

# Following the Animal



# Following the Animal:

*Power, Agency, and Human-  
Animal Transformations  
in Modern, Northern-European  
Literature*

By

Ann-Sofie Lönngren

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Following the Animal: Power, Agency, and Human-Animal  
Transformations in Modern, Northern-European Literature

By Ann-Sofie Lönngren

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To Emilia  
*Protector of the Ants*  
and Samuel  
*Turtle-Lover*

Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals;  
the same fate awaits them both:  
As one dies, so dies the other.  
All have the same breath;  
humans have no advantage over animals.  
Everything is meaningless.

*Ecclesiastes 3:19*

Dear God  
I would like to be a snake sometimes,  
but only when I choose it.  
Andy

*(Children's Letters to God)*

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*One of Odysseus' Men Transformed Into a Pig*. Walters Art Museum. C. 400 BCE. Public domain.

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Ann-Sofie Lönngren  
March, 23, 2015, Uppsala



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

This is a book about reading practices, power, agency, modernity, human-animal transformations,<sup>1</sup> and the tension between anthropocentric and more-than-anthropocentric features in literary texts.<sup>2</sup> It consists of five chapters, which can be read together or separately.<sup>3</sup> The aim is to discuss the ways in which literary human-animal transformations in modern literature from Europe's northernmost part are structured by power and agency, and how these aspects relate to an ancient tradition in the Western sphere,<sup>4</sup> a modern human/animal divide, and the specific (literary,

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this book, I mostly employ the terms “human” and “animal” as shorthand for the more accurate but longer phrase “human and non-human animals”. In this praxis I am inspired by Laura Brown’s *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes. Humans and Other Animals in the Modern Literary Imagination* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 2010), 2. Moreover, the term “transformation” is used in a broad sense and thus refers to a range of alterations and transgressions in relation to humans and animals, marked changes “in form, nature, or appearance” (“Transformation,” *The Oxford Dictionaries*, accessed March 25, 2014,

<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/transformation>).

<sup>2</sup> “Anthropocentrism” here is understood as the notion that “human” is at the centre of the world, that there is a clear and stable divide between human and animal, and moreover that “the human” is hierarchically superior to “the animal”. See, for example, Wendy Woodward, *The Animal Gaze. Animal Subjectivities in Southern African Narratives* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), 5–6; Gary Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents. The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 1–3; and Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2000), 92–95.

<sup>3</sup> Due to my attempt to have the chapters function both alone and together, certain references and arguments are repeated throughout this book.

<sup>4</sup> My point of departure means that I situate this study within a context of Western literary history. However, this does not mean that human-animal transformations are more common or more interesting in this sphere compared to other ones, nor that the Western literary heritage and canon are neutral concepts with un-

political, religious, material, social, and so on) conditions characterizing their own times and places. In parallel, I discuss the ways in which an anthropocentric bias in reading practices generally applied within twentieth-century literary scholarship has contributed to making part of the knowledge produced in this figure invisible. The analysis consist of applications of the interpretational method of *following the animal* in readings of three, internationally well-known literary texts written by authors from Northern Europe, all dating from the decades around the turn of the twentieth century: *Tschandala* (1888) by Swedish author August Strindberg (1849–1912), in which a man turns into a dog; *The Wolf's Bride* (1928) by Finnish writer Aino Kallas (1878–1956), in which a woman turns into a wolf; and the short story “The Monkey” (1934) by Danish author Isak Dinesen (pen name for Karen Blixen, 1885–1962), in which a woman and a monkey turn into one another. Ultimately, this method reveals the function of the literary figure of transformation in these texts as multi-faceted sites of knowledge about the human-animal relationship, with general as well as specific relevance. In the conclusion, I discuss the significance of these results in relation to the field of literary scholarship.

### **Background: The Flaying of Otr's Skin**

We start sometime in the 700s BCE in the Greek archipelago, just as the great adventurer Odysseus and his men land their large ship at the witch Circe's island Aiaia. Some of the men are sent out on reconnaissance and, finally, several days later, only one terrified man returns, Eurylochus. He tells Odysseus what happened when he and the other men knocked on the door to Circe's house:

They called her and she came down, unfastened the door, and bade them enter. They, thinking no evil, followed her, all except Eurylochus, who suspected mischief and stayed outside. When she had got them into her house, she set [sic] them upon benches and seats and mixed them a mess with cheese, honey, meal, and Pramnian wine but she drugged it with wicked poisons to make them forget their homes, and when they had drunk she turned them into pigs by a stroke of her wand, and shut them up in her pigsties. They were like pigs—head, hair, and all, and they grunted just as pigs do; but their senses were the same as before, and they remembered

