

Animals and Humans
in German Literature,
1800-2000

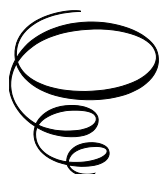
Animals and Humans in German Literature, 1800-2000:

Exploring the Great Divide

Edited by

Lorella Bosco and Micaela Latini

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-5854-1

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-5854-0

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INTRODUCTION

EXPLORING THE GREAT DIVIDE. ANIMALS AND HUMANS IN THE GERMAN- LANGUAGE LITERATURE

LORELLA BOSCO AND MICAELA LATINI¹

1

Since the late 1990s the so-called “animal turn” (Ritvo 118–122) has increasingly become a focus of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, especially in the USA and in Europe. It has been over forty years since Richard D. Ryder coined the term “speciesism” which Peter Singer then introduced into philosophical usage, writing against animal discrimination in his *Animal Liberation* (7). From this starting point on, Human-Animal Studies has developed into a new and promising area of research, that of the Cultural Animal Studies (see Borgards “Einleitung: Cultural Animal Studies” 1–6), which investigates the multifaceted human-animal relationship and the role and status of animals within human society from different points of view. New findings in the field of cognitive ethology have moreover increasingly questioned the assumption of a hiatus between animals and humans, and brought them closer than previously acknowledged.

Animals have of course always occupied a constant place in the cultural imagination. The reflection on the relationships and the differences between human beings and animals has been a constant feature of Western thought (consider, for example, Aristotle or Christian authors such as Thomas Aquinas, only to name just a few) and is grounded in a long tradition based on the claim that the capacity for rational thought and the

¹ Both authors equally contributed to the introduction and to the book in general. More specifically, Lorella Bosco is the author of section 1, Micaela Latini of section 2, and both worked together on section 3.

tool of language clearly distinguished human from non-human animals. This assumption also constituted the foundation for a hierarchical arrangement of forms of life. In contrast, Cultural Animal Studies has broken new ground with regard to these long-debated issues. It has particularly shifted the emphasis to the issue of animal agency by questioning the role of *intentionality* as a dividing line between animals and humans. Cultural Animal Studies scholars have accordingly criticised Western humanism, which operates by placing humans and non-humans (as well as “nature” and “culture”) on either side of a so-called “Great Divide”, as Donna Haraway puts it (*When Species Meet* 9). They have investigated how cultural representations use the device of distance to remove animals from human lives. They have also called into question the presumption of a human exceptionalism and the location of the human species at the centre of the world. This line of critical enquiry has thus challenged traditional concepts of what is to be human. The aim is to elevate animals from their status as mere objects of scientific and cultural processes, and to consider them rather as figures of knowledge. Animal Studies takes even further issues of language, epistemology and ethics that have also been raised by Women’s Studies or Postcolonial Studies, particularly those concerning on how to give voice to difference and otherness without appropriating or distorting it. According to this line of research, animals are also endowed with basic features of subjectivity: rational agency, self-consciousness, language (even if it is of a different nature from human one).

The theoretical foundation for regarding animal beings as agents was provided by the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), cofounded by Bruno Latour in 2007. According to this framework, animals and humans are part of a collective involving human as well as non-human beings, which relate to and interact with each other on different levels. They are agents of a “political ecology” (*Politics of Nature* 1) which is not only a theoretical definition, but also a utopian project (“it has *not yet begun to exist*” 2): the building of a new form of community.

In order to gain insight into the relationships between human beings and animals, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have developed the concept of “becoming human”, as a way of overcoming the notion of subject. They have defined it as a state of oscillation between the human condition and the animal Otherness. In his book *The Open*, 2002, 2004, the title of which alludes to a phrase of Georges Bataille (“the open wound that is my life”), Giorgio Agamben points at the gap between human and animal which he further characterizes as “the central emptiness, the hiatus that—within man—separates man and animal” (93). Agamben moves radically from our traditional ways of thinking about humans, animals and language. Far from

representing a clear dividing line between man and beasts, the idea of language as a human-only skill conceals the fact that human beings are actually animals too and that animals also have a language.

Addressing the act of naming nature as a human prerogative which engenders the very idea of what can be defined as natural, Agamben points out that the human thus produces knowledge which is at the same time also self-knowledge, in a process of recognition as self-recognition: “The cognitive experiment at issue in this difference [between human and animal] ultimately concerns the nature of man—or more precisely, the production and definition of this nature” (22).

Donna Haraway, one of the best-known figures of contemporary Feminist Theory, has engaged with Cultural Animal Studies in her later works such as *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), *When Species Meet* (2008) and the more recent *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in Chthulucene* (2016). In line with her criticism of the violent legacy of humanism and of the link between misogyny and anthropocentrism, Haraway has therefore devoted her attention to animals and animal-human hybrids as well as to cyborgs and Companion Species, pointing out at analogies and “entanglements” (*When Species Meet* 4) between animals and human beings. Certain trans-species properties (for instance, the capacity to suffer) are considered as valid standards for ethical and political critique and practice: “Animals are everywhere full partners in worlding, in becoming with” (301). She has furthermore undertaken an analysis of “agility sports” like hunting, where animals and human beings cooperate in order to accomplish a common task, illustrating how the relationship between human beings and animals is by no means static, but should be conceived of instead as an interaction which can constantly take on new, not discursive forms (205). Animals provide an opportunity to theorize otherness and to explore the border zone between normality and otherness, civilisation and wilderness.

