

We(')re Creatures: A Posthumanist Reading of
*The Sacred Book of the
Werewolf.*

A Major Research Project
Submitted to the MA Program in Cultural Studies and Critical Theory

WORDS OF GRATITUDE

One sunny spring afternoon in the CSCT 701 seminar with Dr. David Clark, I was inspired by our class discussion of the limits of (human/rational) perception, to pursue "the question of the animal" in the novel by Victor Pelevin that has been dear to my heart for many years. I am grateful to both Dr. Clark and to Dr. David Goldstein for initially directing me to excellent sources on animal philosophy.

Without the support, and the faith in me, of my supervisor, Dr. Anne Savage, I could not have completed this project. Thanks to you and to Flash for dropping by to chat and walk with me and Booker. And thank you for your always insightful and often poetic editorial feedback!

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FOREWORD

While organizing the layout of my analyses that make up this project, I happened upon a text that—by virtue of its confidence in the existence of the “deepening gulf” between the human species and all others—prompted me to open this essay by referring to it. The book is Raymond Tallis’ *The Knowing Animal*¹, where Tallis seeks to shut out anything that is foreign or threatening to the anthropocentric system² of thought. Instead of shutting out Tallis’ scholarship in return, I humbly hope to show that the field of posthumanism has no interest in distorting, degrading, disfiguring the human (as Tallis claims, 4), and that animal philosophers are not “gullible intellectuals” (5) who seek to erase all heterogeneities among all creatures.

The words printed here are devoted to the question of the animal, which interrogates convictions held by authors such as Tallis that pseudosciences that have come to shape posthumanism violate the essential characteristic that separates (a creature that is signified by the word) “man” and (the creatures that “men” have come to call) “animals”. This essential characteristic is, as Tallis’ book suggests, the capacity for knowing³. Again, I present arguments in this paper that are not “reactionary” to such avid anthropocentrism but instead demonstrative of the reasons why it is harmful to place humanity on such a special pedestal of “knowing”.

¹ This book is part of a hyper-anthropocentric trilogy that also includes *I am: A Philosophical Inquiry Into First-Person Being* (2004) and *The Hand: A Philosophical Inquiry in Human Being* (2003).

² To give my reader an example, Tallis argues that “Judgement, belief, classification and knowledge are aspects of what I shall call ‘propositional awareness’ ... it is the root of the growing distance, the deepening gulf between Homo sapiens and all other sentient creatures” (CH. 1: The Assault on the Knowing Subject, 9).

³ According to Tallis, “there is nothing corresponding to knowledge in the consciousness of any non-human creature” (9). Worth noting is that Tallis describes his book as “reactionary” and says that he is interested in “criticizing the conceptual revolutions that ... have paved the way for scientific [sic] reductions of human behaviour, diminishing the role of the conscious human agent in human affairs” (11).

The reading of Victor Pelevin's work here is done neither for purely literary purposes nor just to exercise the many ways of reasoning around and about the question of the animal (though elements of both are present). This study offers an example of devotion (my own and the one described by the protagonist of *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf*) to self-contemplation that reaches towards methods beyond logical reasoning and the philosophical idea of an "examined life"⁴. Pelevin's text, as any text, (scientific, fictional, philosophical or religious in genre) is an invitation to perceive the world in a certain way. As such, *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf* offers a perspective of openness towards otherness through A Hu-Li, an ancient werecreature. A Hu-Li questions anthropocentric demarcations of traditional humanism; and she struggles against them. Drawing on Zen Buddhism, yoga and meditation practices for imagery, Pelevin presents us a re-imagined idea of oneness with the universe that is fuelled by love and compassion and guided by intuition and the striving for higher self-awareness. (Warning: Pelevin's work is not a manual for Zen Buddhism, nor is my analysis an excavation of some Buddhist Idea that too many critics attempt to perform.)

Not without slips into anthropocentric logic, moreover, the novel does not float in abstract idealism, no matter how fabulous/extraordinary the events it depicts seem to the mind of a realist. Instead, both human qualities (championed by metaphysical humanism) and werewolf's characteristics (as imagined by Pelevin) are placed under scrutiny and exposed as limited and paradoxical, each

⁴ The word "devotion" is, however, too strong, and not only because the coupling of devotion with critical inquiry is commonly seen as paradoxical.

in its own way. A Hu-Li's world is one where human, animal and mystical overlap. Through the centuries she learns to combine her fox acumen with human "knowledge" and spirituality (drawn from monks, philosophers, novelists, film makers, and other people who have asked what it means to exist) to craft a personal moral framework that guides her relationships with others. A Hu-Li creates illusions with her tail, employing a hypnotic power to alter human perception. Writers are also capable of casting such powerful spells over their readers and of creating hallucinations that alter individual perception.

My project, then, is as much about language and ways of thinking about language and symbolic representation and unrepresentability, as it is about Victor Pelevin's work, animal philosophy and the relatively new discipline (or a cluster of interdisciplinary dialogues) that has been called the "Posthumanities"⁵, which aims to expose and undo the grand narratives of Humanism. I find Pelevin's work relevant and potent as a contribution to the mode of thinking the post-humanist project attempts.

⁵ See Cary Wolfe's very recent *What is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2010.