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challenged, permanently established aesthetic qualities. Rather, I sketch this background in order to point out the potential of the literary figure of human-animal transformations, which I then proceed to subject to critical scrutiny from the perspective of, for example, gender, sexuality, race and species.



everything. Thus then were they shut up squealing, and Circe threw them some acorns and beech masts such as pigs eat, but Eurylochus hurried back to tell me about the sad fate of our comrades. He was so overcome with dismay that though he tried to speak he could find no words to do so; his eyes filled with tears and he could only sob and sigh, till at last we forced his story out of him, and he told us what had happened to the others.<sup>5</sup>

When Odysseus finds out what happened, he takes his sword and heads off to seek out Circe. On the way he meets, as a stroke of luck, the god Hermes who gives him a magic herb that functions as an antidote to Circe's potion. Thus, when Odysseus arrives at Circe's house, he can drink the entire cup of wine she offers him without effect. Circe is impressed by this and eventually agrees to turn his men back to human shape. This means that the clever Odysseus has succeeded in his mission, but this scene represents a further achievement: The transcriber of the *Odyssey* formulated a foundational, literary depiction of a human-animal transformation within the Western sphere.

A striking aspect of this transformation is that it is based on what we today would refer to as anthropocentric understandings of the relationship between human and animal, that is, the idea that there is a distinct, once-and-for-all given boundary between these two categories, and that some kind of magic is therefore required to transcend it. Another anthropocentric aspect of this narrative is that it is portrayed as something terrible for a human being to become an animal: Eurylochus is petrified as he tells Odysseus about the transformation, the men cry as they enter the sty, and Odysseus is furious when he hears about the event. These reactions imply a hierarchical relationship between the categories "human" and "animal", where the former is so highly valued that a person would never voluntarily become non-human; consequently, such a transformation is deeply unwanted, humiliating and tragic. This view was frequently presented in ancient Greek philosophy, in particular by Aristotle, who claims that although "man" is also an animal, he ranks the highest of them all; all the other animals exist for his sake.<sup>6</sup> As both Juliet Clutton-Brock and Gary Steiner note, this attitude creates an anthropocentric foundation for Western philosophy which has lasted well into modern times. During

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<sup>5</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, accessed February 13, 2014, <http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/odyssey.10.x.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Juliet Clutton-Brock, "Aristotle, The Scale of Nature, and Modern Attitudes to Animals," *Social Research* (1995:3), 424–426; Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents*, 53–92.

medieval times, the idea was most notably found in the Judeo-Christian tradition, according to which the world is hierarchically organized into a Scale of Nature with God on top, followed by angels, humans, animals, minerals and plants.<sup>7</sup>

I am not, however, the first to note the anthropocentric discourse in the story of Circe and Odysseus' men; as early as the year 100 CE, Greek historian and essayist Plutarch wrote a continuation of the Circe story (in much the same manner as writers of fan fiction do in our days). In "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti", Odysseus once again seeks out Circe and confronts her with the fact that there are still swine on her island that were once men. Odysseus demands that these pigs are returned to human form, but Circe's response is unexpected: First you must ask them if this is what they want. Circe introduces him to a pig wandering by whom she calls Gryllus. When Odysseus asks his question, this very eloquent pig not only confirms Circe's assumption—that the men prefer to remain pigs—but he also questions the very foundations of the hierarchical relationship between humans and animals. Disrespectfully, he addresses one of the greatest of heroes in Greek mythology with these words:

You see, we don't any of us think much of you either, for evidently it was a farce, that talk of your cleverness and your fame as one whose intelligence far surpassed the rest—a man who boggles at the simple matter of changing from worse to better because he hasn't considered the matter. For just as children dread the doctor's doses and run from lessons, the very things that, by changing them from invalids and fools, will make them healthier and wiser, just so you have shied away from the change from one shape to another. At this very moment you are not only living in fear and trembling as a companion of Circe, frightened that she may, before you know it, turn you into a pig or a wolf, but you are also trying to persuade us, who live in an abundance of good things, to abandon them, and with them the lady that provides them, and sail away with you, when we have again become men, the most unfortunate of creatures!<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Clutton-Brock, "Aristotle, The Scale of Nature, and Modern Attitudes to Animals," 426–431; Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents*, 1, 112–131. For a thorough examination of this discussion in Ancient Greece, see Richard Sorabji's *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Plutarch, "Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti [c. 100 BCE]," in *Plutarch's Moralia XII*, transl. Harold Cherniss and William C. Helmbold, Loeb Classical Library 406 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 499.

