Animal Narratives and Culture

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Vulnerable Realism

By

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1. The amended version of the chapter "Animal and the Mute as a Paradigm of the Victim" appeared in the *Journal of Studies in History and Culture,* issue no 1, vol. 1 (2014).
2. The amended version of the chapter "Posthumanism and Its Animal Voices in Literature" appeared in the English edition of *Teksty Drugie,* translated by Marta Skotnicka, issue no 1 (2015), 247-268.
3. The amended version of the chapter "On D. H. Lawrence's *Snake* that Slips out of the Text: Derrida's Reading of the Poem" appeared in *Brno Studies in English*, in 2013, vol 39, no 1, 167-182.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book came about as an extension of my doctoral thesis devoted to ecocriticism in Polish literature. I wanted to develop certain ideas, such as the appearance of animals in cultural texts, which are not only represented by literature but open a space for introducing narrations centred on animal experience. This experience, so different for a range of species, has not so far been considered as an example of a vulnerable condition. In line with the field of animal studies, I tried to address real nonhumans through cultural narratives and fill in the notion of vulnerability.

Since vulnerability and resilience are used to differentiate the actions of humans with regards to environmental changes such as global warming or natural catastrophes, and to denote the ways in which people can or cannot adapt to external changes, animals are not included in this discussion. Indeed, their behaviour cannot be compared with people's intentions. The vulnerable/resilient dimension of animals' actions does not belong directly to the narratives of ecological crises, but to human-animal relations and culturally constructed knowledge, although analysing these may influence animal studies in a broader, environmental perspective. Importunately for this book, including animals in the narration decentralises the human point of view and provides an opportunity to recognise the Anthropocene as a dominant narration on reality seen from the perspective of vulnerable actors. Due to this narrative strategy, it is possible to also recognise humans as vulnerable subjects and to concentrate on animal experience as paradigmatic for environmental vulnerability, which is my aim for this book.

Vulnerable realism can imply two different understandings: one presenting weak realism as incomplete, and mixed with other literary styles; the other bringing realistic vulnerable experience into narration. The second is the key meaning for this work, but it does not exclude the first since the book asks questions about realism as such, entering into a polemic with the tradition of literary realism. Realism, then, is not primarily understood as a narrative style but a narration that tests the probability of nonhuman vulnerable experience and makes it real.

The book consists of three parts. The first presents examples of how realism has been redefined in trauma studies and how it may refer to animal experience. The second explores that which is added to the narrative by literature, including the animal perspective (a zoonarrative) and how it is done (zoocriticism). The third analyses cultural texts (such as painting, circuses, and memorials) which realistically generate animal vulnerability and provide non-anthropocentric frameworks, anchoring our knowledge in the experience of fragile historical reality.

It is not my aim to follow an academic structure: the first theoretical chapter and the following one provide illustrations of the theory. Writing on narration includes both theorising through cultural examples and because of them. Thus, I am reading cultural phenomena as texts, different narratives which can be deciphered, whereas literature can contribute to this process as a meta-theory when it establishes meanings directly in words. I treat all cultural sources, textual and non-textual, as fragments of our knowledge, penetrating the past and present to figure out where we are being directed towards and how we experience the change.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

I would like to hereby note that all texts which were not previously translated and available in English have been translated by the author and Marek Kazimierski, the co-translator. For the convenience of English-speaking readers, all Polish signs were eliminated from the text, except the bibliography.