Поток Времени 1 / Flow of Time 1

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INTRODUCTION

*"The palaeontologists Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin provide another way of understanding time when they ask the readers of *Origins* to think about the history of the earth as a 1000-page book. If each page covers four and a half million years, it would take 750 pages just to reach the beginnings of life in the sea. Hominids would not appear until three pages from the end of the book, and the first use of stone tools would show up halfway down the final page. The story of homo sapiens would be told in the very last line of the book, with everything from cave-paintings and pyramids to the Holocaust and computer age jammed into the final word".*

~ Quoted by Charles Patterson in *Eternal Treblinka*, 2002

One cannot but wonder what the word that expresses the entire history of *Homo sapiens* would be in this 1000-page book. Except, how can it be any other word than the word "humanity"? The very term that is used to oppose all other living creatures of this planet. "Humanity" supports on its hefty shoulders (though with the help of all the synonymous terms in all parallel chains of significations) the ontological, epistemological, moral and ethical systems of thinking that validate the hubris of "man". Such pride results in horrors of Treblinka-proper and all other places that, as in Patterson's metaphoric use of this extermination and forced labour camp's name, continue to function according to the logic of "The Great Divide"⁶.

The title of Patterson's book is a phrase he borrowed from (and in memory of) Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-1991), a Polish-Jewish-American writer, who compared human treatment of animals (in particular the slaughterhouse industry) to that of the Nazis' extermination of people. This comparison brings with it

⁶ See "Chapter One: The Great Divide: Human Supremacy and the Exploitation of Animals" in *Eternal Treblinka* (2002). Patterson offers a detailed, albeit harrowing, account of the connections between homo sapiens' knack for making complex tools (for example the conveyor belt as a mechanism of mass production) and the adaptation of these technologies to mass destruction of animals and those who are deemed less than human or are strategically dehumanized.

emotional and intellectual complexity that, as Derrida noted, should not be “abuse[d] ... nor explained away”⁷. I will return to following Derrida’s thoughts on the responsibility and compassion involved in drawing parallels between human and animal genocides, a comparison that is controversial and is morally opposed by those who feel that such gestures belittle the suffering of all the (human) victims of the Holocaust. Compassion and openness to otherness will guide my reading of anthropocentric myths that are already deconstructed by Derrida with great care (and with attention to history, religion, philosophy, mythology, politics, ethics, and even to his little cat who remains nameless yet powerfully present throughout Derrida’s meditations in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*). Presently, a shift in registers of meaning will take the discussion of humanist idea(l)s about/of the meaning of “Being” into the realm of fiction and Eastern philosophy – territories seldom trodden by scientists and philosophers, at least in the discourses of the dominant views of non-human life.

A Hu-Li, the protagonist of Victor Pelevin’s *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf*⁸, will be my guide in this task; and more: she will be my witness whose gaze I will endeavour to endure, as much as possible, without turning away, ashamed of my nakedness reflected in the eyes of those who (in a Cartesian model) have no claim to the “properties of man”⁹. Of these characteristics that philosophers have deemed proper to man¹⁰, my analysis will focus in particular

7 *The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow)*. Trans. David Wills. Ed. Marie-Lousie Mallet. New York: Fordham, 2008. All future references are based on this edition.

8 Published in Russian as *Священная Книга Оборотня* (2005) = *Svjashennaja Kniga Oborotnja*. I will refer to it throughout the text as *SBW*, and draw my quotes from the Penguin edition (2008).

9 That is speech, logic, and a host of other qualities and capabilities, from having a concept of history to being able to laugh or to feel shame. *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (5).

10 See Matthew Calarco’s *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal From Heidegger to Derrida* for an excellent overview of continental philosophy’s treatment of animals.

on the importance of languaging and on the capacity for feeling shame and thus acting modestly or immodestly. Both language and shame are key elements in the story of Genesis¹¹. The capacity for both language and shame, as I hope to demonstrate, requires a degree of self-referentiality that Western philosophy *unjustifiably* denies animals. Pelevin, and I in his footsteps, follow another path. Drawing on Eastern philosophies of Buddhism (Zen specifically) that offer a different ontology of selfhood, or modes of understanding “being”, that do not rely on the harmful¹² distinction between *homo sapiens* and other creatures of this planet. Pelevin’s *Sacred Book of the Werewolf* strikes at the foundations of such distinctions, sending cracks of scepticism in the myths of sacrifice and salvation that work to validate much of anthropocentric thought. The openings where the distinction is destabilized create the effect of disorientation in defining humanness (who/where am I in relation to a werecreature? Am I a creature closer to an animal or to a werewolf?). As a result, I argue, each reader is invited to personally contemplate the nature of creatures – real and imagined, known and unknown.

The following (clusters of) questions will guide this project:

1) Are there reasons (ethical, ontological, legal, theological) for keeping the animal-human distinction? And if werecreatures partake in both of the worlds

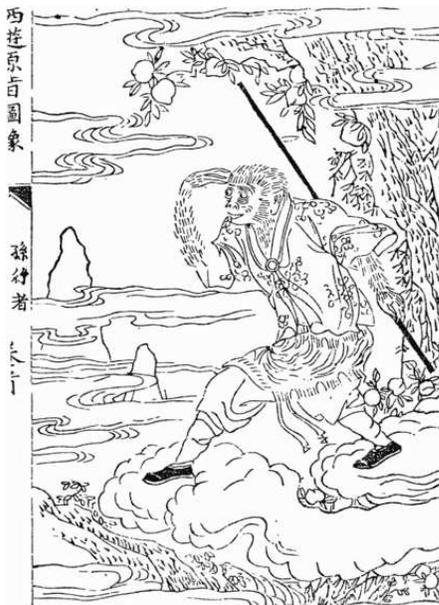
11 Both Derrida and others (Vicky Hearne, for example) have demonstrated the importance of naming the animals that God creates for Adam to “have authority over” (quoted in *Animal That Therefore I Am*, 15) and to “subdue” (Genesis 1.28). Moreover, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise, according to scripture, was intimately tied to their gained ability to feel shame. God made clothes of animal skins for Adam and Eve after “the fall” (Genesis 3. 21). In Pelevin’s work, shame also plays a central role in A Hu-Li’s pursuit of enlightenment and consequent relief from suffering – a detail that, to my knowledge, has not been taken up in any critical work of the novel to this date.