Plutarch's text is probably intended to be comical, and the paring of Odysseus versus a pig certainly makes the story quite entertaining (if today's reader is able to ignore the troubling homophobia Gryllus expresses later in the story). However, it's not the comedic potential I'm focusing on in Plutarch's dialogue but, rather, the fact that it presents a counter-narrative to Homer's story of Circe. Albeit in bantering form, the above narrative subverts the anthropocentrism that is fundamental to the Circe story, meaning that the taken-for-granted "truths" about the hierarchy between human and animal and the absolute boundaries between these two categories are questioned. Thus, another perspective is offered, challenging the parts of ancient Greek philosophy that will make up the foundation for future anthropocentrism by highlighting, in Steiner's words, a "tendency throughout the history of Western philosophy to recognize the limits of old conceptions of ourselves and animals and to seek new conceptions that adequately reflect our experience of humanity and animality."<sup>9</sup> The dialogue between the stories of Circe and Gryllus creates a tension which shows that literature was one place where this challenge took place—a tension that, according to Bryan C. Alkemeyer in his doctoral thesis *Circe Stories. Transformations, Animals, and Natural History, 1550–1750*, has continued to re-establish itself time and again in the history of Western literature.

In this study, Alkemeyer claims that Plutarch's handling of the Circe story has given rise to a hitherto-neglected Western literary tradition, flourishing from the Renaissance to the 1700s and made up of works by Giambattista Gelli (1498–1563), Edmund Spenser (c. 1552–1599), John Milton (1608–1674) and Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), among others. Like Plutarch's story, Alkemeyer claims, these works simultaneously contain a critique of and an alternative to anthropocentrism, and they function as "a major vehicle for arguments about the human/animal relationship".<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents*, 1; for a discussion of other texts by Plutarch about the human-animal relationship, see 93–111. As Brown and Sorabji note, in these texts Plutarch argues in line with the Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope, who claimed that animals are, in fact, superior to humans (Brown, *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes*, 8; Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals*, 159–161).

<sup>10</sup> Bryan C. Alkemeyer, *Circe Stories. Transformations, Animals, and Natural History, 1550–1750* (Ithaca: Cornell University, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2012), accessed May 5, 2014, <https://dspace.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/31399>. Some of these texts (along with others) were previously discussed by John Simons, albeit with no reference to

political potential of this tradition has also been discussed by Marina Warner, who points out that Plutarch's dialogue about Gryllus was one of his most popular, and that it influenced the political debate in France all the way into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as one of the very first texts about animal rights.<sup>11</sup>

More specifically in relation to Northern Europe, I argue that such a tension between different world views (which we today would call anthropocentric versus non- or more-than-anthropocentric) can also be found in pre-modern literary texts within this geographic sphere. In the texts included in the Old Norse Sagas, created between the years 800 and 1400 CE (mostly in what is now Iceland and Norway), human-animal transformations are abundant,<sup>12</sup> and although an equally clear dialogue between two specific texts—like the direct connection between the stories about Circe and Gryllus—cannot be found, there are certainly characters that display a tension between such different world views. One such figure is the multi-faceted and temperamental god Loki, who stands out as one of the gods who most regularly and systematically transforms his body, originally human-like in shape, into that of an animal.<sup>13</sup> This characteristic has contributed to one of the most influential understandings of Loki during the 1900s as that of a typical “trickster”,<sup>14</sup> a conceptualization that was revised in the 2000s by Stephanie von Schnurbein. Instead of seeing

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Plutarch, in *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 140–172.

<sup>11</sup> Marina Warner, “The Enchantments of Circe,” *Raritan* 17 (1997:1), 1–23.

<sup>12</sup> Kristina Jennbert, *Animals and Humans. Recurrent Symbiosis in Archaeology and Old Norse Religion* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2011), 188–195; H.R. Ellis Davidson, “Shape-Shifting in the Old Norse Sagas,” in *Animals in Folklore*, eds. J.R. Porter and W.M.S. Russell (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer Ltd. and Rowman and Littlefield for the Folklore Society, 1978), 126. Another pre-modern tradition that could have been used to exemplify tensions displayed in cultural representations of the human-animal relationship is the one phrased by the indigenous Sámi people, inhabiting, even in ancient times, the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia (Sápmi). The central place of transformations and transgressions between human and animal in the different kinds of Sámi cultures is also visible in modern literature within this field, for example Kirste Paltto's collection of short stories *Stjålet*, transl. Ellen Anna Gaup, Mikkel A. Gaup and Laila Stein (Karasjok: Davvi Girji, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Jennbert defines Odin and Loke as the most frequent shape-shifters in Norse mythology (*Animals and Humans*, 193).

