la force, avec, derrière, l'ombre portée, maléfique, d'une forme de civilisation qui, à un moment de son histoire se constate obligée, de façon interne, d'étendre à l'échelle mondiale la concurrence de ses économies antagonistes.
>
> (Césaire, *Discours* 9)

Following Césaire's formula, in order to see clearly what fundamentally the humanist anthropocentric notion is, we could start by agreeing on what it is not. It is clear that parity does not exist today for all groups of beings (including groups of humans), that this notion is not inclusive, not sustainable, nor does human dignity show through in continuing to persist in human superiority thinking and acting. Furthermore, the "decisive actors" are the zoos and the abattoirs, the agri-farming business, the wholesale grocers and the shipping companies, as well as appetite and force. An updated version of Césaire's "l'ombre portée maléfique" is mirror forms of civilization which that will continue expanding on the world scale; in other words, consumerist imperialism or capitalist imperialism where our hyper-capitalist moment continues to consume the earth.

So how specifically do these authors cause us to see (at least question) these failures? And how might they cause us to then reimagine the ontological presuppositions that have been inculcated in us, and especially how they have affected relations between beings on earth as well as with our environment? Relational philosophical engagement

takes shape through the authors' storyline as well as through their characters' worldviews and actions, allowing us to perceive the effects of styles of thinking as they interact and respond to situations in the plot. Through the presentation of their stories, settings, characters and interactions, the novelists tackle problems engendered by the legacy of anthropocentrism, providing us with alternate images, and alternate means of apprehending ways of knowing and of being. The writers synthesize traditional forms and *fixités* in language, writing form and in thought. We have seen the métissage of creole and French terms, or even English with African terms, as well as the incorporation of elements that lend orality (such as Mabanckou's use of commas for the only punctuation) or suppleness to the French language.

Chamoiseau, Mabanckou and Nganang's centering of their animal narrators effectively participates in the work of shifting the humanist philosophical position of anthropocentrism in decentering the human subject. But the other three writers, too, although they do not use animal narrators, they cause a shift in the balance by making room for animals alongside their humans. Both humans and animals are subjects as Stéphane Audeguy intersperses historical with narrative, as Olivia Rosenthal mixes social-work inspired interviews of field-research with the interior experience of her *narratrice* and as Marie NDiaye offers us a geographical mélange of birds and humans in stages of trauma and metamorphosis. They variously participate in rewriting history, performing phenomenological and ethnographical work and throwing us into encounters that have us take stock of our connectedness in this world. From these encounters, all six authors' engagement in philosophical traditions of thought and in the manner of showing us a world that is possible, allow us to question our modes of existence in the world and

consider the concept of making room. It is important to realize the function of a poetics, of imagery, and of a way of imagining inherent in literature. Glissant's *la Relation* is, per Britton, "in the first place a relation of equality with and respect for the Other as *different* from oneself. It applies to individuals but more especially to other cultures and other societies. It is nonhierarchical and nonreductive; that is, it does not try to impose a universal value system but respects the *particular* qualities of the community in question, in a movement of "degeneralization" (Glissant, quoted in Britton 11).

She also states that Glissant "conceives of Relation as a system rather than as a number of separate, singular relations. It is however, a fluid and unsystematic system whose elements are engaged in a radically nonhierarchical free play of interrelatedness. … Rather than a structure, it is seen…as a dynamic *process* governed by principles that are themselves always being changed by the elements they govern" (11, 13). Conceiving of our world and of the beings living in it in this manner allows for adaptation to changes and natural evolution rather than adhering to a fixed model of viewing the world where any changes or evolution might risk exclusion because they did not exist before the "structure" was conceived. It is no surprise that children born of parents with different ethnicities would be hard to place, and thus excluded, in a fixed structure that accounted for only those known ethnicities at the time of its conception, or that sexual orientations that differ from an established Christian ontological view of male and female relations would be viewed as deviant. The advantage of a relational worldview and Glissant's formulation of Relation lies in its fluidity and adaptability to dynamic ways of being in the world and therefore in its inclusive nature of constructing knowledge. In this corpus, the writers participate in Glissant's "movement of degeneralization" by identifying and

individualizing animal characters (whether they are narrators or not), female characters in their particular experiences of patriarchal oppression, and male characters in their particular situations of ethical conflict vis-à vis their context's conventional standards.

So, if diversity is a "prime value of Relation" (Britton 12) and if "multiplicity in totality is total diversity" (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 206), we can also see that this corpus demonstrates diversity when Audeguy differentiates between male characters, both Senegalese and French, some who contend with and others who uphold their respective societal values, showing the complexity in each individual's relationship to their societal codes. Or when NDiaye distinguishes between species of birds as well as the different reasons that propel migrants to seek a better life in Europe. Chamoiseau shows us multiplicity in totality by foregrounding a local space in which nonhumans negotiate climate changes that threaten life as they know it, and the different responses to such a threat among species as well as within species. His localized attention to place (Rabuchon forest in Martinique) is singled out from other places in the world yet the "love of place" (Matthews 7) feeling we can all connect with permeates the atmosphere of the story. What is so special about singling out a place or an individual? The way Freya Matthews puts it in her book might be the most convincing argument for the job literature can do to communicate what is special about an individual or a place while at the same time invoking a recognizable *feeling* for others in encountering the description of such an individual or such a place in a story (even if the reader has never met, nor visited the described):

> A loved place is not encompassed by our love; we are encompassed, loved, breathed into life, by it. There is little recognition or articulation of this kind

> of relation between self and world in modern Western thought—little attention to categories that express the way the world makes room for us as opposed to the way we act on it, impose ourselves upon it. But many of us sense this accommodation, sense that we are indeed received, and feel a huge but nameless emotion in response when we witness a place in which the world has made room for us overlaid with cement and tarmac, banded in steel, so that every last breath—the breath it imparted to us—is pressed from it, we feel a nameless pain. Being nameless, we have no option but to treat it as of little consequence, never suspecting how we ourselves are diminished by the violent termination of these holdings, these impartings, that are, in fact, foundational to our being. (7)

Literature can name this pain through its storytelling potential. The most obvious manifestation of the principle of Relation, and any philosophical view of relating, is the idea of these diverse elements relating to each other as well as to our shared environment. In this respect, as we have seen, the corpus shows the interrelatedness of humans and animals, and the fact that all these beings share the physical reality of our being on earth together.