¹² Derrida and many other animal philosophers have been labouring to show just how harmful this distinction is.

simultaneously, and neither entirely, what makes the human so afraid of such hybridity? What superior qualities that animals possess do we fear?

2) Does Zen Buddhism offer anything to posthumanist discussions that currently dominate animal philosophy (analytical and continental) in the West? And is Buddhism anthropocentric or does it offer paths that pacify the human hubris and its desire for a special place in the order of being?

3) How are questions of shame and suffering interrelated and how are both essential to the passivity at the centre of power¹³ that Derrida locates? (More: Why does shame play a big role in *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf* and how is love conceptualized in relation to humility in the novel?)



Sun Wukong or the “Monkey King”¹⁴

1. REAL(ity)ISM?

For thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry. There you have a thesis: it is what philosophy has, essentially, had to deprive itself of. It is the difference between philosophical knowledge and poetic thinking.

~ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)*



For the sake of convenience I define my age as two thousand years – the period that I can recall more or less coherently. This could possibly be regarded as an act of coyness – I am significantly older than that. The origins of my life go ... far back into the depths of time, and recalling them is as difficult as lighting up the night sky with a small torch. We foxes were not born in the same way as people. We are descended from a heavenly stone and are distantly related to the king of apes, Sun Wukong himself, the hero of Journey to the West.

~ Svjashennaja Kniga Oborotnja, **Pelevin.**

¹³ The Animal That Therefore I Am (27-8).

¹⁴ Illustration for ancient Chinese book “The Journey to the West” <http://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_Wukong>.

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The opposition between scientific registers of meaning and those we call poetic, fictional, or mythical ones, is a key dualism that belongs to the same principle of organizing the world into binary terms among which the ones that concern me here are fact vs. fiction, human vs. animal, and sacred vs. profane. Derrida, in his attempt at defamiliarizing the reader from Cartesian logic of the thinking subject, suggests that poetry (which I take to mean poetic language at large) may be a better medium for thinking (“beyond reason”) about animals and about the call of ethical responsibility towards all creatures.

Scientific discourses claim to be more “real” than imaginary ones, meanwhile the “reality” that science supposedly captures is in fact based on assumptions of a *realism*, which, as any “ism”, has its strategic limitations of perception. What is real is conditional, insofar as no single perfect method for measuring reality has been devised and no science, however “pure” (that is mathematically expressed), functions without relying on language. Formulas may be less susceptible to the problems of sliding signifiers than the words on this page, but the conclusions that are derived from them about the world are just as vulnerable to being misconstrued in discussion.

Victor Pelevin’s work takes issue with each of these dualities (fact/fiction, human/animal, sacred/profane), contending the established privileging of the sacred-human-facts (and all facts for that matter¹⁵). Each of his works offers a different approach to dismantling the “great metanarratives”¹⁶. To counter a critique of Pelevin’s writing that seems to be in vogue among a certain type of

¹⁵ At a latter point I will discuss the principle of defamiliarization from the “explained and understood” that greatly concerns Pelevin.

¹⁶ Lyotard, Jean-François. *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, c1984.

critics, it is not self-plagiarism that Pelevin exercises from one work to another but a systematic exploration of deconstructing metanarratives.

A traditional reading of Pelevin's work¹⁷ will yield misleading results and dissatisfying schematic representations that rewrite the work rather than following what it offers on its own terms. Logic plays a large role in traditional literary analysis (even though fiction is not commonly considered to be bound by the chains of reason as non-fiction or science discourses are); if the events of the story do not have a certain basic logic of cause-effect and plausibility such a work is likely to be dismissed as "poorly constructed" or lacking in "realism". One example of an old genre that is excused from *strict* demands of logic and realism is the fairytale. Not coincidentally, Pelevin plays with a number of fairytales in the novel¹⁸ that concerns me here, *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf*¹⁹.

A central theme in Pelevin's work is the illusory nature of the world we experience as "real". Indeed the theme connects with the Buddhist ideas about the world as deception and suffering. But to say that Pelevin is a Buddhist proselyte²⁰ (aside from the etymological oxymoronity of the phrase) would be to (wilfully) misrepresent the author's view of religion as an agent that shapes perception²¹. Pelevin's version of subjective idealism, however, does not

¹⁷ That is through methods of evaluation of the text's plot structure or of the "depth" of its characters.

¹⁸ The most prominent ones are *The Little Red Riding Hood* and *Kroshechka Havroshechka*, a Russian tale about an orphan (a variant of Cinderella) who instead of a benevolent fairy godmother has the help of a magical cow who (even after the cow is slaughtered by the evil stepmother) helps the young girl beyond the grave. It would be interesting to study the theme of reincarnation in this fairy tale, but that is beyond the scope of this work.

¹⁹ (Rus. Священная Книга Оборотня = Svjashennaja Kniga Oborotnja = SKO).

²⁰ As one critic does: "Pelevin [is] an apologist ... a Russian literary Messiah of Buddhism [!]. A Messiah that is zealous, endlessly devoted to the teaching through which he came to save his reader, and ... And aggressive." See Igor Getmanskii. "Pelevin's riddles and answers to them". < <http://pelevin.nov.ru/stati/o-getm/1.html> >.