The recent emergence of the discipline of Literary Animal Studies deals as a result with the presence of animals in the literary archive and accordingly regards literature in itself as “konstitatives Element einer Geschichte des Wissens” (“the constitutive element of a history of knowledge”, Borgards “Wissen und Literatur” 425). It was after all Derrida, in his pivotal book *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008), who remarked that only in texts by “poets and prophets” (14)—unlike those written by philosophers, centered on the notion of a human subject observing and examining ‘animal otherness’—can something similar to a thinking concerning the animal be found (7). While scientific disciplines specifically devoted to the study of animals (zoology, ethology, natural sciences)

provide a comprehensive account of animal life in all its aspects and have undermined the traditional view of a human supremacy and of an anthropological difference between animal and human species, Animal Literary Studies rather tend to focus on the animal-human relationship and on the challenges this topic poses to literary representation. They draw on the premise that “literary animals are created by words” (Borgards “Introduction” 155). The interchange between humanities and natural sciences attempts to overcome a further deepening of the so-called “two cultures”-divide, it implies rather a constructive dialogue of literature with skills and knowledges coming from non-literary areas. Literary Animal Studies is therefore an interdisciplinary academic subject which cuts across a broad range of fields such as history, law, philosophy, public policy, politics, religion, critical and cultural studies, science, and arts. Two critical approaches appear here to be particularly relevant: the literarity of animals and the challenge they pose to literary representation. As Ortiz Robles remarks: by means of its rhetorical resources “literature helps us imagine alternatives to the way we live with animals, and animals help us imagine a new role for literature in a world where our animal future is uncertain” (xi).

Roland Borgards (“Tiere und Literatur” 226–227) has further argued that animals essentially take on two roles in literature: they can act as either diegetic or semiotic animals. In the first case they have their place as living creatures in the diegetic world; in the second they are endowed with a semiotic function. A further distinction can be drawn between realistic and supernatural animals. However, Literary Animal Studies are less concerned with analyzing animals as a literary motif—within a somewhat anthropocentric framework. Nor is Literary Animal Studies “theriocentric” (234), since it rather deals with the way the emergence of animals in literature interacts with the cultural context, the process of history and that of poetics. A label that seems to suit them better is “theriotopologish” instead, as Borgards suggests (234), since their positioning between animal, space and order questions the constructed quality of any categorial assumption.

2

As we stated before, in recent years, after the so-called “Non-Human Turn” (Grusin), the field of Animal Studies (and of Literary Animal Studies) has met with outstanding success in many ways, opening up new scenarios for investigation and reflection, and raising new questions concerning the essence of human nature. From this point of view, Jacques Derrida's perspectives on both the dimension of otherness and the question of language are particularly interesting. In a challenging passage of his book

The Animal That Therefore I Am, Derrida reflects on the moment when, as he emerged from the shower in his house, he exchanged looks with his female cat, speaking of how it made him feel uneasy about his nudity: “The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there” (29).

What begins? It is the sense of otherness that begins. If, on the one hand, the human body, naked, reveals itself as fragile, vulnerable, exposed like that of non-human animals—echoing the views outlined by the South African writer and Nobel Prize-winning John M. Coetzee in his *The Lives of Animals* (1999)—on the other hand, a sort of boundary is established. The animality begins when, we can no longer find “our” cat, the “familiar cat” in the cat’s gaze. But what is this dimension of otherness that Derrida’s cat evidences? The “otherness”, the “alterity” that non-human animals represent is on the one hand “absolute”, on the other hand is not to be understood as a horizontal (something viewed as opposite to us), but as vertical, as something displaying the other in the same. Talking about animality necessarily means investigating the questions of proximity and extraneousness, of the self and the other from the self, but it also means reflecting on that otherness which innervates every form of identity: the familiar, on closer inspection, is what protects us but at the same time exposes us, and therefore reveals itself as “non-familiar”, “uncanny” (in German “*unheimlich*”). In this sense, the concept of boundary plays a fundamental role, a concept that—in contrast to the binary opposition human/animal—reveals itself as continuously mobile and susceptible of being questioned. In this sense, human and animal are best viewed as parts of an ontological whole (Calarco).

It is no coincidence that many tales and novels in which animals appear show a continuous reversal of glances between the human self and the bestial other, between the here and the there. An experience that can be interpreted in terms of what Walter Benjamin calls the ‘threshold’ (*Schwelle*), to be understood as a zone of change-passage, transformation and perceptual-conscious expansion. It is a thought that investigates the inside with the outside, similarity with difference, identity with diversity, distance with closeness, presence with absence, familiarity with extraneousness. It becomes then a question of thinking with animality. Hence the connections with the literary anthropology of Eva Geulen and Norbert Otto Eke, that reorients the discipline focusing it on the animal question (2015).

From this point of view, the topic of Animal Studies does not simply open up another field of study: animality; rather it tends to restructure the way problems are dealt with across the whole spectrum of the humanities. What this field proposes is a radical decentralization of the human

Weltanschauung in favor of the animal perspective so that we can regain a sense of belonging in the living world (making contact with the controversial topic of the anthropocene). On the one hand, the increasing attention to non-human animality has revived the anthropological question (as in the debate on the transhuman and posthuman condition). On the other hand, different fields of knowledge have had to consider the debate on animality in a wider sense, as in the case of political studies.

Scholars of the caliber of Thomas Macho have produced extremely valuable studies for the investigation of the relation between human and non-human, starting from the research on bestial rituals up to the most recent forays into the “form of life” of the pig (2004 and 2015). According to Macho, animals reflect the limits and the ambiguities of human societies and, insofar as they illustrate the workings of relations between subordinates and the powerful, render visible the hidden structure of colonial power. They therefore display the ideological function of cultural constructions, as can be seen in zoological gardens. Here, a significant literary example is Kafka’s *A Hunger Artist* (1922), with its pendant images of man and caged panther. Even more interesting, from the standpoint of the connection between power and surveillance devices (following Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, 1975), is Robert Musil’s tale entitled *Monkey Island*, a short story that deals with inter- and intra-group behavior on a small artificial island of Villa Borghese, inhabited by monkeys and apes.

The topic of the gaze also constitutes a link with the new frontiers of philosophical aesthetics. The idea of a non-anthropocentric aesthetics has enjoyed a certain popularity in recent years, developing in various directions, opening up new areas of research and discussion (such as “animal theory”, “animal turn”), and raising new questions on the role of art and experience in general. The growing attention to the connection between the sciences of life and aesthetological issues has re-opened the anthropological (and post-human) question, to the point that several disciplines have become involved in the debate on animalism, from a neuro-scientific perspective or in the context of the similarly variegated field of evolutionary aesthetics. Studies on non-human aesthetics, still in a pioneering phase, play a crucial role in questioning and revisiting traditional views of the aesthetic experience, and thus in redefining the very image of the human and transhuman. After more than twenty years in the new millennium, aesthetics is still in search of a *tertium* that will allow it to overcome the duality between subjectivity and objectivity in beauty. These researches imply a radical shift in the axis of our reflection, a paradigm shift, to quote Thomas Kuhn: from that which is human to that which is not human, from the human to the non-human or transhuman.