<sup>14</sup> Stephanie von Schnurbein, “The Function of Loki in Snorri Sturluson's ‘Edda,’” *History of Religions* 40 (2000:2), 113.

Loki as a coherent character, she claims, we should study his literary function, which in von Schnurbein's reading is "closely related to the exchange of women within the systems of marriage and reproduction".<sup>15</sup> This role is made possible by his unique position in relation to the social hierarchies that characterize these stories. Loki is himself the father of the wolf Fenris (whose mother is a giantess), the Midgard Serpent, and the goddess of death Hel. As von Schnurbein notes, he thus breaks taboos regarding species, social class and sexuality but also gender, as he at one point turns into a mare, mates with the stallion Svadilfari, and gives birth to Odin's eight-legged horse Sleipnir.<sup>16</sup>

I agree with von Schnurbein that Loki's transgressive character gives him the qualities necessary to fulfil a very specific function in the Old Norse sagas, which, from her vantage point, is associated with social norms regarding gender and sexuality. But I would also like to point to the fact that the sovereignty with which Loki enters into and, later on, abandons the bodies of different species indicate that he masters them all, knowing their natures and boundaries and how to use them for his own purposes. Considering Loki's relationship to the animals he transforms himself into, the perspective is what we today would call anthropocentric. In this sense, he undeniably resembles Circe, who has a similar power over the human/animal distinction in *The Odyssey*. Just as von Schnurbein argues that Loki's transgressive character allows him to function as a supporter of the patriarchal system, so I would argue that it also enables him to be understood as a supporter of anthropocentrism (power structures that are in many ways interconnected, as I will discuss later in the book). And much in the same manner that Circe's anthropocentrism is not visible until Gryllus enters into the literary history, so the underlying paradigm for Loki's actions is not apparent until he meets the figure that I want to put forward as the Nordic context's equivalent to Gryllus: Otr.

In Old Norse literature, the story of Otr appears in several different sources closely related to one another, but the tale is most elaborate in *The Saga of the Volsungs* (c. 1250 CE). Here, we learn about the evil Fafner, who is later turned into a big snake and killed by the heroic Sigurd. The story of how Fafner's evil evolved is told by his brother, Regin, and begins with a description of the third sibling, Otr:

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<sup>15</sup> von Schnurbein, "The Function of Loki in Snorri Sturluson's 'Edda,'" 119.

<sup>16</sup> von Schnurbein, "The Function of Loki in Snorri Sturluson's 'Edda,'" 121.

(He) was a great fisherman, far more expert than others, and during the day he assumed the shape of an otter and was always in the river, bringing up fish with his mouth. What he caught was brought to his father, and this was a great help to him. He had many of the characteristics of an otter, he came home late, eating alone and with his eyes shut, for he couldn't bear to watch it growing less.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the peaceful and somewhat sad characterization of Otr, it is with him the dramatic development begins at the Andvari Falls, rich in fish. Regin continues:

My brother Otr always used to go into these falls and would bring up fish in his mouth and lay them on the bank one by one. Odin, Loki and Hœnir were journeying along, and they came to the Andvari Falls. Otr had just caught a salmon and was eating it with his eyes shut on the river bank. Loki took up a stone, struck the otter and killed him. The Æsir thought they were very lucky in their hunting and they skinned the otter.<sup>18</sup>

When the murder is discovered, the gods are required to pay a ransom in gold, and it is this ransom that Fafner becomes so obsessed with that he takes it with him into the wilderness and guards it in the shape of an enormous snake. From there, the story continues in struggle, and Otr's destiny thus fulfils a narrative function: Gods and men must have something to fight about. But I want to linger a while with Otr, his

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<sup>17</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs*, ed. and transl. R.G. Finch (London, Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1965), 25. This description seems accurate for the European otter (which is the kind of otter likely to have been around in the time and place of the creation of *The Saga of the Volsungs*): They often live alone, feed in the evenings, mainly on fish, and they often sleep in their dens, on land. The fact that Otr brings the fish he captures back to his father is also accurate according to historical accounts of how otters have sometimes been trained by humans to fish for them (within the Nordic context, these accounts are summed up by twentieth-century zoologist John Bernström [1903–1989], in *Bernströms Bestiarium. En djurens nordiska kulturhistoria*, ed. Henrik Otterberg [Stockholm: Atlantis, 2008], 544–545). Moreover, otters are known to occasionally keep their eyes closed or cover their eyes with their fore-paws. The reason for this seems to be unclear, but, as we see, the shut eyes are given a literary explanation in this quote from *The Saga of the Volsungs*.