²¹ "To me, all these theories [of religion, both of monotheism and polytheism] are equally close and distant, because of all of them -- without exception -- are [or consist of] swings (or fluctuations: *vzmahi*) of the mind in emptiness (*pustota*). It does not interest me in what direction and under what angle the mind swings because all of its movements possess the same quality -- they always end in the same place they began, and do not leave a trace behind. What's more is that

preclude the author's concern with the ethical treatment of the Other. In fact, the view (which was pioneered by George Berkeley) that everything exists in perception, which the protagonist of *SKO*, the ancient werefox named A Hu-Li, praises and deconstructs, is not in any way equivalent to moral relativism or vacuousness.

Pelevin claims no responsibility toward anybody but himself and his texts when asked about his concern of the impact that his work might have on those who read it²². Such a statement might be taken as morally questionable but only if one believes that the path along which the sense of responsibility ought to travel is a direct one from the individual subject to all the others around. Pelevin's statement is much more complex in its understanding of what responsibility towards the Other entails. On the one paw it is comparable to what J.M. Coetzee's fictional professor, Elizabeth Costello in *The Lives of Animals*, says about the reason for her vegetarianism (namely that it does not stem from moral conviction but from a desire to save her soul²³), and, on the other, in a less religious discourse of personal salvation, I read Pelevin's assertion (that is evident from his writings as I hope to show) that responsible or ethical treatment of any Other – human or animal – begins with contemplation of the self and one's place among all living beings.

the mind itself is illusory (illuzoren) too, because 'the mind' is just a concept established in language that has the same nature as the rest of the phantoms of consciousness (fantomy soznania). Reality is not expressible (nevyrazima). And the religious for me is something that one cannot talk about. Not because it is forbidden, but because it is impossible" (interview with Pelevin, Kochetkova, 2009, my translation).

²² See the interview in *Gazeta Kommersant*. Interview with Liza Novikova, "Vdali ot kompleksnykh ideji Zhivesh, kak Rambo - day by day". Date unknown. / Газета Коммерсантъ. "Вдали от комплексных идей живешь, как Рэмбо, – day by day". < <http://pelevin.nov.ru/interview/o-komrs/1.html>>.

²³ Coetzee, John Maxwell. *The Lives of Animals*. Ed. Amy Gutmann. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999.

2.1 A HU-LI: A FABULOUS METATEXT

The work of deconstructing the binary fact/fiction is commenced in the preface to the novel, “Commentary by Experts”, that explains the origins of the “fictional” account in front of the reader,

The present text, which is also known under the title of ‘A Hu-Li’ is in fact a clumsy literary forgery, produced by an unknown author during the first quarter of the twenty-first century ... The text file entitled ‘A Hu-Li’ was supposedly found on the hard disk of a laptop computer discovered in ‘dramatic circumstances’ in one of Moscow’s parks ... The subsequent fate of the text that was (supposedly) discovered on a hard disk of the laptop is well known. It initially circulated among occult fringe groups, and was later published as a book.

Furthermore, the “experts” advise readers to dismiss *SBW* as “a symptom of the profound spiritual decline through which our society is currently passing.” The “experts” conclude that

the pseudo-oriental pop-metaphysics that the author is unable to resist flaunting before other dismal failures like himself cannot possibly evoke anything more than an intense feeling of *compassion* (my italics, xi).

Aside from a direct challenge of the legitimacy of literary critics and other “serious experts” who devote themselves to studying “real” metaphysics (such as the authors of this report²⁴ who claim that the “text is not, of course, deserving of any serious literary or critical analysis”), this meta-textual interpolation serves to subvert the hierarchy of authority on the interpretation of events that are depicted. As the reader quickly discovers, the experts, in fact, got it all wrong.

Contrary to some critics’ negativity to such “postmodern tricks” (that they claim are used by authors to make their work more entertaining and therefore marketable) the “Commentary from Experts” serves an important role in the

²⁴ The story of one of these critics is woven into the plot of the novel. Dr. Igor Shitman, PhD in philological science (and Shakespeare specialist) goes mad upon the discovery of his name’s translation from English. The significance names have in people’s lives is a subject discussed in the novel, to which I will return to at a later point.

novel: it asks the reader not to jump to conclusions based on “logical” explanations of “strange anomalies” like the ones offered up by Dr. Shitman et al.

2.2 FABLES

Derrida writes in his discussion of animal ethics:

Above all, it was necessary to avoid fables. We know the history of fabulization and domestication. Always a discourse of man, indeed on the animality of man, but for and in man (*Animal That Therefore I Am*, 37).

Undoubtedly the fable genre is highly anthropocentric and, indeed, domesticates or appropriates animals into the human world not for the sake of the animals themselves but in the interests of humanity. Traditional fables, yes. But to say that all fables must be avoided is, in essence, to deprive us of much imaginative interaction with the nonhuman in literature. Surely Derrida did not mean that. The point that Derrida makes is that animals must not be mere intellectual or moral vehicles as they often are in fables; he is seeking the treatment of animals to be “something other than figures or characters in a fable” (35). Having said this, is it not possible to reconstruct the fable in such a way as to make creatures of different species come alive on their own terms and serve purposes other than moral didacticism? And: it would be worth examining the ways in which animals are fable-ized through human history (from Aesop to Orwell in the West but also ancient Hindu examples, and Ivan Krylov’s *Basni* in the East, just to scratch the surface of the material) to map out precisely how it is that animals have been domesticated through these stories and to reveal how the literary confirms the “real” and vice versa²⁵. For example: as powerful as Orwell’s fable *Animal Farm*

²⁵ I am reminded by a similar that statement that Matthew Calarco makes in *Zoontologies*: “Animal studies could take as one of its primary aims a historical and genealogical analysis of the constitution of the human-animal distinction and how this distinction has functioned across a number of institutions, practices, discourses” (140).

is, it conforms to the accepted tradition of using the swine as a stand-in for terrible human behavior. (In Russian we call it *svinstvo*).