Starting from the Darwinian doctrine of selection, animal aesthetics elaborates Darwin's theory of animal beauty, departing from the twentieth century Darwinist model, which tends to explain generative impulses on the basis of adaptive functionalism and the evolutionary chain (Menninghaus 2019). A more radical criticism of anthropocentrism characterizes Welsch's stance. In his view, the evolutionary aesthetic conception is still based on an aesthetic prejudice according to which humanity can only be understood on the basis of humanity itself. Welsch's investigation has as its starting point the question of the pre-eminence of the anthropic principle in modern philosophy (2012). Welsch shares Darwin's views maintaining that the nucleus of human aesthetics is already present in other animals. More specifically, certain forms of beauty (such as those related to the criterion of proportion) can be explained from a biological-evolutionary perspective. Beauty, in this case, occurs solely as a physiological effect, without involving any aesthetic perspective. Even in the case of more complex ratios of proportion (such as for example the golden ratio, found in both art and nature), the basis of the appreciation is also cognitive. This type of beauty, which on an evolutionary scale represents its most ancient stage, applies to non-human animals as well. One of the main challenges faced by aesthetics in its effort to free itself from the slavery of the anthropic prejudice is that of avoiding the tendency to explain all artistic and aesthetic phenomena in terms of some assumed evolutionary advantage. Rather the objective is to build a common space of reflection and investigation, starting from the intersection between biological phenomena and cultural phenomena without reducing the ones to the others, and, moreover, without confining them to the human sphere.

3

The investigation of the role that animals and human-animal relationships have played in literature, especially since the eighteenth century (for the present book, with special regard to the German-speaking world), has developed along with a deeper awareness of the embeddedness of human civilization in a wider network of actors, environments and histories. Like elsewhere, so too in German-speaking countries Literary Animal Studies has led not only to the expansion of the corpus of texts (fable, epic, tales), traditionally connected with animals, but also established new concepts and methods for revising conventional cultural dichotomies such as subject and object, human and animal etc. Although a little later than in the Anglo-American world, Animal Studies has become a burgeoning field of research also in the German-speaking cultural landscape, thanks to the works of

leading scholars such as Roland Borgards and Thomas Macho among others. Authors like Franz Kafka (quite obviously) with his several animal tales or E.T.A. Hoffmann (*Kater Murr*, *Tomcat Murr*), for example, have been the subject of renewed critical attention within this research framework. It is a matter—as Kári Driscoll and Eva Hoffmann call it, drawing on Derrida—of a “zoopoetic reading”, which is able to explore “the mutual imbrication and entanglement of the material and the semiotic, the body and the text, the animal and the word” (4).

The ten essays collected in this volume are aligned with the aforementioned developments in Animal Literary Studies and are devoted to a wide range of case-studies on the relationship between animality and poetics in German-language literature since the nineteenth century. They display a wide variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to a number of texts, not only the ‘canonic’ works, packed with references to animals. Animals are considered not primarily as objects of literature, but as agents endowed with an active role in the production of literature, which have left repressed or forgotten traces in texts (see also Driscoll and Hoffmann 9).

In their reading of Heinrich von Kleist’s tragic drama *Penthesilea*, Grazia Pulvirenti and Renata Gambino (Catania/Italy) touch upon the conflict between Amazons as a cross-species community (Haraway 2008), shaped by the practice of hunting, and the Greeks who instead provide an example of a supposedly civilized community following set rules of behaviour and clinging to empty rituals. As Pulvirenti and Gambino convincingly argue, this contraposition hints at internal conflicts in the Prussian court where supporters of the *ancien régime* on the one hand and young aristocrats, gathered around Queen Louise, like Kleist himself, on the other, were each seeking to impose their own preferred political course of action on the Prussian State.

Sonia Saporiti (Campobasso/Italy)’s gender-oriented and psychoanalytic analysis of the long tale *Sehr wunderbare Historie von der Melusine* (*The Very Wonderful History of Melusina*), published in 1800 by Ludwig Tieck, points out how the figurative element of the snake refers to two different symbolic orders, one maternal and one more specifically female-sexual, which are intertwined. Particularly in the bathing scene, the ambivalence of Melusina clearly emerges, blending submissive femininity and strongly repressed aggressiveness, animality and humanity.

Roland Borgards (Frankfurt a.M./Germany) reads E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Heimatochare* in terms of both (post)colonial and animal theory: the Haimatochare louse is neither autochthonous nor allochthonous, neither archaeobiotic nor neobiotic. It is not autochthonous because without colonialism it would not exist; it is not allochthonous because it was not

brought to the island by humans. It is not archaeobiotic because it is not linked to any of the domesticated animals that were on the island before Cook's arrival there. Thus, Haimatochare defies all of the zoological hierarchies and taxonomies produced and exploited by European colonialism.

Federica Abramo (Catania/Italy) reads Georg Büchner's fragmented drama *Woyzeck* as both a reflection on the empirical turn in medicine and anthropology at the beginning of the nineteenth century and as an antecedent of the debate on vivisection in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the backdrop to Büchner's scientific works (the *Mémoire* and the so-called *Probevorlesung*) and research, she especially focuses on the courtyard scene with Doktor, Professor, students and Woyzeck as well as on the market scenes featuring the trained horse in order to show how these scenes can be viewed as theatrical representations of the biopolitical power acting on the living beings.

Oliver Jahraus (Munich/Germany) argues that Animal Studies should not and cannot be founded only on the analysis of signs, metaphors, and motifs, but must focus more on the relationship between humans and animal beings, and the empathy from which the meaning of animals in literary texts emerges and derives: empathy with animal characters must take precedence over the meaning of animal motifs. As an example, the paper examines horses, surveying a number of views of horse figures in German literature and examining in particular two novels where horses play significant roles (Hofmannsthal's *Reitergeschichte*, *A Tale of the Cavalry* and Lernet-Holenias's *Maresi*).