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INTRODUCTION

I need another place
Will there be peace
I need another world
This one's nearly gone
Still have too many dreams
Never seen the light
I need another world
A place where I can go
I'm gonna miss the sea
I'm gonna miss the snow
I'm gonna miss the bees
I miss the things that grow
I'm gonna miss the trees
I'm gonna miss the sun
I miss the animals
I'm gonna miss you all
I need another place
Will there be peace
I need another world
This one's nearly gone
I'm gonna miss the birds
Singing all their songs
I'm gonna miss the wind
Been kissing me so long
Another world …

—Antony Hegarty[1]

Perhaps some of us experience a sense of belonging to the fragile world of Antony's song, in terms of environmental conditions; a world which is soaked in the human element, discarding other species. This experience of vulnerability, invisible in human communication, might be a matter of cognition and precognition as well. It is grounded in the reflection that something is missing from our view of reality—in reality understood as presence, visibility and surroundings. For religious people this missing

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[1] Antony and the Johnsons, "Another World" (Rough Trade Records, 2008).

part is expressed by an unknown but trustworthy God. From the perspective expressed in this book it might be provided by nonhuman creatures, still living around and related to us, but also different from us.

It is difficult to include animals in narrations about human texts of culture and avoid a consideration that cannot embrace animal experience within its predominant anthropocentric tradition. Thus, the realist component is needed to go beyond the human hermetic point of view and open it up, as attempted in this book: to unlock chosen texts of culture and see what appears when animals are placed in the centre of narration. At the same time, readings which may also be placed in the framework of post-humanities, as they share most premises presented there, are accompanied by the question of how to represent this nonhuman centre that used to be in the background or on the verge of the meaning of cultural narration.

A few of the terms and assumptions used in this book need to be discussed. Since for narration the pivotal source seems to be literature, I primarily refer to some literary texts written by Hélène Cixous, D. H. Lawrence, Tytus Czyzewski, and Ferdynand Ossendowski that enable me to read different phenomena involving animals, such as victimisation, abandonment, exhibition, war, and entertainment, and refer to cultural works other than literary ones (such as Rembrandt's paintings or animal monuments) and spaces (e.g. the circus). Thus, I use the term "text of culture" interchangeably with "cultural text."

Despite the fact that animals' appearance in the human society proclaims their condition as weaker than homo sapiens and in many cases as devoid of meaning (as in the zoo, circus, or war industry), I try to discuss animals' vulnerability in terms of new possibilities of escape from an anthropocentric perspective. This anthropocentric position is also present in criticism (e.g. represented by critical animal studies) when immoral human activities are exposed in the foreground. My perspective is based more on analysing (as provided in reading, interpreting, and questioning) than criticising humans from the moral point of view.

Critical animal studies play a major role for activist and environmental movements, and in this book it is frequently tricky to omit shared issues because of animals' vulnerable conditions. Perhaps the main difference lays in the material taken for consideration (cultural texts) and the effort resulting from it: to switch to the side of animals, and redirect and remap reflection. Thus, vulnerability realistically defines the situation of animals in the human world, but at the same time cultural examples enable us to

also present animals as resilient characters, and as subjects and agents of narration (like the titular tiger in Czyzewski's poem), though this is an experimental, radical, and rarely found way of thinking. As a result, human subjectivity is weakened and silenced, and leaves space for nonhuman inhabitants.

Rephrasing Steve Baker's question "what does art add?" to the issue of animals,[2] I would like to follow with "what does culture add?" What kind of addition is it? What kind of benefit does it have for cognition? The search for an answer is present in redefining the historical and literary category of realism, understood as not only a literary genre but as the source of means for narration. Hence the narration, and not the theory, provides a literary framework for analysing cultural texts in this book.

I am aware that the very concept of realism may seem ambiguous. However, it was the aesthetic proposal, originating in the nineteenth century and signifying "what really does exist?", which was transformed in the twentieth century into philosophical streams contained within literature and its governing rule: "what could exist?" A meaning of realism different to that from the nineteenth century influences the description of the animal existence in the mode of two dominant and intersecting dimensions: the unfamiliar and the domesticated worlds of nature. To claim them is to use realistic strategies offered by the cultural texts and to inscribe them into narration. They lead to reading as if the reader were not a human anymore: they could be one of the predatory animals imprisoned in the circus (as in Ossendowski's *Menagerie*) or a dog abandoned because of human conflicts (as in Cixous' *Stigmata, or Job the Dog*), relocated in and by fiction. The reader becomes the nonhuman not through the process of or any belief in reincarnation, but by shifting their experience into territory completely unknown to them, which opposes technological progress and is available here and now, partly anchored in their animalistic past. This experience may be felt as real.