The fabulous (in both senses) character of A Hu-Li, though not entirely free of anthropocentric mentality²⁶, defies the long-established notion of an abyss that separates humanity and animality. A Hu-Li presents a continuity of being, albeit a fictional one (yet what “fiction” connotes in its relation to metaphysics is a question worth examining), a continuity that as a product of creative thought opens the possibility of transcending the anthropocentric logic, the legacy of which (in Western philosophy) Derrida examines carefully in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Derrida formulates three neologisms that he wants us to keep in mind whenever the question of the animal is raised.

Firstly, the word “animot”, a meta-meta-lingual word, points to the emptiness, arbitrariness, or, at best, abstractness of the word animal. Derrida often places this word in scare quotes or capitalizes it to emphasize the grandstanding of such a useless and even harmful word. *Mot* is just a word and animal is just an “animot” that fails to account for all of the “multiplicities & heterogeneities” (31) of both human and non-human living creatures of this world. Second, “carnophallogocentrism” denotes the underlying ideals of humanism: sacrifice, males, and reason. Finally, “*anthropotheocentrism*,” which reminds us that anthropocentrism is deeply rooted in religious traditions

²⁶ A fact that she admits and blames the magical fox’s reliance of language for this. She says that language “is the root from which infinite human stupidity grows. And we werecreatures suffer from it too ... It’s impossible to you’re your mouth without being wrong. While I mostly agree with Derrida’s perceptive remark that “the history of fabulization ... remains an anthropomorphic taming, a moralizing subjection, a domestication. Always a discourse of man, on man, indeed on the animality of man, but for and in man”, I contend that Pelevin’s fable creatures are not wholly tamed for the purposes of didacticism to man.

(specifically he examines the Judeo-Christian values) that foreground the history of Western “Humanities” in general.

A recent example of a fable that takes a critical look at anthropocentrism is Wes Anderson’s *Fantastic Mr. Fox*²⁷ (2009). Though the foxes and animals depicted in it wear clothes and drink cider, read newspapers, and have a social structure of their own (though one that resembles greatly that of North American human culture), the film is a poignant criticism of humanism. The foxes and other animals unite to retaliate against three giant farms of "Boggis and Bunce and Bean/ One short, one fat, one lean. /These horrible crooks, so different in looks, / were nonetheless equally mean." If Anderson’s film is not entirely post-humanist (and working through the film’s understanding of animal-human relations could help to further define what this term means in application to fables and other imaginative texts) then it is certainly an attack on the subject of factory-farms. The restrictions imposed by being couched in popular media entertainment²⁸ are also worth considering, and beyond the facile dismissal of didacticism dressed up as amusement. Anderson’s fable is *Animal Farm* re-imagined where the animals partially succeed in resisting oppression²⁹. Such resistance is not futile for one reason at least. To resist humanist narratives on a large scale is impossible

²⁷ Visit IMDB for a synopsis: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0432283/synopsis>. Better yet, watch the film.

²⁸ Pelevin makes a similar observation about *The Matrix*: “[The Matrix] certainly is the best and most accurate, that has appeared in popular culture over the past decade. But the genre itself imposes limitations. First, you are told that the body is just a perception -- a great metaphysical step forward. But then immediately you learn that your real body does exist, but it is stored in a barn outside of town, and you have a slot at the back of your head (something that differentiates mommy and daddy), through which everything is loaded into your brain. This has nothing to do with the directors’ limited understanding of metaphysics . If you remove the barn with the "real" body, it would be difficult to show how Keanu Reeves fornicates, which, in effect, will lower the sales. Therefore metaphysics have to yield to the box office”. *Gazeta Kommersant*. Interview with Liza Novikova, "Vdali ot kompleksnykh ideji Zhivesh".

²⁹ In Pelevin’s work the short story “*Zatvornik I Shestipali*” (“Hermit and Sixfinger”) is a similar hopeful account of two chickens’ escape from a factory farm. See <http://pelevin.nov.ru/pov/en-hermit/1.html>.

without first imagining that resistance from a defamiliarized position where what animals are capable or not capable of doing is not determined by tradition.

The Sacred Book of the Werewolf, I contend, is an important addition to such postanthropocentric narratives that seem to be gaining popular attention. This is a symptom of a paradigmatic shift in the direction of posthumanities and, my hope is that it bodes well for the future of all non-human creatures. Pelevin's novel, furthermore, is interesting due to the hybridity about which it speculates. *SBW* is about werecreatures – foxes and wolves – who live secretly among people in the early 21st century Russia. *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf* is a meditation on the difficulty, the loneliness, the advantages and disadvantages of the in-between existence neither inside nor outside that A Hu-Li embraces but Alexander, her werewolf lover, rejects.