The variety in style of each novel affirms the content of the message as well as the individuality of the artist (*littérature monde*[15]). In story-telling mode, the author engages

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[15] The authors who signed the manifesto *Pour une littérature monde en français* object to the use of the word « francophonie » to designate (reduce) writings in a corpus of French-language literatures as merely supplementary to the category of the French classification. The notion is suspected of perpetuating a colonialist model of categorization. "Combien d'écrivains de langue française, pris eux aussi entre deux ou plusieurs cultures, se sont interrogés alors sur cette étrange disparité qui les reléguait sur les marges, eux « francophones », variante exotique tout juste tolérée, tandis que les enfants de l'ex-Empire britannique prenaient, en toute légitimité, possession des lettres anglaises ? Fallait-il tenir pour acquis quelque dégénérescence congénitale des héritiers de l'empire colonial français, en comparaison de ceux de l'empire britannique ? Ou bien reconnaître que le problème tenait au milieu littéraire lui-même, à son étrange art poétique tournant comme un derviche tourneur sur lui-même, et à cette vision d'une francophonie sur laquelle une

the reader in conversation and through the art of each author the reader is invited towards the experience being described. The capacity to move the reader rests in the power of the story-telling mode and art, rather than through a didactic or programmatic language or mode, because the reader is being *shown* an experience, not told *how* to experience. Readers encounter the perspectives governing the characters in these stories and in that encounter, are invited to relate to the experience – whether or not they agree with the maxims inherent in the character worldview. Opacity as a concept for Glissant is crucial in this encounter. He objects to the projection of Western thought throughout the world being such that all cultural encounters are understood through that dominating lens, or expected to fit into the parameters of what is understandable in that thought. The flattening out of the world in this way is what he finds violent.

> Que la pensée de l'Un ne soit pas pensée du Tout, les mythes méditerranéens nous le disent. Ils expriment chacun une communauté, comme transparence naïve pour soi, opacité menaçante pour l'autre. Ils sont fonctionnels, même si c'est de manière obscure ou détournée. Ils suggèrent que l'opacité de soi pour l'autre est irréductible et que par conséquent, quelle que soit l'opacité de l'autre pour soi (car il n'y existe pas de mythe qui légitime l'autre), la question sera toujours de ramener cet autre à la transparence vécue par soi : ou bien on l'assimile ou bien on l'annihile. C'est là tout le principe et le processus de la généralisation. (*Poétiques* 61-62)

France mère des arts, des armes et des lois continuait de dispenser ses lumières, en bienfaitrice universelle, soucieuse d'apporter la civilisation aux peuples vivant dans les ténèbres"? ("Pour une littérature-monde en français", *Le Monde des Livres*, March 15, 2007 & February 3, 2011).

For Glissant, the key to a genuine encounter between reader and what is being described in stories lies in allowing the reader to move towards understanding the position, the world view, the authenticity of the character. It is this work of figuring out the "strangeness" of the character that amounts to considering the Other, considering another position, considering another way of knowing and being in the world, and therefore allowing the Other his or her space. Readers encounter the being and are allowed the space to come to know the individual in context rather than proceeding from a fixed view or ideology.

Revealing the intersectionality of violence is an important strategy for highlighting the consequences at work of given assumptions in thinking. The two women authors' writing here address the violence of patriarchal *and* colonial structures in content (depicting female characters' conditions relevant to this violence) and they also are writers whose articulations for the positions they take in speaking up for the voiceless, and out against the violence and exclusion inherent in dominant thought attracts more violence; Marie NDiaye was embroiled in a public debate for her opinion on a "France monstrous" that she deemed intolerant of foreign others, and Olivia Rosenthal's style of writing literature, although she has won prizes for her work, does not earn her the most esteemed literary prizes. Is it because of a willingness to "contaminate" literature with social science techniques? Reactions such as these further reinforce intolerance and underscore a refusal to make room in considering points of view that would go against France's idea of her identity and cultural conventions. Chantal Kalisa's investigations into violence against women in terms of ignoring female authorship and literature written by Caribbean and African women in her chapter 'Exclusion as violence,' covers several

layers of how this is accomplished. For female writers like NDiaye and Rosenthal, even though they are not Caribbean, what Kalisa says about how exclusion is accomplished even inside of the literary institution/scholarly tradition and by important thinkers is relevant. She writes:

> Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, coeditors of *Out of the Kumbla, Caribbean Women and Literature*, describe the absence of women writers in Caribbean studies as "voicelessness": "The concept of voicelessness necessarily informs any discussion of Caribbean women and literature. . .. By voicelessness, we mean the historical absence of the woman writer's text: the absence of a specifically female position on major issues such as slavery, colonialism, decolonization, women's rights and more direct social and cultural issues. By voicelessness we also mean silence: the inability to express the position in the language of the 'master' as well as the textual construction of woman as silent. Voicelessness also denotes articulation that goes unheard." (*Violence in Francophone African & Caribbean Women's Literature*, 1)

Although Marie NDiaye has won the celebrated Goncourt for *Trois femmes puissantes*, the criticism she receives is for not behaving with decorum befitting representation of France and her literary colors. It is hard to imagine the same criticism being leveled on a male French writer for having voiced an opinion on a contemporary issue that is also evoked in the content of the creative product earning the literary prize. That the novel could be worthy of an important prize, but simultaneously demand silence on the part of its creator when it comes to critiquing national societal intolerances, points to a ridiculous

contradiction in the concept of "freedom" that helped to build French identity and country. NDiaye has doubly exposed the embarrassing moral and political problems posed by France's stance on foreign Others: in the first instance, she exposes through her novel storyline, and in the second instance she affirms the reality of her fiction through the reaction of French minister Raoult[16] to her public comments.