Micaela Latini (Varese, Como/Italy) focuses on the figure of the mouse in the German-language literature and culture in the first half of the twentieth century, particularly during the First World War. She explores the way the shock of the "storm of steel" led to the association between the figure of the mouse and the human body, considered as "bare life" (Agamben). In this sense, particularly significant are the representations of mice in Kafka's tale *Josephine die Sängerin oder Das Volk der Mäuse* (*Josephine the Songstress or The Mouse Folk*, 1924), in Musil's animal portraits in *Nachlass zu Lebzeiten* (*Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*), and in Benjamin's interpretation of Mickey Mouse.

Isolde Schiffermüller (Verona/Italy) investigates how in some German-language literary texts of the first part of the twentieth century a view of humanity outside and beyond the humanistic tradition reflects itself in the use of images that highlight human features in the physiognomy of the animal face. Examples include Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duineser Elegien* (*Eighth Duino Elegy*), Robert Musil's animal figures in his *Nachlass zu*

Lebzeiten (*Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*) and Franz Kafka's short stories. Starting from these texts, Schiffermüller investigates the possibilities and boundaries of a zoopoetics that questions the anthropological approach in order to redraw the boundaries of human life.

The contribution by Jelena Reinhardt (Perugia/Italy) examines several animal species in Elias Canetti's work, and the way they are viewed by the main characters or their role within the narrative (see *Crowds and Power; The Conscience of Words & Earwitness; The Tongue Set Free; The Play of the Eyes; The Human Province*). She shows how Canetti's well-known themes on the human condition—such as death, the dynamics of crowds, the mechanisms of power—also play an important role in the non-human poetics of the Austrian author.

Raul Calzoni (Bergamo/Italy) analyses the aesthetic rendering of animals and their poetical and epistemological significance in W.G. Sebald's *œuvre*. Sebald claims that animals watch humans and vice versa “across a narrow abyss of incomprehension”, in spite of the fact that they are both at the mercy of a world regulated by physical or emotional captivity. The paper seeks to explore the aesthetic, ethical, and epistemological limits of Sebald's representation of a “world after Auschwitz” as a space surrounded by darkness that only the eyes of particular animals and human beings can penetrate.

Lorella Bosco (Bari/Italy) offers a reading of Sibylle Lewitscharoff's *Blumenberg* (2011), a novel born out of Hans Blumenberg's lifelong fascination with lions. The lion visiting the protagonist in the book is both a source of solace and irritation with its unclear ontological status which defies logic or merely conceptual explanations. Bosco also devotes attention to the manifold iconological references in the novel (particularly to Antonello da Messina's *St. Jerome in His Study*), in order to highlight the analogies between Blumenberg and the lion as well as with the partridge. This bird questions human exceptionalism by claiming the animal capacity for suffering.

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Editorial note:

Unless otherwise stated, all translations of quotations from non-English sources are made by the authors.

CHAPTER ONE

HOUNDS, HORSES AND ELEPHANTS IN HEINRICH VON KLEIST'S DRAMA *PENTHESILEA*

RENATA GAMBINO AND GRAZIA PULVIRENTI

In Heinrich von Kleist's masterwork *Penthesilea* (1806–1808), Amazons and Greek heroes rule the stage together with many different species of animals. They are used not only metaphorically to enucleate and underline human qualities or vices, but also as agents in hunting scenes (McHugh 487–495). As regards the ideological issues implied by the hunting motif in the anthropological and political discourse of Kleist's epoch, we aim to analyse in depth the function of game hunting in the play, and to go beyond the traditional exegetical approaches to the text in relation to the presence of animals (see Theisen 153–164; Mehigan 291–311).

Packs of hounds, horses, palfreys, Persian horses, elephants, and also hunting prey like the deer, big and small game, foxes and boars mentioned in the text are to be considered “diegetic animals” (Borgards, “Tiere in der Literatur” 89–93), i.e. they are not used as rhetorical figures and do not refer to qualities of the human being. Rather, they are depicted as living creatures and as “actors” that influence the plot. Kleist himself was ironic about the large number of animals in his play in his response to criticism by the influential writer and scholar Karl August Böttiger, who mocked the play in a review published on *Der Freimütige* (Berlin 5/6 Febr. 1808): “Außer Scharen von Griechen und Amazonen, Mädchen und Müttern—Weibern kann man doch nicht sagen—treten im 19. Auftritt Amazonen mit Meuten gekoppelter Hunde und Elefanten, mit Sichelwagen und Fackeln auf” (Sembdner 201–202; “Apart from crowds of Greeks and Amazons, girls and mothers—you cannot define them as women—in the 19th act Amazons appear with packs of coupled dogs and elephants, with sickle wagons and torches”), Kleist replied with an epigram published in the journal *Phöbus*, which he co-edited with Adam Müller (No. 4/5):

KOMÖDIENZETTEL:

Heute zum ersten Mal mit Vergunst: die Penthesilea.

Hundekomödie; Acteurs: Helden und Köter und Fraun. (*Phöbus* 241)

[COMEDY ANNOUNCEMENT:

Today, by permission, the premiere of *Penthesilea*, a canine comedy; the cast: heroes and fleabags and women].

Other animals like wolves, hyenas and wild cats are used metaphorically to evoke the aggressive and feral aspects of the human being: the simile of rabid wolves is used for the warring armies of the Greeks and the Amazons (*Penthesilea* 5); the swarms of Amazons are presented as locusts (544–545); *Penthesilea*'s fury is compared to the ferocity of a hyena (331); the agility of the Amazons' queen is rendered with the image of a fleet-footed leopard (346); her ability to leap back up after falling is conveyed by the suppleness of a cat (455); like a bird, Achilles is able to move quickly (2918), as is *Penthesilea* (1338); love is predatory like a lion (1766). In such cases the animals do not have self-agency and rhetorically express human features.