3. HYBRIDS

"Tout autre est tout autre"
~ **Derrida** (quoted in Lawlor)

A Hu-Li is, arguably, Pelevin's most mystical and challenging character, though not the only werecreature in his oeuvre. I say she is the most challenging because the range of experience that she embodies is hard to grasp. As an ancient creature her mind can reach back over two millennia, having the potential (though through great effort) to recall any event that she has ever encountered in that time. She claims to be roughly 5,300 years old (though it is not explained how she makes this estimate) and later confesses that she cannot remember her origins. (If we recall palaeontologists' Richard Leakey and Roger Lewis' analogy of a 1000-page book, however, A Hu-Li, like humanity as we know it, fits into one

word of the history of our planet.) Among the other werereatures in Pelevin's imagination, A Hu-Li is the most misplaced. The monk who teaches A Hu-Li the secret of becoming a "super-werewolf" offers an explanation of why this is:

It is believed that sometimes a mind born into the world of demons takes fright at the cruelty and goes to live on its outer perimeter, where the demonic reality borders on the world of people and animals. Such a being does not belong to any one of these worlds, since it migrates between all three – the worlds of humans, animals, and demons. It is to this category that magical foxes belong (303).

A Hu-Li's body, moreover, is a simulacrum of the human. Werefoxes' bodies look human, as far as we learn from few descriptions offered³⁰, but have, in addition, fox tails (that expand and contract like "antennae"). Also foxes lack reproductive organs that are functional; instead, A Hu-Li has a simulacrum that she calls "a prick-catcher". The most realistically depicted part of A Hu-Li's body is her tail – an organ that allows her to cast illusions for human beings (or "tailless monkeys" in her parlance). Allegorically speaking, her tail is of the same significance to defining foxes as beings as the mind is considered to be in defining humans. One of the challenges that A Hu-Li faces is to learn how her tail creates illusions for others, and for herself, as she eventually discovers. The path to discovery is initiated by a human (Buddhist monk) in China, 12 centuries prior to the events that take place in the novel. I will return to the teaching she receives from the Yellow Master at a later point.

³⁰ A Hu-Li says of her looks, "To look at I could be anything from fourteen to seventeen years old – closer to fourteen" (5). And "we have slender, shapely bodies without a trace of fat and magnificently defined musculature ... We have fine, silky, gleaming hair that's a bright fiery-red colour. We are tall, and in ancient times that often used to give us away, but nowadays people have become taller ... Although we don't have any sex in the sense of the ability to reproduce, all of its external signs are present – you could never take a fox for a man ... Our breasts are small and perfectly formed, with small, dark-brown nipples ... where women have their most important dream factory we have something similar in appearance – an imitative organ ... And at the back we have a tail, a fluffy, flexible, fiery-red antenna" (16-7). The physical descriptions are few after this in the rest of the novel, but the reader is often given details about how the tail perceives and numerous roles it plays in a fox's life.

Meanwhile, dwelling on A Hu-Li's place in the world (that is the nature of her being) will offer the reader more insight into the peculiarities of a hybrid creature that embodies paradoxical combinations of both post-humanism and a peculiar kind of perfectionism³¹ that does not go unchallenged in the novel. Chicken hunting induces a transformation into a furry quadruped creature that is commonly referred to as a fox. But her transformation is short-lived and also impossible without the deep feeling of shame which A Hu-Li believes to be essential to moral and spiritual self-improvement.

We can ask: What does a werecreature's hybridity (the being and not being part of the human and animal worlds) expose about human fear of the unknown and anxiety about mixing categories/modes of being? (The fascination with mythical creatures is an old one: world mythology is rich with minotaurs, werewolves, vampires, zombies, feral children and other creatures of the "in-between".) Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is an interesting example to study as it depicts hybridity as monstrosity yet "Creature" is neither beyond good and evil, nor is he an embodiment of either exclusively³². The serpent (from Genesis) is, perhaps, the most loathed mythical animal (in the Judeo-Christian tradition at least) who is conveniently blamed for causing "the fall", or the differentiation between good and evil, yet he and the other animals remain in the pre-differentiated state. This is a double gesture of human deceitfulness: the blame for man's loss of Paradise is placed on the *animot* and yet all animals called such

³¹ Perfectionism in the language of moral philosophy implies a moral hierarchy where humans are at the top. See *The Death of the Animal* (2009). Werecreatures, as super-beings that transcend both human and animal categories seemingly top the hierarchy. Why organizing living beings into a hierarchy of existence-value is misleading and harmful is a lesson that A Hu-Li learns and one of the most important lessons that she strives to convey in her narrative.

³² I do not have space to say anything else about the anthropocentric narratives of civilizing the creature in this novel. But Creature is a complex being that straddles the human and inhuman, living and dead and is thus rejected despite all of his suffering and efforts to fit in.

a name are to be subjected to man's powers and cruelty since they are "outside" the law³³. *Carnophallogocentrism* par excellence!³⁴

Perhaps, the clear distinction that we fancy to exist between good and evil is just as harmful as the distinction between human and animal. Hence we should also ask: is the refusal of admitting animals (and all those considered "less-than-human") into our moral universe, as well as the boredom with (or wilful ignorance of) their suffering, the innermost essence of humanity? And how do we "sacrifice sacrifice?" to follow Derrida's assertion that this is precisely what philosophers who have dwelled on the question of the animal (Kant, Heidegger, Levinas and Lacan specifically in Derrida's analysis) have failed to do, each by holding fast onto some human characteristic that they deemed improper or impossible for the animal³⁵. Much has been written to show the injustices of such reservations that these philosophers keep. Yet few hazard to give instructions for undoing the damage of these schools of thought, and, more practically, for changing legislature about the ethical treatment of non-human creatures³⁶.