<sup>18</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs*, 25. “The Æsir” refers to the asa-gods, in this case Odin, Loki and Hœnir. The fact that otters sometimes keep their eyes shut, even while eating (see footnote 17), has, historically, rendered them a rather easy target for hunters. Occasionally, hunters’ interests in the unusual thickness of the otter’s fur have brought this species close to extinction.

slumbering eyes, his lonely life as a hardworking fisher and the boundaries between human and animal that his physical form as well as his identity dissolve. For sure, the lack of sharp boundaries or clear hierarchy between these two categories highlighted in Otr's name—which means “otter”—has a counterpart in Gryllus, whose name more or less means “Grunter”.<sup>19</sup> In spite of the fact that there are, of course, also great differences between them (for example, Gryllus is transformed against his will and only later discovers the advantages of being non-human, while Otr is part of an Old Norse and folklorist tradition of shape-shifting), Otr's presence in *The Saga of the Volsungs* captures similar ideas as Gryllus' entry into Western literary history, namely the constructed nature of the anthropocentric worldview and the possibilities to tell other stories and create other worlds, worlds that are not based on notions of human exceptionalism but, rather, pose a threat to it.<sup>20</sup> With such an understanding of Otr, it seems significant that he dies by Loki's hand.

## Human-Animal Transformations, Modern Times

This is a very schematic and sketchy pre-modern background, but I still hope that it makes clear that although the literary history of the human-animal transformation is long and diverse and that this figure is moreover very differently framed through time and space, it seems to form a sort of continuum in that the figure provides simultaneous conditions both for highlighting anthropocentrism as a structure of power, and, as shown in

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<sup>19</sup> Lucas Herchenroeder, “Τί γὰρ τοῦτο πρὸς τὸν λόγον; Plutarch's *Gryllus* and the So-Called *Grylloi*,” *American Journal of Philology* 129 (2008:3), 350. As Herchenroeder notes, Gryllus can also refer to a certain kind of dance. Regarding the Old Norse Sagas, it was not un-common that shapeshifters were called names that referred to the animal species they could transform into, such as Ulv (Wolf) in *Egil's Saga* (c. 1220–1240 CE), and prince Bjorn (Bear) in *Saga of King Hrolf Kraki* (c. 1400 CE). The complexity involved in the Old Norse tradition when giving gods or humans names that correspond to different kind of animals has been discussed by Jennbert, *Animals and Humans*, 184–188.

<sup>20</sup> The idea of non-human animals as “other worlds” was phrased by Barbara Noske in *Humans and Other Animals. Beyond the Boundaries of Anthropology* (Winchester: Pluto Press, 1989), xi, and developed by Donna J. Haraway in “Otherworldly Conversations, Terran Topics, Local Terms [2004],” in *Material Feminisms*, eds. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 174–182. Haraway has also discussed the term “human exceptionalism”, which can be defined as the very core of anthropocentrism, in *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 11–12.

Plutarch's text, explicit arguments for a different order.<sup>21</sup> Has this potential persisted into modernity? If looking at the historical context, the prerequisites are clearly there, which is pointed out in, for example, Philip Armstrong's claim that "human-animal relations have been central to the mission of modernity".<sup>22</sup> On a general level, this seems to have come about by two different sources of influence.

The first realms of influence are Renaissance and Enlightenment philosophers, continuing to reproduce the tension between what we today would call anthropocentrism and resistance, present as far back as ancient times. Anthropocentrism was most notably put forward by René Descartes (1596–1650), whose understanding of animals as soulless machines without the capability to either think or feel legitimized both vivisections and the large-scale use of animals as labour and food in the emergence of modern industry—what Laura Brown has called an "alienating" view of non-human animals. This contrasts with the writings of Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), who instead represents a more-than-anthropocentric view of the relationship between humans and animals. As Brown claims, Montaigne's view is that "humans and nonhuman animals are on a path toward convergence", a view that Brown refers to as "association" and that was a prerequisite for, among other things, the modern-day pet discourse.<sup>23</sup>

The second stream of influence is derived from Charles Darwin (1809–1882), who in *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859) and the subsequent *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) puts forward the thesis that humans are animals among other animals, closely related to apes and without any real uniqueness or

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<sup>21</sup> Simons has argued (a bit rigidly, I think, but nevertheless) that "narratives of transformation" are one of three "methods by which non-humans have become the material of cultural reproduction"; the other two are "symbols" and "anthropomorphism" (*Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation*, 85).