On the other hand, hounds, horses, elephants and hunting prey are endowed with self-agency. They act as autonomous living creatures and influence what happens in crucial scenes in the play. For these reasons they can be considered, according to Borgards, "diegetic animals":

Diegetische Tiere sind also Tiere, die als Lebewesen in einem "diegetischen Universum" ihren Platz haben; non-diegetische Tiere sind hingegen Tiere, die nicht als Lebewesen in der diegetischen Welt zu finden sind ("Tiere und Literatur" 226).

[Diegetic animals are animals which have their place as living beings in a "diegetic universe"; non diegetic animals are those which cannot be found as living beings in the diegetic world].

They are gifted with self-agency and can be included in the broad circle of actors within the play, according to McHugh's theory about "animals as agents" (McHugh 491). We can better understand their role in the light of Bruno Latour's "Actor-Network Theory" (*Politiques de la nature* 2004): animals, like the hounds in *Penthesilea*, are actors, not in the sense that they act like people, but in the sense that their actions and behaviours lead to relevant changes in the development of the play and in the actions of humans:

Ein Akteur ist einerseits kein passives Objekt, insofern ihm Handlungsmacht zukommt; ein Akteur ist aber andererseits auch kein autonomes Subjekt,

insofern seine Handlungsmacht sich immer nur in Netzwerken, d.h. in Abhängigkeit von einer Vielzahl anderer Akteure entfalten kann (Borgards, *Tiere und Literatur* 234).

[An actor is, on the one hand, not a passive object because he owns power to act; but neither is he, on the other hand, an autonomous subject because his power to act can only develop within a network, i.e. in being dependent on a multitude of other agents].

Specifically, in the history of the Amazons, as Kleist portrays it, hounds and Amazons live a joint life, co-shaping one another in a sort of cross-species community (Haraway 4). According to Borgards, if we consider “the literary as a kind of container for animal content” (“Introduction” 158), we may discover the deep interconnection between the literary representation of the hybridised community of Amazons/hounds and the critique of the social structure of Kleist’s epoch as represented by the masculine world of the Greek Heroes (see Foucault, *Abnormal*).

The cross-species community of Amazons and hounds is rooted in the common nature of the *bios* that they share: this condition deconstructs what Giorgio Agamben has called the “anthropological machine” (Agamben 22), which refers to the definition of humans as opposed to animals. In contrast, the cross-species community creates an in-between space of natural balance, of “irreducible ambiguity” (Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* 33), where boundaries and distinctions disappear. The way Amazons share their lives with animals deconstructs the “anthropological difference” between humans and animals (Borgards, “Einleitung” 1) helping us to highlight the “politics” (Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign* 16) implied in the representation of non-humans or cross-species communities. The “companion species” of Amazons and hounds create a space of “articulation between human and animal” (Agamben 38) which allows the human to recognize himself/herself in the non-human, in the shared animal nature of all living beings, in the common organic nature of the *bios*. This common biological existence cannot be described as a sum of parts but, according to the biologist and biosemiotician Jacob von Uexküll (*A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*), is to be interpreted as a whole and universal process, represented in a complex sign system. This is a further relevant aspect of Kleist’s play: Amazons and hounds share a sign system which is rooted in nature and in the environment (in the terms of Jacob von Uexküll). They can understand each other, cooperate, pursue the same aim of hunting and be successful at it.

On the other hand, Amazons and Greeks, Penthesilea and Achilles are hindered in understanding each other: they neither share the same “language”

nor the performative expressions of their bodies since they epitomize two opposite forms of sociality and sociability. The Amazons, women living in community with their hounds, represent an archaic form of society that obeys natural laws, according to the needs of autarchic self-organization and reproduction. The Greek warriors represent a form of stereotyped masculine society, obeying empty formal laws without any relation to the real natural values of life. Animals as co-actors of the Amazons enact the need for re-appropriation of the authentic and basic values of life, in the sense of *bios*, while the Greeks are “non-human” heroes of the epics, crystallised in speech formulas and predictable behaviours. The diegetic hounds in *Penthesilea* “highlight how deeply aesthetic and literary questions are interwoven with both political and material spheres” (Borgards, “Introduction” 156) as we will see in this study.

Borgards argues that “politische Theoriebildung und literarische Formfindung unlösbar ineinander verschlungen sind” (“Tiere und Literatur” 232; “political theory and literary form are inextricably intertwined”) and points out the role of hunting practices in the eighteenth century until the French Revolution as a means of affirming the political power of the king, an idea also found in Schiller’s work about the anthropological and political origins of hunting *Über die erste Menschengesellschaft nach dem Leitfaden der mosaischen Urkunde* (“On the First Society of Men according to the Guidelines of the Mosaic Document”, 1790). In Borgards’ terms:

[...] in der politischen Theorie von Aristoteles bis zu Machiavelli und Hobbes sowie in der politischen Praxis vom *Ancien Régime* bis zu den Revolutionen in Frankreich und Deutschland, die Jagd ist überall mit im Spiel: bei Entstehung politischer Herrschaft wie bei ihrer Sicherung, bei ihrer Repräsentation wie bei ihrer Perversion (“Tiere jagen” 8).

[In political theory, from Aristotle to Machiavelli and Hobbes, as well as in political practice from the *Ancien Régime* to the revolutions in France and Germany, hunting is involved everywhere: in the emergence of political rule as in its safeguarding, in its representation as in its perversion].

Foucault explained the political function of hunting with regard to the opposition between two different forms of “governmental techniques”: one referring to the role of the shepherd and the other to that of the hunter. These two representative roles embody “pastoral power” and “absolute power” (see Borgards, “Tiere jagen” 9). In modern times hunting was considered a ceremonial representation of the hegemony of the king who as absolute monarch had the power to rule over his citizens’ life like the hunter over the pack of hounds: “Die Jagd galt als eines der Regalien, als ein exklusives

Hoheitsrecht, das ausschließlich dem Souverän zukommt" (9; "Hunting was regarded as one of the *regalia*, as an exclusive right, belonging only to the sovereign"). The crown thus had an exclusive legal power over the citizens who were obliged to work to make hunting possible.