Both NDiaye and Rosenthal's excavation of violence is done through the family structure, and they expose standard assumptions that are inadequate for all beings today. The intersectionality of violence is an unavoidable truth in their work: NDiaye works on the family unit as it affects the female condition without ignoring the effects on the males in the unit (Norah's brother and Fanta's husband Rudy) and Rosenthal works on the societal conventions of female sexuality as it affects queer female sexuality which in turn affects other forms of socially-branded non-conventional forms of sexuality. NDiaye 's specific technique is to situate the effects of the forms of patriarchy on the female inside of the family unit. She shows these forms in diverse cultural models embodied in the culturally different males in her three stories: A Senegalese father, a French husband, and an interracial and intercultural marriage together paint a main tableau of the predominant theme manifested in different portraits. Sexual politics are examined within the landscape of postcolonial environments such as in Senegal with Khady, as well as in the French province where Rudy and Fanta move to from Senegal. Similarly, in *Que font les rennes après Noël?,* we see that violence is not isolated because Rosenthal's comparison treatment of female queer sexuality within the framework of animals' imprisonment to human attitudes of superiority and dominance allows her to align the urgency of dealing

[16] http://www.liberation.fr/france/2009/11/12/affaire-ndiaye-raoult-une-grave-atteinte-a-la-liberte-de-parole_593255

with both situations for the common good and for the reality of today's societies. Both writers register difference inside the web of overlapping violence stemming from processes of thought validated by the dominant perspective, and both writers signal the inadequacies of these processes.

In identifying inadequacies in philosophic foundations, the authors suggest shifting the starting point for moving in new directions. Rather than continue to rely on foundational thought that structure inadequacies, contradictions in law and in custom, (such as the equality of all men contradicted in practice through the dualisms of White/Black or the freedom of all in theory but negated in practice (sexualities, genders), the better practice is to take the historical reality of a split ontology as the starting point. Or, to face the reality of the contradictions head on instead of stubbornly clinging to an ideal abstraction such as Liberté, Égalité and Fraternité for all, but with exceptions in reality. The Cartesian dilemma is one such example of foundational knowledge meant to apply to everyone, and credited as taking all of humankind into the modern era, and it came with assumptions about the world and about what should be investigated in the world from a philosophical standpoint. We grapple as societies in the West with those assumptions taken for granted today, in the sense that the disconnect is felt when the "rules" don't seem to apply to certain groups. The writers in this corpus show why positionality matters in making assumptions; it seems obvious why assumptions that René Descartes deems important (as a white, educated and propertied male in 17th century France), would not serve members of groups outside of his specific group. Yet, rather than retrace and redraw the conceptual assumptions, we continue to operate in society on such assumptions with all their attendant disconnects today. When groups of

women, people of color, migrants (and any group that was already "less-than" the privileged dominant group – usually white male and moneyed) attempt to function in societies governed by a Cartesian conceptual apparatus, not only do they feel all the pressures of trying to catch up to a culturally dominant white male worldview, it is also the culturally dominant white male group that has no idea why these other groups cannot function and see only problems. The writers show that the first step is to face the *actual* truth of the situation so as to start to sort out the disconnect between worldviews in the different groups of beings in society.

There is another important reason why people in societies are at a loss to understand the actual truth of the situation from a moral standpoint; the relational link is lost in modern western societies in daily consumption practices. The distancing that is achieved for the regular consumer of meat makes it difficult for the average citizen to be conscious of all that actually goes into a package of say, steak, in the store. Even the word "meat" is evidence of a distancing technique since it removes us from the image of a cow and saying we are eating cow if we choose beef. The fact that we say chicken for eating chicken poses no problem because the extent of our conditioning means people genuinely feel chickens are supposed to be eaten by humans and don't think of chickens as sentient beings with any form of social life. Rosenthal's novel is a perfect example of adopting a phenomenological approach because she gets a feel for what has been said from the notes and interviews with humans working with various animal populations, and she provides us a literary account that explores how social context shapes the experiences of the workers. Because the context is France, we know what conditioning forces are at work, so it is through the workers' responses that shaping is revealed. In one such example,

Rosenthal's *narratrice*, now in university gives us insight into experimenters in Biology working on animals through a researcher's opinion:

> La première contradiction est philosophique. On expérimente sur l'animal parce qu'il est proche de nous et en même temps on considère qu'il est suffisamment différent pour utiliser dans les expériences. Et la seconde est personnelle, en général les gens comme moi ont fait de la biologie parce qu'ils aimaient les animaux et le métier nous amène à les traiter sans ménagement, il faut s'y faire. Ce n'est que tardivement que j'ai commencé à interroger ma pratique, au départ, j'ai eu un parcours tout à fait classique (129-30).

and in another, this time of the reaction of seeing the butcher at work in the abattoir:

> Le tueur, dans l'abattoir, les gens n'aiment pas, ils trouvent ça ingrat, surtout quand ils sont affectés dans la zone sale. Quand je vois les jeunes qui arrivent, parfois ils restent une demi-journée et ils font demi-tour, c'est un travail physique, pour tuer faut être un homme (206).

The workers are decentered in the machinery of thought and practice, labs are generally places where not everyone has access, and the abattoirs are also on the outskirts of cities – to see what actually goes on requires arrangements to make the trip or gain access. Rosenthal reveals the various manifestations of hiding the ugly realities in thinking and practice. What is put first (centered) is always progress and economic profit for humankind. She shows what is wrong with society. The animals in society used for human ends are made invisible (like slavery in colonies that was the machine for the sugar in coffee) so that society is disengaged from live animals corresponding to meat.

Rosenthal's narratrice also is decentered and not quite fitting in to the machine of production of values emanating from original Christian formulation of the role of women in the family unit. She wishes she would be at ease like the other girls playing with dolls and she imagines she will be happy if she mimics everyone else by getting married – because isn't everyone else happy? But she is also disconnected – from her true self that is not aligned with the conventions of society. Mechanization of the conditioning process is also a theme that Rosenthal plays with. Just as the connection is lost between animals and meat due to the mechanization in big businesses, the link is also lost between many ways of being and sexualities due to the automatization – acceptance – inculcation, or mechanism of marriage. In fact, the narratrice has to go outside (on the outskirts of marriage) to find that link – that relationship that will start the process of connecting her to her true self - much like the abattoirs in society are on the outside. Her relationship with the woman ten years her junior is hidden and clandestine at first much like the abattoirs are also hidden in French society.

