

## **Editorial: Through the Looking Glass: Figuring the animal**

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The articles featured in this final issue compiled and edited by Dr Sopelekae Maithufi, the outgoing Editor-in-Chief, but finalised by *Professor Emerita* Rosemary Gray, Managing Editor of the *English Academy Review*, provide a cornucopia of trans-generic Human-Animal Studies.

Although Wendy Woodward and Erika Lemma pertinently noted in 2014, “The term Animal Studies (AS) and Human-Animal Studies (HAS) have been used almost interchangeably in this fairly recent burgeoning field”, the literary trajectory is a much longer one. For South Africans it was possibly Nobel Laureate, J.M. Coetzee’s *Lives of Animals* (1999) - soon incorporated into his *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) – that drew attention at the turn of the millennium to the symbiosis of humans and animals, thus arguably re-igniting the literary legacy of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1907), Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* (1894) and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s even earlier epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855).

In 2009, perhaps transposing Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s famed rationalist adage, “*Je pense donc je suis*” [I think, therefore I am], Ur’s Jacques Derrida intrigued with *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, compacting the roots of the eco-phenomenological tree. Soon, the blooming tree became home for storytellers, poets and philosophers, providing literary critics, such as those featured in this issue, with an onto-poietic imaginary, that is, a heightened awareness of the oneness of the animal kingdom on Planet Earth.

The five articles featured here constitute a representative sample of the literary, historical, and figural discourses that reflect tangential aspects of the HAS notion. Michael Chapman’s “English Studies, Before, In, and Beyond the Time of Covid-19: Elephant, Chameleon, and Lizard” is a *tour de force* blueprint of applied English Studies in and beyond the global pandemic. Particularly useful in addressing the challenges faced by the teaching fraternity, linked as they are to finances (Fees Must Fall), failure rates exacerbated by inadequate preparation for tertiary studies and an inculcated sense of entitlement and made manifest in annual student disruptions accruing from lack of placement facilities, this essay explores “adaptations to university teaching [English Studies] in a time of Covid-19 and the potential and limitations of such adaptations post Covid-19” that have “strategic and planning repercussions for government, society, and university leadership”. Chapman fascinates with his deployment of the African folktale: “Elephant, Chameleon, and Lizard” as emblematic metaphor for before, in, and beyond Covid-19.

Chapman situates his discussion within an indispensable survey of English Studies: Yesterday and Today; English Studies: Today and Tomorrow; and English, the

Language of the Modern World. This hands-on article is also available on the English Academy's Teaching English Today (TET) interactive Web site for teachers.

Likewise concerned with adaptability and flexibility within the Humanities, K. Nayayana Chandran shifts the focus to teaching in an Indian tertiary institution, homing in on an experiential case study entitled, "Writing Selves in Disguise" with a subtitle, "On Reading and Writing Acknowledgements" and allowing us the peep behind the looking glass into the University of Hyderabad's innovative module for first time researchers entitled, "Research and Publication Ethics". The course is designed to address the all too prevalent problem of students of English, who paradoxically prefer blurbs, study notes, cover summaries and even authors' biographies to reading the text; this circumtextuality is what G rard Genette (1991) calls paratexts. The essay recounts experimental approaches to reading the writer's acknowledgements in well known published books, affording the possibility "of entering or turning back" (ibid.). What for me is an important by-product, is not only the students' fascination with the marginalia they have collected but their realisation of "how the difficulty of writing acknowledgements for the writing selves is indeed the writing of difficulty in disguise".

Also concerned with the writing self or self writing is Nick Mdika Temba's "Politics of Memorialisation in Rwandan Witness Memoir: Marie B atrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter*".

This article focuses on the trauma of the human animal, recasting as it does the historical facts of Rwandan genocide, and memorialising the ordeals of a Rwandan refugee in eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). Articulating the lived reality of the atrocities captured in this resistance narrative to set the record straight in our post-truth society, the article usefully theorises witness or memoir life writing and expertly applies the theories to the chosen text.

And because the memory of, or the remembering by the teller is underpinned by selection, imagination, and sometimes bias, life writing is inevitably both difficult and unstable. As Anglo-Irish novelist Elizabeth Bowen states:

The apparent choices of art are nothing but addictions, pre-dispositions: where did these come from, how were they formed? The aesthetic is nothing but a return to images that will allow nothing to take their place; the aesthetic is nothing but an attempt to disguise and glorify the enforced return. (1950:269)

Bowen's theoretical statements, reflecting on the operations of memory as an "enforced return" or, what I have called, the nostalgic imperative, are pertinent, for her thoughts on memory – be they in biographical, autobiographical or personal chronicle mode – articulate a common group of preoccupations and emphases. They suggest that the narrator-cum-storyteller is not just a self-conscious "maker" or fabricator, but an intuitive encoder, an awkward truth-teller, striving for expression, as I noted in an early academic article on *The Heat of the Day*, Elizabeth Bowen's wartime novel (Gray 1998).