Hunting is also part of the discourse about political power, its violations and its asymmetric relations and perversions. The political discourse inside the Prussian state was particularly intense in the years in which the play was written. The years 1806 and 1807 saw the Prussian state in serious crisis thanks to the threat of invasion by Napoleon, and the political conflict inside the Court, between the supporters of King Friedrich Wilhelm III, an irresolute procrastinator inclined to avoid the fight against France, and the aristocratic reformative faction. The anti-Napoleonic patriots' political head was Queen Louise while Prince Louis Ferdinand and the general Prince Friedrich Ludwig Hohenlohe were the military leaders. Despite their involvement, the war ended with the triumph of Napoleon's troops against the famous Prussian Army, the death of Prince Louis Ferdinand—and the consequent defeat of the reformative aristocracy—and the humiliation of Queen Louise, which meant disaster for the Prussian State.

Because of the evident political implications of hunting in Kleist's time, we argue that the portrayal of hunting, specifically of the *Parforcejagd* ("par force hunt") in the play *Penthesilea*, contains hidden political issues. Elements of the *Parforcejagd* are presented in many scenes of the play in which the main character is accompanied by the pack of hounds, hunting with the Queen of the Amazons. As regards the classical sources that Kleist used, the most innovative aspects are the different ending to the story—in the myth Achilles kills Penthesilea—and the huntress nature of the Amazon's queen. In the pivotal scenes of *Penthesilea*, horses, elephants and hounds become co-actors in events. Since ancient times horses had been fundamental in any kind of battle, while elephants belonged mostly to the Eastern tradition. In Kleist's play, Penthesilea is riding on her horse in the company of elephants when she attacks the Greek warriors. The surprising presence of these animals creates an archaic, oriental atmosphere which not only recalls the tradition of mythological combat, but introduces a non-military use of these animals, shifting the action to game hunting: "Zu den Helfertieren gehören z.B. [...] Pferde zum Transport und zur Verfolgung, Elefanten als Reittiere bei der Tigerjagd" (Krüger 113; "The helper-animals include e.g. [...] horses for transport and for pursuit, elephants for riding at tiger huntings"). The employment of elephants during game hunting is iconographically attested, for instance in the ancient oriental bas-reliefs from the epoch of the Sassanid Empire in Persian Taq-e Bostan. The difference between the use of elephants in military action and in game

hunting is clearly marked by the presence of dogs. Indeed, in Kleist's play the elephants are surrounded by ferocious packs of hounds, which are considered fundamental companions of hunters:

Die wichtigsten Tiere in Begleitung von Jägern zu allen Zeiten und auf allen Kontinenten sind jedoch Hunde, die bereits Zehntausende von Jahren früher als andere Tiere oder Pflanzen domestiziert worden sind. Und so waren wohl auch die Koevolution von Mensch und Hund sowie allgemein die Beschäftigung mit Tieren im Versuch, Kontrolle über sie zu erlangen, die bedeutenderen Schlüsselfaktoren der menschlichen Evolution als die Jagd allein (Krüger 113).

[However, the most important animals accompanying hunters down the ages and all over the world are dogs, which were domesticated tens of thousands of years earlier than other animals or plants. And so the co-evolution of man and dog, and the general study of animals in an attempt to gain control over them, were probably more important key factors in human evolution than hunting alone].

Packs of dogs surround Penthesilea in the pivotal scenes of the play: the 20, in which Penthesilea attacks Achilles, and the 22 and 23, in which the game hunting is narrated by the Amazons watching the scene. There is a notable semantic shift from the battle setting to the hunting setting, and the atmosphere suddenly changes:

PENTHESILEA

Mit schwacher Stimme

Hetzt alle Hund' auf ihn! Mit Feuerbränden

Die Elephanten peitschet auf ihn los!

Mit Sichelwagen schmettert auf ihn ein,

Und mähet seine üpp'gen Glieder nieder! (1170–1173)

[PENTHESILEA

in an enfeebled voice

Set the dogs on him! With flaming torches

Drive the elephants to trample him!

Charge him with our sickled chariots

And mow him down, cut limb from supple limb! ("Penthesilea" 87)].

In a powerful crescendo the play builds to its dramatic ending, which caused irritation and disgust in Kleist's contemporary readers:

DIE OBERPRIESTERIN

Jetzt unter ihren Hunden wütet sie,
Mit schaumbedeckter Lipp', und nennt sie Schwestern,
Die heulenden, und der Mänade gleich,
Mit ihrem Bogen durch die Felder tanzend,
Hetzt sie die Meute, die mordatmende,
Die sie umringt, das schönste Wild zu fangen,
Das je die Erde, wie sie sagt, durchschweift (v. 2567–73).

[THE HIGH PRIESTESS

And now she's raving, foaming at the mouth,
Among her howling dogs, and calls them sisters,
And like a Maenad dances with her bow
Across the fields, urging on the pack
Of murder-breathing hounds surrounding her
To catch the finest wild beast that ever,
So she tells them, roamed upon the earth ("Penthesilea" 113)].

From the scene 20, where Achilles approaches the Amazons to confront Penthesilea, what was announced as a duel unexpectedly becomes a ruthless hunt. This transformation of the dynamics between the two characters radically changes the outcome of the clash, subverting not only the myth but also the formal complex structure of the play.

A deeper meaning is conveyed by the sudden transformation of the traditional model of the single combat between the two heroes into a game hunt. The single combat dates back to the epic tradition and features as early as Homer's *Odyssey*. Later on, it becomes typical of the epic genre, the emblematic example perhaps being the mortal duel between Tancred and Clorinda in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* (XII, 48–70). In Kleist's play, the Queen of the Amazons has been challenged to a duel by Achilles and instead of preparing herself for a single combat, like in the myth and in the epic tradition, she resolutely embarks on a fatal hunt against her enemy by interacting with her hounds:

AMAZONEN

Mit Meuten gekoppelter Hunde. Späterhin Elephanten (...)