Although Rosenthal's interview paragraphs interrupt the typical rhythm of the narrative world of her *narratrice*, the testimonies of the different workers in animal industries provide key information for not only Rosenthal's *narratrice* but also for the readers. Since the link is removed in society between living animals and the production of meat, or science progress and painful experiments on animals, or animals in zoos and their realities in captivity, or raising and training animals, readers who have no knowledge of (or who have not wanted to see) what really goes on behind the scenes of the animal industry at large for the ends and uses of humans will also be shocked. Both narratives contained in the alternating paragraphs are more potent combined than each

story would be separate. In making the link visible to society, Rosenthal is also giving society the power to choose and to act. Just as the *narratrice* ends up taking action to complete her education and her metamorphosis – by breaking her conditioning mold, and by growing up and no longer believing the fantasies such as Santa's reindeers-- to live her authentic self, so too may the knowledge surrounding the treatment of animals inspire members of French society to complete their own education.

Social awakening work is also evident in the other novels too, where forms of ethnographic or phenomenological approaches can be discerned. In *Temps de chien*, Nganang's dog narrator is an inside member of Yaoundé where he conducts his observations for his social sciences study. Mboudjak's project can be situated in ethnography and is in the spirit of true participant observation of neighboring communities in the city in the search for Man as his research question. He is part of the culture-sharing group, of other dogs and humans of that city. In this way Nganang can excavate the themes of abuse and corruption and lack of future of a Biya-run country that are factors in the violence and abject behavior that Mboudjak witnesses. Nganang is communicating with his country about standing up and about finding the dignity in humankind in the culture, for the culture, and as a people.

In Chamoiseau, the Malfini's observations are more aligned with the phenomenological approach since he focuses on the Foufou, studying him for intentionality and for consciousness. Chamoiseau's project, through the Malfini's gains in consciousness, also has the readers witness the positive impact of the Foufou's example on the surroundings and on the other inhabitants. The poetics of difference is at work since even as the community works together for the good of the whole, the variety of

inhabitants of Rabuchon employ their own skillset to contribute in the effort. Chamoiseau honors his own culture in having the Malfini come find Chamoiseau the raconteur to communicate the example of the Foufou in the storytelling mode that fits the culture's preferred way of continuing the legends - the *conteurs* for a people. Here is yet another example of a culture contributing to a larger world environmental problem, by displaying its own way of managing relations between inhabitants and relations to its own place on earth.

For Mabanckou's porc-épic, the project is ethnographic in his insider status of both animal and human worlds of the cultural context of Sékébembé. His memoirs participate in communicating the findings, and his research question is based around the theme of harmful/peaceful doubles, a locally relevant topic, but which handles the larger theme of the pointlessness and arbitrary nature of the perpetuation of violence and violent practices based on cultural myths and beliefs.

We see the way the complex intersections between different forms of oppression that exist for women are revealed in the stories presented to us by NDiaye and Rosenthal. They not only share concerns about patriarchal order and systems that reinforce such ordering, they also illuminate how women are affected differently by showing how the place of women in different societies is conditioned. NDiaye shows the effects on her female characters that straddle the cultural conventions in Senegalese as well as French communities, and inside of family units where male figures, also conditioned by such societal structures and thinking, impact their lives. Rosenthal for her part concentrates on the norms that are set up in French society through her female narrator's family unit and sexual identity. Her narrator's journey makes room for a new imagined community in

France that has been denied by traditional thought structures. Rosenthal's narrator struggles against traditional expectations for women in France. Any person who struggles to fit in conventional boxes and who is similarly "imprisoned," mentally as well as physically, by traditional thought and the institutions that uphold it, can relate to the narrator's life. By juxtaposing that interior imprisonment with the physical detention of animals for human purposes, readers who have never questioned the conventional order may think and feel beyond themselves and their own immediate concerns. NDiaye uses the birds in her story to represent the chaos and helplessness felt by marginalized others in a system that holds certain beings as more valuable over others. If we can understand a behavior that is horrifying to us—such as a cockroach feeding off detritus in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, or the predator bird in Chamoiseau's novel—it is because those kinds of representations of animals have long been in our imaginations, and comparisons of humans to such creatures illuminates the way we are acting and being in the world.

The corpus as a whole exemplifies the open-endedness (versus definitive, closed, or *fixité*) valued in Glissant's theory of Relation, thanks to the storytelling power inherent in literature. All the stories leave the possibility of hope for an improved world, even in Audeguy's story with the deaths of Personne and Hercule. The concerns addressed in these novels and that we face today are *ongoing*, and therefore as yet unresolved to the satisfaction and well-being of all, but do not preclude the hope that they *may* be and that we may be working on solutions even as these stories are told. Combined with the content of their stories – which embody the notion of being "outward-looking" (Britton 11) because the plight of beings who are not included or considered in this world is highlighted – the open endings represent the relational dynamic in terms of adapting to

and accommodating evolution and change by the styles of contemplation and critique of the Western tradition of humanist philosophy. Arendt, Derrida and Glissant have been considered "difficult" to follow. If Derrida's project in *L'animal* is to illuminate the violence caused by the language and associated relations by his "tracing" of words and meanings ascribed to them, and this confuses and frustrates, he then accomplishes the goal of throwing imperial certitude and humanist reason into question. Why, or more correctly, who, should his project frustrate? Anyone who persists in understanding the world and its various inhabitants by taking "sa propre mythologie, l'indo-européenne, son *logos*, c'est-à-dire le mythos de son idiome, pour la forme universelle" (Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie* 254), for explaining the world and its beings in the world. The same holds true in the literary worlds created by the writers in this corpus. If the stories resonate with the reader, chances are there is that interaction between story and reader, between storyteller and audience, where the context, the time, the way of the telling and the way of understanding— being ready to see and to hear— coincide and collide perfectly.