<sup>22</sup> Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), 1. Sherryl Vint makes a similar claim when writing about "the human-animal boundary which structures twenty-first-century life," in *Animal Alterity. Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, *Homeless Dogs and Melancholy Apes*, 8–9. See also Erica Fudge, *Animal* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2002), 92–105; Peter Singer, "Preface," in *Animal Philosophy. Ethics and Identity*, eds. Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), xi; and Steiner, *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents*, 132–152.



specificity.<sup>24</sup> As Carrie Rohman notes, the breakthrough of this thought “signified one of the great ideological pivot points in the modern era”<sup>25</sup> and certainly meant a change in the age-old tension between today’s notions of anthropocentrism and resistance sketched out above. While having just been declared an animal among others, the development of modern Western society was in the process of being constructed upon a rigid human/animal divide, characterized by the large-scale exploitation of animals and the powers of pet-keeping.<sup>26</sup> This paradox was further complicated by the influence of modern times’ major medical and psychological achievements, such as the development of psychoanalysis as well as social and political movements, primarily the intensified colonial withdrawal and the increasing rise of post-colonialism but also the struggle for human rights and social justice connected to the women’s movement, the labour movement, the gay movement, and other similar efforts.<sup>27</sup>

As a result of this paradigmatic collision, during the twentieth century, Western society developed a relationship between humans and animals that is in many ways paradoxical, unreasonable and illogical, in the sense

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<sup>24</sup> For a discussion, see, for example, Fudge, *Animal*, 18–20; and Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals*, 131, 210.

<sup>25</sup> Carrie Rohman, *Stalking the Subject. Modernism and the Animal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 2. See also Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies. The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Derrida has written about the latter part of the twentieth century as characterized by “unprecedented proportions of [...] subjection of the animal” (*The Animal That Therefore I Am* [2006], transl. David Wills [New York: Fordham University Press, 2008], 25, ital. in orig.). See also Noske, *Humans and Other Animals*, 22–39; Keith Tester, *Animals and Society: The Humanity of Animal Rights* (London: Routledge, 1991), 79; and Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 242, 300–301. Indeed, in the twenty-first century, the exploitation of animals and nature has reached such proportions that it has been argued that we are now in fact living in the Anthropocene, a new geo-planetary era characterized by the human impact on planet Earth and its ecosystems. See Paul Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, “The Anthropocene,” *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000).

<sup>27</sup> Of course, this is a complex process that has been widely debated and, moreover, developed differently in different places. For example, Michael Lundblad highlights the intervention of Freud to explain the “explosion of literary and cultural texts focused on animality” that happened in the United States during the decades around the year 1900, of which many “offer striking alternatives to a Darwinian understanding” (*The Birth of a Jungle. Animality in Progressive-Era U.S. Literature and Culture* [Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013], 3–4.

that “animal” is a category that we humans have used to give ourselves basically *carte blanche* to kill, eat, lock up and experiment with but also to give a name, turn into family members, give medical care and give a burial.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, the distinction between “human” and “animal” varies from context to context, as different societies have historically relegated groups of people into the category of animal for different purposes. Indeed, as many scholars have noted before, it is possible to see the atrocities carried out by twentieth-century authoritarian regimes as consequences of these paradoxical views of animals in modern society drawn to an extreme: The dehumanization of certain groups has opened the door for the large-scale executions of humans (particularly during World War II).<sup>29</sup> Thus, as Cary Wolfe notes, “the humanist discourse of species will always be available for us by some humans against other humans as well, to countenance violence against the other of *whatever* species—or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference.”<sup>30</sup> In modern Western society, being defined as “human” or “animal” is a question situated right in the tension between biopolitics and necropolitics,<sup>31</sup> between *bios* and *zoē*,<sup>32</sup> and therefore, ultimately, a matter of life or death.