My work is therefore presented under the title involving the concept of realism in its representational meaning: literature offers strategies that can be used to sustain the model of the world which maps a common, shared, and intertwined area of existence between people and animal species, and provides an alternative to the anthropocentric narration in which the

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[2] Steve Baker, "Contemporary Art and Animal Rights," in *Considering Animals: Contemporary Studies in Human-Animal Relations*, eds. Carol Freeman, Elizabeth Leane, and Yvette Watt (London: Ashgate, 2011).

human—I, you, or us—is no longer the sole source of experiencing reality, shifting into a different "pair of eyes" and becoming a real experience and manner of perception, and a window onto a different view. Hereby, this is the fiction that enables making the nonhuman animal present in our experience through a special fusion of the knowledge of animals, imagination, feeling, and experience.

Realism in cultural texts is a way of interpreting scientific information, especially with regard to the psychology, ethology, and behaviour of animals (I also refer to some concepts from outside the humanities); it also allows possibilities to continue what is unfinished, left behind, and unnecessary in the life sciences' narration. Cultural narration can then be considered as not progressive in the sense of animal research, but it also leads to cognition. It recognises animals as vulnerable actors not only in the human, deficient experience, but also in the concept of fragile reality.

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The first part, titled "Realism, Referentiality, and the Vulnerable," contains essays about changes in the theory of representation that allow me to include nonhuman experience. In the opening chapter, "Redefining Realism and New Interpretative Possibilities," I take into consideration realism's reformulations, partly in the context of ecocriticism and trauma studies which supplement traditional, though still influential, positions, such as that posed by Wolfgang Iser. The most powerful interpretive shift in twentieth-century realism can be recognised as the realism of (re)presentation that mediates in the transfer of changes. One of its most powerful branches belongs to post-Holocaust literature, which includes tensions between referentiality, representation, and realism. The animal is entangled in the discussion as the paradigm of the mute victim in chapter two, "The Animal and the Mute as a Paradigm of the Victim," allowing me to describe the experience of humans and nonhumans as complete, absolute, and inaccessible vulnerability with the help of fiction. This has nothing in common with objectivity, although its ambition is to get as close as possible to the probability of representation.

The aim of the second part, titled "Zoonarrations," is to capture how animals are diversified due to their sensual features and how differently (by imagining their biological and psychological needs) they experience reality. To indicate the animal point of view, I consider and draw inspiration from the current criticism of anthropocentrism, mainly Cary

Wolfe's concept of posthumanism, which is presented in chapter three: "Posthumanism and Its Animal Voices in Literature."

Using posthumanistic (also referred to as "postanthropocentric") reflection, I extend the importance of the "animal" functioning as a missing link between people and nature, and offer an alternative cognitive model of the world, essentially realistic if we include the specific ethology, behaviour, psychology, and character of the species. But animals may also focus on a dialectic of emotional involvement and power abuse in human relationships with the nonhuman world, which is depicted in the Derridian interpretation of the poem "Snake" presented in chapter four, "On D. H. Lawrence's 'Snake' that Slips out of the Text: Derrida's Reading of the Poem." This also explains the significant links between ecocritics and animal studies, which in (post)humanism are determined by the cultural change in the perception and representation of animals. In literature, the prospect of nonhuman animals, presented from the perspective of how specific and different the ways of perceiving and experiencing the world may be, provides an opportunity to introduce another variant of realistic narrative. The fifth chapter, "Introducing Zoocriticism (the Theory of Animal Narratives)," uses the example of a non-vulnerable protagonist, a resilient tiger who entirely dominates the poem by Czyzewski. Due to the fact that literature permits the animal point of view, it may become a source of knowledge, providing missing narration about other species which the book refers to as "zoonarration."