If there is on the other hand, confusion and "opacity" per Glissant, then this too is a function of that interaction, only here the reader or the audience may not be receptive (ready to see and to hear) to the mode of communication and/or the message contents. Not understanding a way of communicating or what is being communicated may be due to a refusal to accept the message or the form of the telling, but also can be due to an unreadiness, an unpreparedness on the part of the reader to decipher at that moment of encounter. The possibility is still there, for yet another encounter, a rereading, for both types of reader, at another time. And, the important thing following Glissant is that the

opacity is respected in the sense of the writing reflecting diversity and otherness as a counter to the same *logos* being applicable for all. As Glissant explains in his *Poetics of Relation*:

> If, however, we look at literary texts, which after all best delineate the image of a language, if not its function, and if we analyze how such texts are affected by language learning or translation (these being the two fundamental mechanisms of relational practice), ideas of transparency and opacity quite naturally present themselves as the critical approach. The literary text plays the contradictory role of a producer of opacity. Because the writer, entering the dense mass of his writings, renounces an absolute, his poetic intention, full of self-evidence and sublimity. Writing's relation to that absolute is relative; that is, it actually renders it opaque by realizing it in language. The text passes from a dreamed-of transparency to the opacity produced in words. Because the written text opposes anything that might lead a reader to formulate the author's intention differently. At the same time, he can only guess at the shape of this intention. The reader goes, or rather tries to go back, from the produced opacity to the transparency that he read into it. Literary textual practice thus represents an opposition between two opacities: the irreducible opacity of the text, even when it is a matter of the most harmless sonnet, and the always evolving opacity of the author or a reader. Sometimes the latter becomes literally conscious of this opposition, in which case he describes the text as "difficult." (114-15)

"Transparency" is where the reader can be touched or moved by what he or she sees in

the produced words, and "the always evolving opacity" of the author or a reader is invoking the exchange between teller and audience. The reader is involved, which means that the story meaning the author relays is not an absolute, the message is not fixed in only one meaning, and is therefore not prescriptive. Also, the fact that there are different readers who encounter the story through the words at different times, and in different places, means that the reading will not be the same for everyone, which constitutes the other half of the exchange. We must similarly acknowledge that the same reader may even apprehend the story differently depending on the stage of life or mood at the moment of encountering the story. The variance in understanding that occurs as readers connect individually with the story constitutes this engagement with the produced opacity Glissant speaks of: the storytelling activity is representative of the relational dynamism.

Critics of literature's potential for "creating knowledge" that can help to shape the ideas and deliberations of a community of people surrounding common concerns and ways of being may argue that this opposition in literary stories leaves too much room for interpretation. This poses a problem for anyone who wishes a fixed, one-size-fits-all reading of a problem or of a way of operating in the world. Those who hold themselves open to the possibility of diverse readings of "the shape of this intention" also open themselves to the *contribution* that comes with multiple ways of thinking, and of constructs in worldviews that amount to the larger complete picture of narratives and ways of knowing (in) the world. In this way, literature's style of contribution to a given debate, such as the larger "metaphysical crisis in human consciousness" (Matthews 8) under discussion here, is itself representative of the type of relational thinking advocated for in the content of the stories. From Matthews:

> A reorientation to the living world will be possible only in the context of a reorientation to materiality per se and a new appreciation of the possibilities inherent in our relation to world, and its local modality, place. What are the possibilities inherent in our relation to world, to place, and what would it take to realize them? (8)

Related to the contribution in form and content that literature can offer in the production of cultural knowledge is the prospect of incorporating products of knowledge coming from other areas and fields of inquiry, such as the sciences, anthropology, geography, history and philosophy, in order to interrogate culturally inherited values and habits. Literature thus takes on the work being done by thinkers in other fields, combining knowledges and horizons of thought in a story to demonstrate why current hierarchical modes of thought do not work for the world we now live in, as well as proposing better alternatives. This is exemplified in the way Glissant's theory of Relation compliments Derrida's and Arendt's insights in countering dominant discourse. Seeing the world through stories, especially engendering ideas for a potentially more just world, is the aesthetic execution of merging the knowledge we have gained through the various fields. Also, the combined or layered potentiality that exists in literature is perfectly reflective of a conscious response to the intertwined legacies that confront us today, such as colonialism and our ecological crisis. The various challenges that face us today are because of intersecting worldviews over time and in different contexts; it is therefore appropriate that in thinking how to best address such challenges, the mode of taking on the challenges befits the complexities of those challenges themselves today. Literature's storytelling capabilities offer the range and the multiplicity needed to reach the

consciousness of multiple beings and to appeal to the multiple ways of understanding that exist in beings. In her essay *On Being Living Beings*, Isabelle Delannoy, citing results from sociology studies, explains the role of aesthetics in the growing environmental awareness exhibited in populations around the world. "To define "aesthetics," I will use the definition of "aesthetic commitment" proposed by Nathalie Blanc, who works on this question from the perspective of environmental awareness:

> We are not referring to a specialized field of studies like the arts, nor to a philosophy of the beautiful, nor to a theory about refined taste. We are referring to an active knowledge of one's surroundings, which is not limited to the arts nor to other cultural monuments. . . . Aesthetic experience is a way of inscribing the environment in oneself, and no longer making it an object of passive and disengaged contemplation. (Delannoy 138)

Although Delannoy provides numerous examples of such aesthetics, two will suffice here to follow her development of the importance of adding an aesthetic dimension to intellectually proven scientific information. First, Delannoy says the "Blue Marble" image of earth released by Nasa in 1972 allowed people to "personify" earth: "these images have added aesthetic experience to knowledge: we suddenly felt what we had only known intellectually. We came together with it— that is, we integrated it, we became aware of it" (138). Second, to "illustrate (that) Rachel Carson's impact arises from the combination of scientific argumentation and vivid description of our sensory and aesthetic experience of the environment around us" (138), Delannoy quotes from the opening of Carson's *Silent Spring*:

> There was a strange stillness. The birds, for example— where had they gone? Many people spoke of them, puzzled and disturbed. The feeding stations in the backyards were deserted. The few birds seen anywhere were moribund; they trembled violently and could not fly. It was a spring without voices . . . Future generations are unlikely to condone our lack of prudent concern for the integrity of the natural world that supports all life. (Carson, quoted in Delannoy 138)

But even if the obvious benefit of literature lies in this blending of the aesthetic experience and scientific argumentation into story form, capturing in words and in imagery our relationships with our environment, Elisabeth de Fontenay alerts us that the reason for the success of stories such as Genesis lies "aucunement (dans des) acte(s) de nouvelles découvertes." She goes further to explain that authors,

> inspirés, provoqués par les événements, ils rompaient et promulguaient, inventant, réinventant l'universalité. . .. Seul un certain historicisme – je veux dire une conscience et une connaissance approfondies des événements qui ont fait époque dans le devenir moderne et contemporain de l'Occident – fournit une habilitation présentable pour cette sobre foi de notre temps, les droits de l'homme" (*Sans offenser* 96).