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<sup>28</sup> What I here call a “paradox” Eileen Crist has described as a “tension” between Cartesian objectification and Darwinian anthropomorphism: a split that characterizes the language employed in animal behavioral science throughout the twentieth century (*Images of Animals. Anthropomorphism and Animal Mind* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999], 1).

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Anat Picks, *Creaturely Poetics. Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 23–51; Vint, *Animal Alterity*, 20; Boria Sax, *Animals in the Third Reich. Pets, Scapegoats, and the Holocaust* (New York, London: Continuum, 2000); and Joanna Bourke, *What it Means to be Human. Reflections from 1791 to the Present* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2011), 182–189.

<sup>30</sup> Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites. American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>31</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* [2002], transl. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 80, and *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* [1995], transl. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 119–188; Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979* [2004], transl. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” transl. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15 (2003:1), 11–40; and Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages. Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2007), 33.

<sup>32</sup> The ancient terms *bios* and *zoē* were re-invoked by Agamben in *Homo Sacer*, 1–12. As Judith Butler claims, in extension this distinction means being

The many facets of this historical development as well as their effects and manifestations in modern literature have been accurately summed up by Rohman:

The post-Darwinian crisis in humanist identity, the production of imperialist otherings, the development of psychoanalysis, the modernist revolt against Enlightenment legacies of rationalism, the twentieth-century eruption of linguistic convention, all these dynamics shape an acute engagement with the discourse of species in literature of the period.<sup>33</sup>

Against this backdrop, modern, Western society seems to fulfil the prerequisites for the tension between anthropocentrism and resistance to be recreated on a more acute level than ever, which makes the human-animal transformation—with its historical background of providing a space for this re-enactment—a particularly relevant figure to focus on when studying the human-animal relationship in modern literature. Indeed, as George Ferzoco and Miriam Gill note, metamorphosis is a relevant area of study both because of its persistence in European culture and because it is a “pervasive concept to raise fundamental questions about the nature and agency of radical change.” Moreover, the simultaneous subversive *and* conservative potentials in this figure, in that the transformation can be both voluntary and liberating or forced and oppressive (as we saw in the pre-modern examples above) ultimately means that the figure is essentially about agency, social change, politics, and power.<sup>34</sup> And although the modern context, as Enrico Giaccherini claims, has perhaps given rise to more degrading, forced changes than classical literature<sup>35</sup>—certainly the case in Strindberg’s *Tschandala*, which I discuss later in this book—the more complex and to some extent liberating potential is clearly also there, often within the frames of that which Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

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conceptualized as a grievable or non-grievable life (Judith Butler, *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable?* [London, New York: Verso, 2009], 1–15).

<sup>33</sup> Rohman, *Stalking the Subject*, 28.

<sup>34</sup> George Ferzoco and Miriam Gill, “Introduction. *De Hereditate Protei: Ways of Metamorphoses*,” in *Proteus: The Language of Metamorphosis*, ed. Carla Dente et al. (Hants, Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 1–2.

<sup>35</sup> Enrico Giaccherini, “Metamorphoses, Science Fiction, and the Dissolution of the Self,” in *Proteus: The Language of Metamorphosis*, ed. Carla Dente et al. (Hants, Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 62–70.

have called “minor literature”, characterized by political and collective qualities.<sup>36</sup>

The fact that the human-animal transformation is not solely about degradation is apparent not only in Kallas’s *The Wolf’s Bride* and Dinesen’s “The Monkey”, which I will also discuss in this book, but in one of the most paradigmatic texts of early modernist literature: Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* (1915). While it is relevant (which I will discuss more thoroughly later) that all three literary texts that I set out to discuss have at one point or another been defined as “Gothic”—a genre that is characterized by its contrapuntal position to the rationalist, scientific and progressivist tendencies of modernity and Enlightenment and, thus, as Fred Botting notes, one in which transgressions between the human/animal divide are likely to occur<sup>37</sup>—it is also an important observation, I believe, that contemporary Western culture is filled with human-animal transformations and transgressions, beyond the logics of genre lines.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, there are both degrading and liberating representations (sometimes both at once), and they go under a wide variety of names: therianthropes, zooanthropes, metamorphoses, hybrids, xenotransplants, shapeshifters, GMO, transformers, furies, familiaris, role play, extreme body modifications—the list goes on.

These representations suggest that the significance of the human/animal divide is not only central to the development of industrialized, Western societies, but also, by extension, that the definition of the very terms “human” and “animal” is one of its core concerns. Against this backdrop, I would like to posit the human-animal relationship as the focus of attention

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<sup>36</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* [1975], transl. Dana Polan (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 16–27.