I would now like to turn to Leonard Lawlor's reading of Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am* because Lawlor does offer a theoretical model for embracing heterogeneity among species and thereby reducing the violence against the other. Focusing specifically on the practice of *naming* that Lawlor believes has the power (albeit a weak, passive kind) to nudge human psychology over the threshold of its humanity into the open space of ethics that are uncharted, not pre-determined, and passive though not motionless or ineffective.

³³ I will briefly comment on the latest published series of Derrida's lectures, *The Beast and the Sovereign* (2009).

³⁴ Or, as Derrida said, "Politics presupposes livestock" (*The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 96).

³⁵ It is *reason* for Kant; *Dasein* or "being there", i.e. not merely existing but having self-awareness for Heidegger; *ethics* for Levinas; and *unconscious* and/or divided self in Lacan. *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (90).

³⁶ There is an enormous (dietary) reason for this hesitation; but more on that later.

4. A HU-LI: What's in a name?

But amid all this gazing and blinking, this watching and thinking, this fantastic *theoria* of vision that may be coterminous with philosophical modernity itself, where are the moments when—to speak too quickly—animals see philosophers, where philosophy is subjected to the gaze of the other animal, to the other-than-human animal, “the gaze called animal”?

The Animal That Therefore I Am, Derrida.

A Hu-Li is a fictional “other-than-human animal” (11) that sees philosophers from the distance of otherness, which allows anthropocentric certainties to be questioned. The name A Hu-Li (which she says translates from Chinese as “a fox named A” – a self-referential name in itself) hints at a number of meanings, a variety of interpretive possibilities. The Russian translation, for example, is a cheeky homonym of the Russian (rather vulgar) expression. So A Hu-Li jokes that living in Russia with her name is “rather like living in (North) America with the name ‘Watze Phuck’” (7). Also, the sounds from which her name is composed can be read as “A Who Lee?” a question that (to the Russian ear at least) can sound like the great philosophical question of what “the sum total that is of A Hu-Li” (37) really is, as *such*, we could add, following Heidegger. Moreover, A Hu-Li uses the pseudonym, Adele Li in her work as a prostitute. Her lover, Alexander Sery (in Russian *серый* means “grey”), shortens Adele to Ada, which A Hu-Li says can be read in two ways: 1) Ad A (*ad* in Russian means “hell”) – the hell of A or A’s hell, or 2) A, da? – an expression equivalent to “oh yeah?” in English.

Play with homonyms across languages is one of the joys in Pelevin’s work. For him, beyond the delight of playing with sounds (a game that is certainly not human alone), the complexity of meaning and potential for miscommunication that emerge from even the simplest of sounds opens the discussion for not only the arbitrariness of languages known to human beings, but also about the need for

ongoing attention to more than established meanings within any given signifying system. This is the point Derrida makes with *animot*. To forget, even for a moment, that as we speak we also have to constantly ask questions of the words that we use, is to become trapped and deceived by rules of signification that are not fixed for all eternity. Readers of Pelevin's fiction are trained in such meta-reading – that is critical thinking about the reading of one's reading – an essential aspect for the work of deconstruction.

Recalling what Derrida says structures anthropocentrism (sacrifice, man, and logos) we can begin by reversing what, Lawlor reminds us, has been called the “anti-Platonic” logic:

the attempt to reverse ... hierarchies set up in Plato's philosophy, hierarchies that are then appropriated into the metaphysical tradition: the hierarchies between the invisible or intelligible and the visible or sensible; between the soul and body; between living memory and rote memory; between mneme and hypomnesis; between voice and writing; between, finally, good and evil³⁷

Reversing such hierarchies is not sufficient. What use is there in placing the animal, as some extreme devotees to non-human life do, on the pedestal of knowing, for example, and declaring thus that humans, actually, have an inferior relation to the world because through their tool-making and love for abstraction they have lost their primeval, animal senses³⁸. Is our worldview not expansive enough to consider a great variety of perspectives and evaluate them differently

³⁷ *This is not sufficient: an essay on animality and human nature in Derrida*. New York: Colombia U Press, 2007. (28).

³⁸ J. M. Coetzee's fictional Elizabeth Costello, to whom I will return, makes a claim that flirts with such a reversal. She argues: “the program of scientific experimentation that leads you to conclude that animals are imbeciles is profoundly anthropocentric. It values being able to find your way out of a sterile maze, ignoring the fact that if the researcher who designed the maze were to be parachuted into the jungle of Borneo, he or she would be dead of starvation in weeks” (62). Her rhetoric is compelling as her intentions are good; and certainly I agree with her that “There is something self-stultified in the way in which scientific observation recoils from the complexity of life” (62), but to discount abstraction in and of itself (as with the case of discarding fables) is unnecessary and regressive. The two kinds of knowledges should not be directly compared. But the sentiment that engenders such an argument is precisely what is missing in those science labs that Costello evokes.

in different contexts? A Hu-Li has something to teach us regarding such a multiplicity in the mind that I will turn to shortly. But let us follow Lawlor's meditation on the power of naming.

4.1 THE POWER OF NAMING

Naming, as anyone familiar with the occult arts (or with Lacanian psychoanalysis) has the power to summon things into existence. In Genesis, God asks Adam to name the animals and thus establish his dominion over them. Derrida's approach to naming (in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* at least) is through Walter Benjamin's contemplation of the "passivity of being named, this impossibility of reappropriating one's own name ... of obscure foreshadowing of sadness" (20). Derrida adds something very important to this thought on naming, and hence I quote at length:

[Naming is] a foreshadowing of mourning because it seems to me that every case of naming involves announcing a death to come in the surviving of a ghost, the longevity of a name that survives whoever carries that name. Whoever receives a name feels mortal or dying, precisely because the name seeks to save him, to call him and thus assure his survival. Being called, hearing oneself being named, receiving a name for the first time involves something like the knowledge of being mortal and even the feeling that one is dying. To have already died and being promised to death: dying. (How could one, I ask in passing, refuse the animal access to the experience of death as such by depriving it thus of nomination?)