Literature's power then, and thus its contribution to the wider cultural debate, rests in its potential for taking up important events and reworking them into a narrative that helps readers envision a more just world, better social interactions, that can enable a shift in mentalities. And if, as Glissant writes in his *Poétique*, literary texts "delineate the image of a language," this explains the way a literary text can "speak" to a people, a community,

or a nation, about an event they can understand in their own language, with their own symbols of meaning and for what the event means to them. De Fontenay insists that "il apparaît clairement que les dérivés de l'éthologie ne peuvent pas être évincées par la science, laquelle fournira toujours de nouveaux prétextes pour réaliser des amalgames, mais seulement par une argumentation politique, lourde de remémoration, nourrie d'histoire, de philosophie, de pensée sociale, d'attention à la complication des conflits et à l'indialectisable événement" (*Sans offenser* 97).

The changing nature of the world and whether we are headed in the direction we want to be in the world is the central inquiry that literature allows us to pursue while fashioning words, gestures, traits, images that speak out against, and question violence. The weapon in literature is the "smoking word" that can generate an awakening, but not in a violent manner. The word is used to incite a moral awakening, inspiring ideas, opening hearts, horizons and understanding. In literature's storytelling power, crossing paths with other fields' epistemologies is enabled and this helps shatter silence and complacency as well as any distancing around events and modes of thought. Literature captures from the inside and provides a larger view.

"The ecological crisis is a symptom of a deeper, metaphysical crisis in human consciousness and an accompanying crisis of culture."

Freya Mathews, *Reinhabiting Reality: Towards a Recovery of Culture* 2005

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

"La plus calamiteuse et fragile de toutes les créatures c'est l'homme, et quant et quant, la plus orgueilleuse. Elle se sent et se voit logée ici parmi la bourbe et le fient du monde, attachée et clouée à la pire, plus morte et croupie partie de l'univers, au dernier étage du logis, et le plus éloigné de la voûte céleste, avec les animaux de la pire condition des trois : et se va plantant par imagination au-dessus du cercle de la Lune, et ramenant le ciel sous ses pieds. C'est par la vanité de cette même imagination qu'il s'égale à Dieu, qu'il s'attribue les conditions divines, qu'il se trie soi-même et sépare de la presse des autres créatures, taille les parts aux animaux ses confrères et compagnons, et leur distribue telle portion de facultés et de forces, que bon lui semble."

Michel de Montaigne. *Les essais*. Livre II, chapitre XII. Apologie de Raimond de Sebonde

An experienced commonality

Even as the novels situate worlds in local spaces on our planet, the notion of an experienced commonality on the levels of environment and how we relate to other living beings is drawn. If, as mentioned in the introduction, Lévi-Strauss suggests that animals are good to think with, it is because the complexity in their worlds parallels that in our experience, whether some cultural ontologies would like to admit it or not. Animal

representations are effective as a lens through which commonality in life conditions of oppressed groups – human and non-human – may be viewed. Indeed, these oppressed, or invisible, groups may also be heard if we read such animal depictions in literature in the spirit of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* narrator "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?" (581). Getting readers to see past animal invisibility is a step closer to considering other people with a similar plight. Like the human species, animals are varied and diverse inside of species categories and thus individual beings exist in each type. Yet the "only question we can ask in relation to our place in nature is 'Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the smartest of them all?'" according to Frans de Waal (157). In his discussion of the measure of all things being human-centered, he argues that keeping "humans in their preferred spot on that absurd scale of the ancient Greeks has led to an obsession with semantics, definitions and redefinitions, and – let's face it – the moving of goalposts" (157). Certainly, some of these semantics and redefinitions include animalizing some groups of humans in a negative light, which is why acknowledging humans' embeddedness in nature matters as well as emphasizing the roots of thinking that accords greater value to groups that are the so-called furthest away from the "natural," the "crude," the "savage," or the "overexcited" state.

The novels recognize singularity and diversity (or plurality per Arendt)[17] without taking away from the human race. This aligns with Elisabeth de Fontenay's position of being "animaliste" and "humaniste" at the same time. In an interview[18] in which she mentions the biological difference of 1% existing between humans and chimpanzees, she

[17] Arendt: "Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition – not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* – of all political life." (*The Human Condition* 7*)*

[18] Fontenay, Élisabeth de. Interview with Astrid De Larminat. "Les singes ne peuvent pas faire la révolution !" *Le Figaro*, Culture. Livres, 23 octobre 2014.

explains: “ Si je refuse de dénier la différence humaine, je refuse aussi de définir le propre de l'homme, car cette volonté de définition, quelle qu'elle soit, a toujours entraîné l’exclusion de l’humanité pour les nouveau-nés, les handicapés mentaux, les “sauvages”, les personnes âgées qui perdent la tête, les fous, voire les criminels. Je dirai néanmoins que ce fameux 1 % a donné la possibilité d'inventer, de produire du nouveau tout en gardant de l'ancien, et donc de faire l'histoire. ” (de Fontenay *Le Figaro*). Certainly, the authors seem to be questioning what the human race could and should be doing with the 1%.