<sup>37</sup> Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 11.

<sup>38</sup> This abundance of transgressions includes commercials and wildlife documentaries presenting manipulated and/or anthropomorphized depictions of animals. The commonality of figures that blur the human/animal boundary in twentieth-century Western culture has previously been noted by W.J.T. Mitchell, “Foreword. The Rights of Things,” in Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites. American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), xii; and, moreover, by Donna J. Haraway, who claims that in the late-twentieth-century fusions of the organic and the inorganic, the human and the animal are prominent (*Simians, Cyborgs, and Women. The Reinvention of Nature* [London: Free Association Books, 1991], 149–181).

for literary and cultural analyses. Thus, in borrowing from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's discussion about the construction of the dichotomy between "homosexual" and "heterosexual" in nineteenth-century Europe, the significance of the human-animal relationship can, I believe, in fact be phrased as an axiom: "an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern"<sup>39</sup> human/animal definitions—an application I would assert. Therefore, we do not need to look for the relevance of the animal in any particular places or in relation to any specific figures, genres or motifs; rather, these aspects are always visible *somewhere* because anthropocentrism is a socially constructed norm and, as such, according to Michel Foucault's concept of power, bound to produce its own resistance.<sup>40</sup> From this perspective, it is relevant to assume that focusing on modern times' human-animal relationship holds the potential to produce that which Foucault has called "subjugated knowledges", defined as "a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity."<sup>41</sup> However, in order to produce these insights, the choice of analytical tools is a core concern.

What is the conventional way of handling textual representations of animals in literary scholarship? This has been discussed by Susan McHugh, who claims that fictional animals are, generally, expected to serve as metaphors for "the poetic imagination and (voice) the limits of human experience".<sup>42</sup> Also Armstrong notes that literary representations of

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<sup>39</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 1. The phrasing of a similar analogy, although with Marx, was previously suggested by Simons in *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation*: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of the struggle between humans- and non-humans" (7).

<sup>40</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1, The Will to Knowledge* [1976], transl. by Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 95–96.

<sup>41</sup> Michel Foucault, "Society Must be Defended," in *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976* [1997], transl. David Macey, eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003), 7–8.

<sup>42</sup> Susan McHugh, *Animal Stories. Narrating Across Species Lines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 6; see also 13–15. Also Mel Y. Chen has noted how the "symbolic weight" burdens the category "animal" within contemporary cultural criticism, in *Animacies. Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 98.

animals are, most often, predestined to function as “screens for the projection of human interests and meaning”.<sup>43</sup> But if the literary animal is not given more significance than that, and the human-animal transformation is thus pre-conceptualized as only representing dimensions of the human, the tension in this figure, along with the subjugated knowledges it is potent to produce, are bound to be overlooked. This circumstance can be understood against the backdrop of a discussion initiated by John Berger in 1980. In the modern Western societies, Berger claims, non-human animals have disappeared out of human sight and consciousness, to such an extent that they are, more often than not, in cultural analyses as well as the society at large, rendered both meaningless and invisible.<sup>44</sup> This discussion was continued by Akira Mizuta Lippit in 2000, when he argues that during the course of the industrialization of the West, humans have developed a cultural blindness regarding animals.<sup>45</sup> In relation to literary scholarship, the convention of reading animals metaphorically and thus as “really” representing aspects of the human fits very well with this background. However, Berger’s and Lippit’s arguments are also part of a larger debate that reaches back for decades, about the anthropocentric bias in modern Western scholarship.

Although the discussion about the relationship between text and reality, metaphor and matter is of ancient heritage, the modern debate regarding these issues was initiated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the 1970s and 1980s, as they proposed that the Enlightenment’s notion of the stable human subject should, in the humanist production of knowledge, be replaced by a focus on “intensities”, “becomings”, and “lines of escape”.<sup>46</sup> Similar problems were addressed by Bruno Latour at the turn of the 1990s, when he pointed out the modernist paradigm underlying science and suggested a focus on “the hybrid” and the non-human, rather than on the allegedly stable, anthropocentric categories of modernity.<sup>47</sup> At around the same time, Barbara Noske made the observation that “everything and

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<sup>43</sup> Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> John Berger, *About Looking* [1980] (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 3–28.

<sup>45</sup> Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 1–26.

<sup>46</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1972], transl. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Penguin Books, 2009); *Kafka, A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1980], transl. Brian Massumi (London, New York: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>47</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* [1991], transl. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).