The function of zoonarration contextualises part three, titled "The Presence of Animal Vulnerability," where collected essays provide analyses of chosen texts of culture, indicating the problem of animals' misrepresentation in the experience of reality. Chapter six, "Rembrandt's *Slaughtered Ox*: the Animal Referent Made Present," outlines contemporary readings of this painting within the theories of Mieke Bal, Hélène Cixous, and Carol Adams, and their varying interpretations of what might be understood by the vulnerability of Rembrandt's ox. Chapter seven penetrates the space of the circus, guided by a zoocentric narration from Ossendowski's *Menagerie* as a way of expressing animals' vulnerable experience. In the last chapter, "War Memorials to Animals from the Anthropocene Age," I show how the ideological machine of war denaturalised animals and their image because of the human need to commemorate animal victims that suffered and died in major military conflicts.

I intentionally close this book with the Anthropocene's influence on cultural narration, indicating particular transformations in how we

experience reality, building theories of resilient or vulnerable activities. In my opinion, as among the scholars[3] I have come across (although I believe there are just a few interesting examples of this), the human impact, global warming, and related environmental crises are reflected in how we write, read, and interpret cultural texts. For a more in-depth understanding of how living in the Anthropocene changes patterns in the building of our knowledge, we look for new tenets of cultural narration which frame the experience of a fragile world and silence our human dominance and process of devastation.

One of these tenets, missing from previous discussions about the pre-anthropogenic period, can be provided by nonhuman representatives that bring real agency into the posthuman experience of vulnerability. Animals redirect our reflection from the past and hypothetical future to the present moment that we, humans, do not capture; not just because we have lost the ability to perceive and refer to the present—in comparison to other animals, such as chimpanzees, we do not possess an eidetic memory any more, though we used to have it in the previous evolutionary stage of living when the environment was hostile and hazardous to us—but because the present does not affect our narration adequately.

Since we lack experience of the present moment, we very often do not understand the animal condition in captivity, in relation to us, in the changing environment dominated by homo sapiens. But we also do not grasp what is fragile and real in the experience of the present, as if these two sides of experience were not interrelated for us. And yet, addressing humans' deficient perception of realism may look like leaving the area of fiction that used to abstract its cultural reality from "here and now"; flying away from social and practical problems into conscious or unconscious figments of imagination; envisaging solipsistically that all reality is controlled by human minds, as suggested in the last stanza of William Blake's poem "The Human Abstract":

> The Gods of the earth and sea,
> Sought thro' Nature to find this Tree,
> But their search was all in vain:

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[3] See Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions. The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015); Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge. The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

There grows one in the Human Brain.[4]

Though the human idea of culture, the Tree of Knowledge abstracted from material and present reality, is very deeply inscribed into our experience, influencing our reading, understanding, and accommodating; it is posed as an obstacle in this book for us to recognise how unprepared we are for the Anthropocene's crisis, as reflected in cultural narratives which omit the real threat. The inclusion of different and, to some extent, similar animal experiences signifies a return to narrating fiction in the texts of culture that leave space for the nonhuman animal perspective and relocate human recipients who need to be reminded that the so-called natural environment cannot be controlled since it belongs to the chain of living organisms and matter greater than the human construction of knowledge (but perhaps not the imagination, which is another question).

While it is difficult to recognise how unpredictable the conditions we are facing in the present are—always a problem whenever any catastrophe, natural or political, occurs, revealing our unreadiness to face the present— this book, in its overall modest intention, aims to find fissures in the texts of culture which present animal vulnerability as a bridge to reality.

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[4] William Blake, *Collected Poems*, ed. W. B. Yeats (London: Routledge, 2002), 77.