Indeed, although one could argue that Patrick Chamoiseau shows an almost revolutionary capability in his Foufou character, that would be scratching the surface and seeing in the Foufou what most ordinarily identify in someone admirable. The stronger argument is showing what living beings are capable of if they act according to what is needed for everyone to flourish. The Foufou, with his talents and determination to live overcoming his Alaya, could just as easily have continued to live out his days in a corner of Rabuchon employing his adaptive talents for learning new ways of being and doing so solely for his own amusement and enjoyment. He transcends his circumstances and puts his talents to use in overcoming new challenges, benefiting everyone, even those who come to the realization later. That is an example of using the 1% in a manner that exemplifies volition to share, and to act for the common good. But Chamoiseau also shows that everyone has a share in this because as the Alaya is common to us all, so too is the potential for overcoming the selfish, limiting aspects of our Alaya and for tapping into the natural “wisdom” of living in a collaborative, rather than competitive and dominating manner. In Mabanckou’s novel, the porcupine observes the 1% in Kibandi, as well as

other humans in the story, being put to use in violent, vengeful acts. But Mabanckou does not stop at leveraging an indictment against the human race; he has his porcupine reflect on the cost of adhering to a thinking that reduces rather than expands. The porcupine loses his porcupine family of *semblables* when the governor porcupine senses danger for his group. That danger was judged to be our porcupine getting too close to human contact through the *myamvumbi* summoning him as a *double nuisible*. Mimicking exclusionary traditions and practices is hurtful to all. Patrice Nganang has Mboudjak ask the question "Where is Man in all of this"? all throughout the story where the canine character cannot differentiate between the conduct of animals and the humans. Only when the humans in the neighborhood finally find the courage to take a stand against abusive authority together does Mboudjak see what could be, and how Man could make a difference.

And what about the three "Made in France" novels? How do they question what humans do with the 1%? Stéphane Audeguy, in situating his story in Revolutionary France, traces a change in relation between beings. By showing how human and animal characters navigated the conditions of the period, both in France and in Sénégal, born of economic decisions that then led to socio-politically instituted norms, he points to mistakes, yes, but also allows us to discern the nature of the course taken. If we understand how we went wrong, the hope is that we can use our energies, our intellect, our principles, for charting a better course. His knitting of the fates of both animals and humans in his story points constantly to "la fragilité de l'existence" (Audeguy 16). At the beginning of the novel Yacine notices the similarity in death for both baobabs and humans because in both he sees "la vie se retirer comme une vague" (Audeguy 15). The fragility of life calls for action now, to protect it as well as to make it count. And both the

novels from Marie NDiaye and Olivia Rosenthal corroborate the gushing of blood still flowing from the wound drawn from those original decisions made by people "in power" in France. All three interweave the lot of animals with that of the humans in their stories to highlight the commonality in life conditions as we continue to plot the same course in history, as well as how those conditions come back to the mother country, the original perpetrator, and its inhabitants.

Rethinking-imagining humans' relationships

While the three animal-narrator novels focus around "projects" taken on by communities in their fictional worlds, the three French novels represent animality that is within humans. The update to the fable or the *conte* in the case of the animal narrators can be seen as representing new understandings of what constitutes membership or citizenship in a community, whereas the technique of centering on humans and non-humans' animality in the other novels help to update the parameters of traditional Western humanism to be more inclusive, facing current realities within a humanist framework. The writing of animals in all six novels suggest a re-positioning of humans' relationship to other humans, non-humans and to environments by challenging oppositional hierarchical thinking-imagining that excludes groups.

These creative productions cause us to consider ontological distinctions that have been embedded into our psyches by the communities with which we identify and with which we feel comfortable. The "line" in this corpus between writers in France and those outside, or even by those authors who use animal narrators and those who do not, turns out to be less of a divide and more of a variation or alternative. They provide a multitude

of constructs in worldviews that amount to the larger complete picture of narratives and ways of knowing (in) the world. Each author embodies individuality in his or her approach, exactly as the content of their stories celebrates diversity and singularity or individuation in beings and in ways of being in this world. Variation in the corpus is asserted through localized contexts and language features, as well as through approaches to writing animals in contemporary French literature, but the central anxiety is how we relate to each other. The manner in which we relate to each other affects not only treatment amongst ourselves and other living beings, but also how we take care of our planet. Situating the beings that have been bleeding from the wound of imperialist practices and thought within an ecocritical perspective allows authors to sound the alarm for the rest of the constituents in both nature and culture, in territories all over the planet. Blurring the human-animal frontier corresponds to blurring the nature-culture divide. The sharp distinction does not hold up under the glare of environmental destruction as all stakeholders lose equally. Jeremy Bentham was credited as posing the question "Can animals suffer?" (Bentham, Ch XVII, note 122) which caused a shift in focus and in direction for those determining what is proper to humans. Perhaps the new question should be "What are we, as humans, going to do with the 1%?"

Hannah Arendt's understanding of commonly used terms *power* and *force* in our world is useful to reveal why the subtlety in understanding this difference matters in the analysis of our corpus. She understands power as being typically understood as *power over* (Arendt, *On Violence* 36) citizens of a state or some variation of this model of thinking, in business and economic realms as well as political. This is a natural extension of "might is right" or competitive modes of thinking engendered and endorsed by

ideologies that exclude. Arendt's concept of power, true power as emanating from consensus within a group towards action to work on mutual concerns or issues, is where the real shift needs to happen.

> Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is "in power" we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power emanated to begin with (*potestas in populo,* without a people or a group there is no power), disappears, "his power" also vanishes. (Arendt, *On Violence* 44)

This type of collaborative power is the force we see produced from the example set by the Foufou in Chamoiseau's novel. The Foufou embodies Arendt's definition of strength: "Strength unequivocally designates something in the singular, an individual entity: it is the property inherent in an object or person and belongs to its character, which may prove itself in relation to other things or persons, but is essentially independent of them." (*On Violence* 44). The Foufou's effect on the Malfini, and on other denizens of the corner of Rabuchon forest where the Foufou goes to work tackling the "slow death" environmental degradation problem, is what galvanizes the group force, and thus the power of the group to combat the physical force of the environment. Interesting too is to look at Chamoiseau's pitting of "forces": if we take Arendt's definition of force, which as she says "should be reserved, in terminological language, for the "forces of nature" or the "force of circumstances" (*la force des choses*), that is, to indicate the energy released by

physical or social movements" (*On Violence* 44-45), Chamoiseau has shown the power behind the social force started by the Foufou against the physical force of the "slow death." Furthermore, in the story he also exposed the failure against nature of the other kind of force, that is, the coercion exercised by Colibri on the rest of the hummingbirds in a totalitarian style of ruling. Again, the totalitarian style of relation among beings, no match for *true force* such as forces of nature, does not work and needs to change.