Predicated on Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's (2001) definition of memoir as "a mode of life narrative that historically situates the subject in a social environment, as either observer or participant", and "testimonia" as a narrative that "unfolds through the fashioning of an exemplary protagonist whose narrative bears witness to collective suffering, politicized struggle and communal survival", Temba argues convincingly yet provocatively that Umutesi's memoir "highlights the manner in which official power can also participate in genocide denialism". Rooted in John Beverley's *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (2004) which proposes that testimonio "promotes emancipation through a discourse of solidarity against a real or perceived threat or oppression", Temba's interpretation effectively speaks truth to power. The philosopher, Bertrand Russell, perceptively notes that, "The lover, the poet, and the mystic find a fuller satisfaction than the seeker of power" (*Philosophy Now* 2017), to which John Lenz adds in explication: "The lover includes the lover of truth, that is, the philosopher, although many individual paths are possible." (ibid.)

The path that Rosanna Masiola chooses to tread in "Sacred Spaces in Southern African Literature: From *Mhudi* to Mutemva" is a mystical one; it examines the representation of sacred spaces in the novels of four authors from Southern Africa and their translations *viz* the writing worlds of Sol Plaatje, Thomas Mofolo, Alan Paton and John Bradburne. The excerpts chosen for translation into French, Spanish and Italian - the European Romance Languages of former Roman Catholic countries - reveal, she says, common themes such as dispossession of the soil coupled with "evidence of textual divergence in the cohesion of symbols, lexico-semantic shifts, and cultural domestication". This erudite multilingual/translingual article, underpinned by translation theories, helpfully categorises sacred spaces "as apotropaic, chthonic, mystic and messianic" as well as "theological and epiphanic". The article climaxes with a salient post-human observation that

A renewed understanding of the importance of space from a spiritual perspective and of translation can counter the dehumanising effects of the loss caused by colonisation and language hegemony. Furthermore, it has the potential to enhance awareness in a diasporic world where the effects of globalisation continue to erode the spiritual rootedness of community memory and individual mystic experience.

The fifth and final article, Jessica Murray's "Using Critical Animal Studies to Read Climate Change Fiction: Literary Reflections and Provocations" was presented as the Academy's annual Percy Baneshik Prestige Lecture on 12 November 2022. This cutting-edge, must read article

utilises the conceptual and theoretical tools of Critical Animal Studies to expose and interrogate the terminological lapses and possibilities in selected contemporary climate fiction novels. These novels are *My Days of Dark Green Euphoria* (2022) by A.E. Copenhaver, *Bewilderment* (2021) by Richard Powers and *Stay and Fight* (2019) by Madeline Ffitch. I argue that the terminological

slipperiness that confronts anyone attempting to talk about and imagine other animals in respectful modes of engagement signals more than the inadequacy of our scholarly lexicons. Rather, these gaps reveal deeply problematic epistemological and ontological assumptions about other animals and our responsibilities to them.

The argument is bolstered by two re-constructed Doric pillars: critical animal studies and its logical offshoot, vegan studies.

As indicated by Murray's title, importantly and crucially the discussion situates Climate Fiction at the epicentre of contemporary critical academic debate, with an implied injunction for human animals to remove their blinkers, to revisit their arrogant anthropocentrism and to attune themselves to what Murray calls "the presence and proximity of nonhuman interlocuters". These she terms the "more-than-human interlocuter[s]", i.e. "nonhuman animals". The essay resonates well with Melissa Boyle's *Captured: The Animal within Culture* (2014) and extends concepts such as those in Njabulo Ndebele's 2007 essay entitled, "The Year of the Dog: A Journey of the Imagination".

Fanciful as it may seem, some of the Book Reviews and poems in this issue serendipitously complement the articles. For example, Desireé John-Ukofia's "A Sad Place" could be paired with Nick Mdika Temba's "Politics of Memorialisation in Rwandan Witness Memoir: Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter*", while Kobus Moolman's "Kingsbury Hospital - ICU" could be seen to be in conversation with Michael Chapman's "English Studies, Before, In, and Beyond the Time of Covid-19: Elephant, Chameleon, and Lizard".

At the outer frame of these mosaic pieces, the art of judging any piece of academic writing is fraught with critical difficulties, especially in a postcolonial/de-colonial context.

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