PART ONE:

REALISM, REFERENTIALITY, AND THE VULNERABLE

CHAPTER ONE

REDEFINING REALISM AND NEW INTERPRETATIVE POSSIBILITIES

The connection between texts and reality, by which we mean the referentiality of literature, is the main problem connected with ecocriticism.[1] This is why redefining realism relates to negotiating anew the relationship between text and both physical and hyper-textual reality. My aim, however, is not to systematically outline the tradition of understanding realism, but to show it in a certain profile which comes from the perspective and need of ecocriticism, and specifically the theory of representation in its mimetic sphere, where "signs must somehow overlap with the hyper-signified world."[2] This "somehow" imitation, which defines creativity, begs the question about the realness of the reality presented in literary texts, on the one hand being *some kind* of analogon in a world as it exists and experienced by the reader of the text and/or containing within it the possibility of realisation, the realness of potentiality, the probable model of the world.

Questions about the realness of meaning within a literary text inevitably bring up Aristotle's classic theory of *mimesis*, in which a striving towards *catharsis* is key, under the influence of such a shaping of a text which works upon the reader. Regardless of the interpretation of the word

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[1] Patrick D. Murphy, *Ecocritical Explorations in literary And Cultural Studies. Fences, Boundaries, and Fields* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009), 17–32; Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), especially the chapter "Questions of Mimesis," 30–44; Buell himself later admits that the most frequently cited definition of ecocriticism is found in the first anthology of ecocritical texts (*Ecocriticism Reader*) edited by Cheryll Glotfelty, which simply states: "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." See Buell, "Ecocriticism. Some Emerging Trends," *Qui parle* 19 (2) (2011): 88.

[2] Michal P. Markowski, "O reprezentacji" ["On Representation"], in *Kulturowa teoria literatury: Glowne pojecia i problemy* [*Cultural Theory of Literature. Main Concepts and Problems*], eds. Michal P. Markowski and Ryszard Nycz (Krakow: Universitas, 2010), 297.

catharsis, according to Aristotle it is helpful to use emotions, such as in tragedy. For a contemporary audience it is even more convincing: the emotional impact of the text depends on its psychological plausibility.

Erich Auerbach is an important voice in this tradition of recognising the connection between reality and literature, stressing in his *Mimesis* that the reader should feel a part of the constructed history,[3] and though he was specifically referring to Biblical texts, in future analyses he also expanded the scope of this rule. Similarly, Ryszard Nycz, in his *Literature as a Trail of Reality*, continues the consideration related to the theory of representation, explaining that we lack direct access to reality as reality is the world experienced, such as the one which has influence on us and by its very nature reminds us of a text. This is analogous to the situation in which (modern) literature appears before symbolic arrangements, revealing something, showing it, making it present, perhaps calling into being and demanding that meaning is attached.[4]

The question of realism in ecocriticism also appears at a certain cultural point at which researchers no longer consider the problem of language[5] which characterises linguistic phrasing as a priority, but say openly that literature is once again naming reality. This is happening alongside a return to the mimetic tradition, though the modelling of experience takes place in a different fashion, no longer possessing the character of a mirrored reflection of reality, instead becoming a presentation of certain potentialities in a realistic modus. Literature, precisely because of this connection with the world, remains dangerous, impacting upon emotions and rearranging well-worn avenues of thought: "One could say from this perspective [of experiences] that humans are retroactive animals: that which they do and strive towards they also change, to a certain degree, both that which they had been before and the world which they experience."[6]

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[3] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Thought*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 2013), 18–19.
[4] Ryszard Nycz, *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistosci. Poetyka epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* [*Literature as a Trail of Reality. Poetics of Epiphany in the Modern Polish Literature*] (Krakow: Universitas, 2001), 12.
[5] Markowski, *Kulturowa teoria literatury 2*; Ryszard Nycz (ed.), *Poetyki, problematyki, interpretacje* [*Poetics, issues, interpretation*] (Krakow: Teresa Walas Universitas, 2012), 44.
[6] Markowski, *Kulturowa teoria literatury 2*, 54.