Building on the Glissantian project of Relation, Chamoiseau maintains "qu'il n'y a pas de centre dans les écosystèmes il n'y a que relation". In his December 2017 interview at the Salon des Revues Plurielles in Marseille[19], he explains that although ecosystemic thinking is thought of as only pertaining to the natural world, in fact, it is a concept that is readily applicable to the functioning of cultures, to the functioning of imaginaries, and to bringing it in to the contemporary dynamics of the world…which for him boils down to what Glissant called Relation. The tenth *déclaration des poètes* of the manifest and essay Frères migrants links the migrant to all of our Histories "Qu'il incarne dès lors l'Histoire de tous nos histoires" thus connecting historical contacts the world over and the ecosystems of such contact from before colonialism and slavery to globalization and our moment of hyper capitalism. The animal figure too, like the migrant figure, may be the face of all of our histories, and as such a reminder of the violence in perpetuating the systems of thought and actions that corroborate bodies and lands as for economic ends and wastes.

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[19] *Approches Cultures et Territoires* Dec. 13, 2017 Entretien avec Patrick Chamoiseau, mené par Abdellatif Chaouite, et lectures d'extraits de l'ouvrage "Frères Migrants" par Isabelle Fruleux https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpWJrrb1h7g

Ecosystemic ways of relating

Action and consensus then, coming from a collaborative mindset, allow for the greater share in working towards a solution to a concern, thus equaling a larger reflection or more true reflection of most stakeholders. It is easier to identify specific environmental concerns and the participants than it is to focus on how we relate to each other as a major concern, yet zeroing in on how we relate to each other, changing that dynamic, is the way forward for creating solutions towards a common concern such as the environmental crisis. As Isabelle Delannoy stresses in her essay: "Our ecosystems are no longer a landscape where our activities occur, or a pool of resources; they have become a dynamic network of which we are a part as living beings, but most especially as thinking beings, the only species able to conceptualize this network because of our capacity for reflexive thought. This vision of ourselves as living beings inscribed in the network of the living world generates an unprecedented opportunity to renew Western ways of thinking within both the hard sciences and the humanities." (Delannoy 143).

The novels zero in on the plurality of beings on this earth, the recognition of which must allow for the change in dynamic of how we relate to each other. If the authors write animals as a way of thinking and imagining our multiple relationships to the physical world that we are in, what they are showing us is the problem of speciesism, which like racism, assumes a fundamental difference of kind, rather than degree. The writing of animals here are different in degree, in terms of narrative practice as well as in terms of content. Per Derrida codes, they attend to differences between and among characters (human and nonhuman animals) as well as between these characters and their environments, which allows for ecological readings and furnishes different "landscapes".

Because of the interrelation between and among humans and animals and the fact that the relationships that the various characters have to the world that they know are situated in each work, the binary distinctions are challenged in a few ways. As literary productions, all six entertain, teach, as well as advocate for the realignment of relationships. The diversity in approaches is not solely a reflection of counter discourse to our dominant culture, it speaks to the desire to be a part of the "knowledge production" rather than subjected to a "fixed" notion of it, as well as to the contribution that a plurality of voices, thinking and approaches in fact can make to a complete understanding. French-language literatures join the broader conversations of ecological and social justice concerns as well as identity politics culturally, in the academy, and through activism. They each attempt to reshape identity by writing stories, memoirs, history, and legacies into the cultural production, suggesting what is possible, as a means of regeneration in the spirit of *narrative rebirth* [20] in their efforts at storytelling.

The socially transformative function of literature may be put to use within the multi-disciplinary focus that ecocritical inquiries allow. Ecocriticism's contribution to French-language literatures is apparent in the potentiality of imagining different orders: questioning the hierarchical opposition between humans and nonhumans allows for de-centering human exceptionalism. Likewise, questioning the hierarchical opposition between French and "Francophone" letters may be similarly questioned and alternatively

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[20] Term used by Julia Kristeva in her book *Hannah Arendt: Life Is a Narrative,* capturing the notion of natality from Arendt inherent in narrative action: Kristeva explains the epigraph Arendt uses from Isaak Dinesen in *The Human Condition* "[a]ll sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them" (90) and goes on to elaborate on how Arendt connects the notion: "As Arendt and Aristotle have told us, there is no life without politics, and Arendt and Augustine have informed us, there is no life (bios) without a rebirth in and through narrative (*Hannah Arendt* 99).

imagined. In the afterword of their book Marnie Sullivan and Douglas Boudreau put it this way:

> The reciprocal influences of humans and the environments in which they live are worthy of future explorations as the study of literature in French moves beyond the French/Francophone binary. Reading beyond this binary may well be one of the more valuable contributions ecocriticism can make to French-language literature (*Ecocritical Approaches* 192).

The combined understandings resulting from the analysis of this corpus contribute to the fields of ecocriticism as well as to those within critical literary theory as expressions against understanding knowledges as homogenous and one-dimensional. This analysis can be taken as a) an ecosystem of expressions of relation within the material worlds of contextualized linguistic spaces that are themselves expressing the relations of their fictionalized worlds' characters to each other and to their localities, and b) one that fits within a broader ecosystem of ecocritical investigations meant to add dimension(s) to environmental and cultural understandings. On the strength of both types of approaches in writing animals, as well as differences in poetics, the corpus embodies the type of shared, relational work needed to contribute to moving the goalposts of knowledge in the human/animal and nature/culture divide: different but equal means valuing dynamic exchange.

"L'universel a basculé dans la diversité, qui la bouscule" (Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* 66)

"Là où les histoires se joignent, finit l'Histoire". (Glissant, *L'Intention poétique* 209)

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