PENTHESILEA

sich zu den Hunden wendend

Auf, Tigris, jetzt, dich brauch' ich! Auf Leäne!
Auf, mit der Zoddelmähne du, Melampus!
Auf, Akle, die den Fuchs erhascht, auf Sphynx,
Und der die Hirschkuh übereilt, Alektor,

Auf, Oxus, der den Eber niederreißt,
Und der dem Leuen nicht erbebt, Hyrkaon! (v. 2421–26)

[*Amazons enter with packs of leashed dogs, and later, elephants, torches, and sickled chariots, etc.*

PENTHESILEA

turning to the dogs

Come on, Tigris, now, I need you! Come on, Leäne!

Come on, with the ruffled fur, you Melampus!

Come on, Akle, who catches the fox, up Sphynx,

And you, rushing the deer, Alektor,

Up, Oxus, who tears down the boar,

And you, who does not fear the lion, Hyrkaon!].

Not only are hounds called into action in this scene, but they are also defined as specific hunters of different animals: foxes, deer, boars, all typical kinds of prey for the Parforcejagd. So every form of attack conducted by the Amazons is not depicted as an occasional battle, but as a hunting ritual undertaken on a specific occasion (“Der frohe Tag der Reise wird bestimmt”, *Penthesilea* 2061; “the happy day for travel is decided”, “Penthesilea” 104), celebrated with musical instruments, typical for hunting, used in order to prepare the raid on the “Lager der Auserwählten”, (*Penthesilea* 2066; “toward the chosen people’s distant camp”, “Penthesilea” 104), like the hunter does in the fenced territory where the prey is pushed. Each Amazon arrives in the hunting field to choose the best men: these are not killed, but collected as prey and conducted to Diana’s temple, where they are ritually prepared for the ensuing mating. After this, they will be released and sent home.

In the main scene of the play, Penthesilea is presented as a skilled huntress: she seeks out, locates and captures her prey thanks to her ability to identify its location from the slightest movement of the bushes where it is trying to hide. Her prey, Achilles, is described as a deer:

MEROE

[...]

Inzwischen schritt die Königin heran,

Die Doggen hinter ihr, Gebirg’ und Wald

Hochher, gleich einem Jäger, überschauend;

Und da er eben, die Gezweige öffnend,

Zu ihren Füßen niedersinken will:

Ha! sein Geweih verrät’ den Hirsch, ruft sie,

Und spannt mit Kraft der Rasenden, sogleich

Den Bogen an, daß sich die Enden küssen,

Und hebt den Bogen auf und zielt und schießt,

Und jagt den Pfeil ihm durch den Hals; er stürzt:
Ein Siegesgeschrei schallt roh im Volk empor (2640–50).

[Meanwhile the Queen comes riding up to him,
At her heels her dogs, and like a hunter
On a hunt looks out across the landscape;
And just as he is pushing through the branches
To fall before her feet her prisoner,
She cries: "Aha! His horns betray the stag!"
And with the strength of madness draws her bow
Back right away so far the two ends kiss,
And raises up her bow and aims and shoots,
And drives the arrow through his neck; he falls;
Our women let loose a raucous cheer of triumph ("Penthesilea" 114)].

In short, a detailed deer-hunting scene. This is relevant to any understanding of the political issues in this scene and the play as a whole. Deer hunting is in fact a "Sinnbild einer Kriegsführung" ("symbol of warfare", Krüger 117): in Kleist's case a symbolic representation of the complex political and social issues during the Prussian coalition wars.

The relevance of these issues to the writing of the play has already been pointed out by some scholars, without further development:

Geht man von einem solchen Nebeneinander von Naturrecht und Biopolitik aus, ließe sich die Form des Trauerspiels in *Penthesilea* auf den Einbruch des Napoleonischen Staates und die Reaktion der preußischen Reformen auf ihn gleichermaßen beziehen. Für einen Fanatiker des preußischen Widerstandes, der sich andererseits (wenn auch aus finanziellen Gründen) an der Verlegung des *Code Napoléon* beteiligen wollte, kann das als eine plausible These gelten; jedenfalls ist es eine für die Moderne des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts grundlegende Situation (Campe 317).

[Assuming such a coexistence of natural law and biopolitics, the form of the tragedy in *Penthesilea* could be related equally to the collapse of the Napoleonic state and the reaction of the Prussian reformers to it. For a fanatic of the Prussian resistance who, on the other hand, wanted to participate (albeit for financial reasons) in the transfer of the *Code Napoléon*, this can be regarded as a plausible thesis; at any rate, it is a fundamental situation for modernity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries].

The semantic and iconographic field of hunting characterizes the work from its very beginning. This pivotal feature of the play has already been hinted at by Gerhard Neumann, who wrote that this context determines the nature of "the whole play as a fluctuating network" (Neumann 106). Rüdiger

Campe also briefly mentions this aspect of the play: “Wie man später erfährt, ist der Krieg der Amazonen ein Beutezug, in dem es um die Jagd, das Einfangen der Opfer für die Reproduktion des Staates, geht” (Campe 318; “As we learn later, the war of the Amazons is a raid whose aim is hunting and returning with prisoners for the reproduction of the state”).

The chase which starts in the 20th scene is modelled on the hunting practice of the *Parforcejagd* (“par force hunt”) or *Hetzejagd* (“coursing”) or *Prunkjagd*, a seventeenth-century German variation of English Monarchal Hunting. It was considered a typical Old Regime practice with ritualized techniques and significant environmental and social exploitation. In fact, this kind of hunting was considered a ceremonial practice, a means for the dynastic order to affirm its power and political hegemony over all other social classes (Teuscher 358): “Die Parforcejagd des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts [war] ein höfisches Zeremoniell, das nicht in erster Linie der Fleischbeschaffung diente, sondern der Repräsentation” (Krüger 114; “The *par force* hunt of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [was] a courtly ritual, which did not primarily serve to procure meat, but rather to represent power”).