As shown by Dario Villanueva, one does not have to identify realism with a specific school or method, but can simply take into consideration that mimetic permanence leads to a creative development of reality.[7] In a similar way, the challenge posed by Lawrence Buell for a return to realism in literature focused on the protection of the natural world is expressed most dramatically in the book *The Environmental Imagination*.[8] We are not dealing here with realism which reduces literature to a solely one-way representation of texts aligned with reality, or the linking of the representing entity with that being represented in some sort of construct-monolith, as Dana Phillips tried to accuse Buell of doing in her *The Truth of Ecology*.[9] Yet, as Buell counters, we are rather talking about a defined sort of *environmental referentiality* which forms an integral part of literary works.[10] Besides, he has previously written about a return to realism in the meaning of giving a realistic, and not metaphoric, sense to the so-called background, the *setting* of the text, by which we understand the place which could take on the function of a, "literal reference or as an object of retrieval or contemplation for its own sake."[11] In *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, he stresses the importance of the aesthetic, conceptual, and ideological meaning of the environment—"environmental ground **matters"**[12]—accentuating the last word, which has a double meaning in the English language: signifying and being manifest.

Buell's position shows that it is worth differentiating between either mimetic or critical realism and the sort of realism which talks about a reality different to that which is actual and material, but remains connected with it, in order to not subject ecocriticism to accusations of a desire to return literature to a realism which equates a naively understood replica of the world. In the words of realist theoretician Frederic Jameson, the world of great realistic novelists from the nineteenth century was not natural, but historic.[13] Hence, realism demands an additional definition, a development

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[7] Dario Villanueva, *Theories of Literary Realism*, trans. Michai. I. Spariosu and Santiago Garcia-Castanon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 9.
[8] Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 83–114.
[9] Dana Philips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 159–84, especially 163–4, 175.
[10] Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, 32.
[11] Ibid., 85.
[12] Ibid., 33.
[13] Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca NY.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 193.

of the kind of relation between reality and text which, on the one hand, would be in agreement with a general intention of ecocriticism based on the need for a critical literary relating to the world in which we live, and on the other would consider criticism of nineteenth-century realism.

This is far from simple, seeing as, "these same readers display critical ignorance and imaginative impatience when faced with alternative-genre literary-realist texts that question the self-evident mimetic-materialist nature of reality itself."[14] Therefore, it seems that writing understood as copying reality is being transformed into a process of intervening between the text and the physical world, or else becomes an alternative experience of the word. It is also key to differentiating between the intervention of ecological realism and allegorical realism, which constantly provides stable meanings to the bearers of the natural world in texts representing at the time a part of the world of anthropocentric tradition without going beyond it, where a fox equates cunning, an owl wisdom, a dog loyalty to humans, and so on.

Against allegorical realism

> the world's material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be "read" and interpreted as forming narratives, stories. Developing in bodily forms and in discursive formulations, and arising in coevolutionary landscapes of natures and signs, the stories of matter are everywhere: in the air we breathe, the food we eat, in the things and beings of this world, within and beyond the human realm.[15]

The literary theoretical link between literature and physical (material) reality or even the influence which literature has on reality (and vice versa—how reality shapes literature) are questions addressed through ecocritical considerations[16] emerging out of the idea that the changing

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[14] Don Adams, *Alternative Paradigms of Literary Real* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 10.
[15] Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, "Introduction. Stories Come to Matter," in *Material Ecocriticism*, eds. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 1.
[16] Among the latest publications see Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby (eds.), *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); Patrick D. Murphy, *Transversal Ecocritical Praxis: Theoretical Arguments, Literary Analysis, and Cultural Critique* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013); Jeffrey J. Cohen and Lowell Duckert (eds.), *Elemental*

conception of nature and the natural world is different to our understanding of human beings as creatures separated from natural reality, putting the stress on the relations and exchange between the human and the natural world. Their presentation and reception, through cultural products, can also invite critical or analytical reflexions of a natural nature.[17]

Realism no longer depends on a classical copying of nature, but rather on discovering cultural concealed connections, bonds, and entanglements between humans and their organic, ecological surroundings, especially those from the animal world. In this approach, reality presents itself as an open space, undefined, posing anew the puzzles of relations between humans and other beings, other species, as well as the question of what realism is, which models of co-existence we function within, when we want to evade the dominant role of humanity or phenomenologically frame it in parentheses.

Answering this question from an ecocritical perspective, one could attempt to further define realism in which it is not things which are referents but elements which constitute natural environments and living, often sensitively responsive beings; in this context, the theory is sensitive to the reframing away from the real world, experience from beyond the text, to all strategies and literary connections which lead to the discovery of the animals and other species living around us. And, in spite of the fact that we are not dealing with the copying of nature in literature, the world which is imagined realistically is found (even if this is illusory) somewhere close to us, or else affects readers in such a way that it brings them closer to a nature-based reality, moving imperceptibly between the interior and the external text.

Ecocriticism could make reference to Jakobson and that which he calls the "referential function"[18]—the essentiality of referencing the text to a para-

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Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

[17] The city can be even perceived as a part of natural reality, a space which has entered into the natural ecosystem and created links with the natural surroundings. See Jennifer Wolch, "Zoöpolis," in *Metamorphoses of the Zoo: Animal Encounter after Noah*, ed. Ralph R. Acampora (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), 221–43.

[18] Roman Jakobson, *Linguistics and Poetics* in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas Sebeok (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1960), 356; see also Wendy Wheeler, "Natural Play, Natural Metaphor, and Natural Stories: Biosemiotic Realism," in *Material Ecocriticism*, eds. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 75-77.

textual situation, emerging from an interest in introducing a new interpretative context. This is why the connection with reality and the mimicking—or intermediating—of it in a text is so important to this approach, making it possible to show the effect of reality, but not as understood by Roland Barthes where hyper textual reality vanishes and all that remains is that which is in the text and in connection with the presenting of the text is imagined, without the need to reference the subject of the imagination, to the "signified."[19] Realness and the ways of generating it have—in contradiction with Barthes' framing—a causal function in ecocritical interpretation. In the same way, referentiality, but also representation, are concepts which could transfer from realism to ecocriticism, retaining their nineteenth-century conceptual meanings and messages which aim to bring us closer to the reality being presented without replicating it, especially when using critical perspectives indicating the need to remodel human practices in the sense of non-allegorical, and therefore non-humanised, natural reality.

How does one present the approach of literature read from a realistic perspective towards wild nature if we postulate its status as autonomous towards the human world? The question which emerges once again touches upon the idea of the representation of nature in textual form. The realism of presentation thus disagrees with the postulate of nature as dehumanised, since in reality we are dealing with a nature already somehow controlled by human beings. Technology and the evolution of ecological consciousness often go hand in hand with the need to supervise and impose rule over as-yet unspoilt regions, while anthropocentrism causes the exploitation and subjectification of animals. Therefore, this cannot be.

Realism involves, above all, a specific interpretation which allows us to indicate or imagine a real designation (e.g. the animal which has the experience). It restores the sense of presence in the world, and differently to the existing models. It moves away from post-structuralist and post-modernist formulas, which state that the whole of our experience can be explained in the text and through it in the name of mediating the text and extrapolating the relationship between the text and the nature presented, to the connection between humanity and the natural world, which has undergone a civilizational separation.

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[19] Roland Barthes, *The Reality Effect* in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 141–8.