From the Middle Ages hunting was considered one of the major legal privileges related to property. It was an exclusive right and prerogative of the noble royal families and noble landlords. It imposed huge burdens of servitude or allegiance on the peasants and workers born in the territory, as they always had to be available for the preparation, carrying out and completion of the activities connected with the rich hunting. The right to hunt was enshrined in the laws regulating land ownership and comprised “high hunting” and “low hunting”: the former was possible only for landlords connected to the royal court and involved large prey such as deer, fallow deer and wild boar. The second was a privilege granted also to less eminent members of the landed aristocracy, who were allowed to hunt smaller prey such as foxes, hares, squirrels and small birds (Berni 10). The noble who ruled the territory was awarded the “right of hunting” (*Jagdrecht*): this title was a sign of distinction among other nobles to whom he could award the title for a certain period (*Gnadenjagd*).

During the seventeenth century in Versailles, the *Parforcejagd* was considered the most important form of hunting and was regulated by an extremely strict protocol. It was considered a spectacular variety of hunting, with the riders preceded by packs of dogs chasing a deer, wolf or boar. Since hunting was a legal privilege and exclusive prerogative of the court, it became a symbol of hegemony in revolutionary France and also of traditional hegemonic power in monarchical Prussia. Hunting was particularly appreciated and practised in those kingdoms where the

aristocracy was powerful, and as a result it was ceremoniously abolished in Napoleonic France as a perfect example of the arrogance of a ruling class unmindful of the difficulties that the practice entailed for the peasant economy. The greatest burden (*vassalage*) linked to the hunting right weighed heavily on the peasants, who were obliged to prepare, assist and support the hunts. Further burdensome duties included breeding the hounds, feeding the horses, controlling the game throughout the year, reintroducing it when necessary, bringing the game from the vast forests to the area selected for the hunt, constructing fences or barriers to prevent the prey from escaping, tending safe paths in the woods, and organizing lavish banquets for the invited company (see Schwappach). All this work fell entirely on the shoulders of peasants and workers, who had to busy themselves with these hunting duties even during the planting or harvest periods. Moreover, hunting with hounds and horses often caused extensive damage to the farmland and the seeded land. Winter hunting parties were particularly hated and criticized because they exposed farmers and workers to a higher risk of accidents and death from hypothermia. In fact, the *Parforcejagd* lasted many days or even weeks, and involved a large number of hunters, dogs and different types of prey (Rösener 254–347). For a hunter, the richest prey was the deer, more precisely the hart, an adult male red deer, which was run down and exhausted by the hounds before it was killed.

Thanks to two works by the German engraver Johann Elias Ridinger, we can get an idea of how the *Parforcejagd* was organized: *Parfaite & exacte Representation des Divertissements de Grands Seigneurs* published in German and French in 1729, containing a collection of engravings explaining to young hunters the most important rules and techniques of this exclusive “Pleasure for Lords” (Laß and Schmidt 389–437); *Die par force Jagd des Hirschen und deren ganzer Vorgang* (“The Par Force Hunt of the Deer and its Whole Process”, 1756), a collection of 16 engravings with a text explaining in detail every phase of these complex hunting rituals (Spickernagel 103–126).

This exquisite “Pleasure for Lords” was also depicted in numerous paintings and craftworks, like vases (see the *Jagd vase mit gelbem Fond*, “Hunting Vase against a Yellow Background”, Meissen 1739, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, PE 3503), reinforcing its political relevance. In many of Kleist's texts we find references to hunting within a political discourse, which is unsurprising given his lifelong political involvement.

In his well-informed biography of Kleist, Günter Blamberger underlines that Kleist worked on *Penthesilea* during the months of Prussia's defeat and Napoleon's entering Berlin. The first information about the play appears in a letter of 31, August 1806 to his friend Rühle von Lilienstern: “Jetzt habe

ich ein Trauerspiel unter der Feder” (“I am currently working on a tragedy”). The announcement of the play’s completion is made to his cousin and Court Dame Marie von Kleist in autumn 1807: “Ich habe die *Penthesilea* beendet” (“I have finished *Penthesilea*”). A short version of the play appears in the first issue of the Journal *Phöbus* (January 1808). As a book, it appeared one month later, published by Cotta. Kleist probably also worked on *Penthesilea* during the months of December 1807 (letter to Ulrike von Kleist, 17 December 1807) and January 1808. In those months, as Blamberger points out, many dramatic political events took place: “Dazwischen liegt die Niederlage Preussens bei Jena und Auerstedt, die Flucht des Königshofes nach Königsberg, Kleists Kriegsgefangenschaft in Frankreich [...]” (Blamberger 325–26; “That was the period in which Prussia was defeated at Jena and Auerstedt, the royal court fled to Königsberg, and Kleist was in captivity in France”).

Kleist was not a neutral spectator but he was personally involved in many of those events, partly because of his relationship with important politicians and members of the Court, partly because of his interest in the future of the nation. His political involvement might explain his arrest, while trying to reach Berlin, and his detention, first in Fort Le Doux and afterwards in Châlons-sur-Marne, from where he was set free on 13, July, after the Treaties of Tilsit. During the months of this still mysterious imprisonment, Kleist worked on *Penthesilea*. The letters exchanged with friends and relatives during those months give some account of the author’s ideological stance against Napoleon. He emphatically expresses his worries about the success of Napoleon’s troops and its consequences for Prussia, and he condemns the political irresolution of the King, who is also opposed to the reformist faction of ministers and politicians seeking to change the corporative state structure and the old-style organization of the army. Kleist was in contact with the reformist ministers who were trying “dem preußischen Staat eine neue, moderne Ordnung [zu] geben [...] um den Außenminister Hardenberg und den Geheimen Oberfinanzrat Karl Sigismund Freiherr von Stein zum Altenstein” (“to [give] the Prussian state a new, modern order [...] thanks to the Foreign Minister Hardenberg and the Privy Chief Finance Councillor Karl Sigismund Freiherr von Stein zum Altenstein”, Blamberger 230). Kleist was introduced into the reformist circle by Christian von Massenbach, Marie von Kleist’s brother-in-law, and became an enthusiastic collaborator of Altenstein, who seemed to appreciate him and gave him the chance to train as an administrator in Königsberg. In the reformist faction there were also Kleist’s close friends, Rühle von Lilienstern and Ernst von Pfuel, both officers in the Prussian Army, both involved in the patriotic opposition to Napoleon (Blamberger 242).