Hence, the abandoning of allegorisation involves the risk of alienation, confusion, and stripping of meaning within nature in a world dominated by human signs. One can see this in the fable, "which is usually a story ostensibly about *animals* but actually about *human* beings."[20] What we are discussing here are the narrations of nature which do not utilise allegorical development. They abandon the presentation of animals in forms of "personified abstractions"[21] as well as the whole idea of using figures taken from nonhuman creatures to substitute human affairs. This is when we inevitably approach the question of whether, in our understanding of literature thus far, this is at all possible. Have we not encountered some kind of anthropological border between our ability to express the experiences of others and the taking part in a world other than the human, wanting to preserve nature as tangible?

What can be of interest here is the hint emerging from reflections on literature that comes from the most inhuman and extreme conditions, whose experimental nature but also need to root discourse in reality which reminds us of facts and events have become so powerful that they lead to the possibility of reconstructing experiences which are completely alien and inexpressible for human beings—by which we mean literature which appeared after the Holocaust and is connected with the genre of traumatic realism. This has a great deal in common with something I am trying to explore in terms of the idea of animal muteness.

(Post)traumatic Realism and Deficiency in Reality

The question of our ability to express extreme experiences which exceed our means to comprehend them was initiated by post-Holocaust literature.[22] At the same time, this caused us once again to reconsider the realistic presentations of that which characterises our experience and the kinds of changes taking place in literature itself, abandoning the understanding of realism in the category of style as a "method of

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[20] Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Writing and Reading of Allegory," in *The Poetry of Search and the Poetry of Statement: On Dante and Other Writers* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 203.

[21] Ibid., 22.

[22] Teresa Walas, "Literatura (kultura) jako selekcja i projektowanie doswiadczenia. Casus: 'mały realizm'," in *Kulturowa teoria literatury: Glowne pojecia i problemy* [*Cultural Theory of Literature. Main Concepts and Problems*], eds. Michal P. Markowski and Ryszard Nycz (Krakow: Universitas, 2010), 275.

reading."[23] Attempts to extract the qualities characteristic of Holocaust literature have proven very useful in terms of trying to define the relationship between vulnerable realism and traumatic realism, where the realism of telling, narration, and poetics in the meaning of believability is more interesting than that which actually took place.

Anne Whitehead, the author of *Trauma Fiction*, states that she is more interested in that which does in fact operate within narratives of the Holocaust rather than the factual content. A similar relationship between the reality of natural facts and the real experience of events, such as the extinction of species, is part of the ecological reception of fiction indicated by ecocritical interpretation, hence my attempt at a comparison. Likewise, in relation to animal experience we lack access to factual records.

A text has to be convincing, have the air of authenticity, seeing as it tells about true (albeit impossible to imagine) narratives, such as the memoirs of Binjamin Wilkomirski[24] or *The Painted Bird* by Jerzy Kosinski. In such narrations we are not dealing with a faithful record of memory, but about reliving something, re-experiencing, hence these two authors' use of the present tense which projects past scenarios onto the here and now. We then notice a non-objectifying perspective, like the literary device of using a child's point of view, which causes the reader to feel greater empathy. Besides, a child often notices the kind of details missed by grownups, details which the child describes without knowing what is actually going on.[25]

Michael Rothberg, who coined the phrase "traumatic realism" in order to characterise the cultural phenomena which followed the Holocaust, argues that texts about trauma seek a new modality of realism in order to

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[23] Aleksandra Szczepan, "Realizm i trauma—rekonesans" ["Realism and Trauma: Reconnaissance"], *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2012): 222; this issue also contains interesting articles about the redefinition of realism in the context of trauma: Katarzyna Bojarska, "Czas na realism—(post)traumatyczny" ["Time for (Post)Traumatic Realism], 8–13; Jakub Momro, "Apokalipsa i wirtualnosc. Dwa nowoczesne paradygmaty realizmu" ["Apocalipse and Virtuality: Two Modern Paradigms of Realism"], 48–69; Katarzyna Bojarska, "Dwie wieze, dwa wydarzenia: Art Spiegelman i trauma odzyskana" ["Two Towers, Two Events: Art Spiegelman and the Regained Trauma"], 70–90.
[24] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 32.
[25] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 38.