The act of mourning of the self through the power of being named (by the Other, Lacan would add) seems to be a sad prospect, but the concept of being saved through the act of naming can have more than one interpretation as Lawlor demonstrates in "The 'Weak' Response to the Suffering of the Living: An Attempt to Follow Derrida".

Derrida, in this passage, focuses on the survival of the name beyond its “owner”, so to speak. Though is it possible to really “own” a name? Lawlor, however, reads something much more positive in the act of naming:

But what I have done is constructed a kind of "recipe"--how can we eat well, that is, in the least evil way?--for the more sufficient response. The "recipe" is a kind of bet on "human psychology" as it is viewed by common opinion. The central idea lies in the naming of the animals, which metaphorically "eats" them; naming each and every one of them (naming as we do a child who is coming (8)) will engage our passions, will make us feel differently, and our passions will make us think differently and act differently; naming them, the hope is, will change the way we "literally" treat and eat the animals.

Lawlor's recipe of following the animal in the mode of "active passivity" strives to move in the direction of what he calls “unconditional hospitality”, a kind of a “weak force”³⁹. I will highlight the key components of Lawlor's "recipe" and show how they connect with A Hu-Li's actions and personal moral guidelines that she has developed over the centuries.

The first key ingredient in unconditional hospitality is to "recognize that we are composed of one force" (this idea that overlaps greatly with Buddhist idea of the unity of being⁴⁰). Doing so, Lawlor argues, will result in a “weak force ... an ability to be unable to hold the others out”. Such a gesture will not cancel out singularity. Recognizing that at some deep level we are all one (a continuous flow of energy, or a flow of time, perhaps, expressed through that energy?) does not preclude singularity, especially not in the realm of personal experience or in the application of this “weak force” in the making of legal/moral decisions. One should endeavour, Lawlor says, to “[l]et the others in their singularity in”, and it

³⁹ Lawlor, Leonard. “The ‘Weak’ Response to the Suffering of the Living: An Attempt to Follow Derrida”. *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*. 2007 vol:40 iss:2 pg:79 -90. Web. Accessed through GaleGroup. I am not able to give page references for the passages that I will cite because the electronic journal where I read this piece was in a non-paginated format.

⁴⁰ I will get to analyzing the expression of this idea in Pelevin's work shortly.

follows that this active passivity would break down the boundary between self and other, rendering it an outdated relic of humanism. This advice is echoed in the moral guidelines that A Hu-Li's leaves for werecreatures and for "tailless monkeys". She says that the way to following "The Path" (to spiritual enlightenment) is to contemplate one's own nature. A Hu-Li began this path twelve centuries ago, and she advocates and demonstrates such contemplation throughout the novel; for example, A Hu-Li explains that she understood that a fox's "essential nature [is] to constantly pretend" but that this does not mean that she is always insincere because her "essential nature [is] to simulate [thus] the only path to genuine sincerity lies through simulation" (316). But understanding is never enough. And she teaches that "there isn't anything that can be understood once and for all"⁴¹. Contemplating one's own nature then is not an egotistic philosophical indulgence but a mode of being where the self is nothing but an inextricable part of everything else, not separate from all otherness, but only temporarily and conditionally differentiated. The debate about the "realness", or, conversely, illusory nature, of such differentiation is the key theme that Pelevin explores in all of his works, each of which becomes a unique space, with its own rules of perception.

Next, A Hu-Li teaches that one must "comprehend what love is" (330). And this also resonates with Lawlor's advice to make the "weak force" *unconditional*. Could we call Lawlor's concept a type of love, then? The kind of love that does not stem from a narcissistic desire to possess the loved object

⁴¹ "Since we don't see it with our eyes but with our minds we say 'I understand'. But when we think we've understood it, we've already lost it. In order to possess the truth, you have to see it consistently – or, in other words, comprehend it over and over again, second after second, continuously" (SBW, 263).

(and thus treat it as one pleases⁴²) but one that sees the other as a singularity to be respected? Lawlor also adds, that “[w]e should not forget here that unconditionality follows from Kant’s insight that a law, if it is to be worthy of its name, requires it to be absolutely universal”. The word “universal” is a slippery one here because it can be used in the positive way that Lawlor intends it (without the function of the anthropological machine slipping into this universality), however, (and most likely) the force of difference (upon which the anthropological machine works, as Agamben taught us), would still exclude certain beings (according to some perfectionism or another) in practical situations. Lawlor also recognizes that “there are always conditions”. I will return to the problem with universals at a later point.

The final steps in A Hu-Li’s ritual of liberation (the result of which is that A Hu-Li “cease[s] to create this world”, 333) is to “engender in [your] heart love of the greatest power possible [unconditional?] and then to “call out [your] own name in a loud voice” (332-3). Without Lawlor’s concept of salvation through naming, this last bit of A Hu-Li’s advice made little sense. It seemed to be a flourish added for dramatic effect. But from Lawlor’s recipe offers the possibility of a more powerful interpretation. He writes:

Now, name every single other in its singularity. The name always results in the iterability of the singular. (10) The iterability is the same weak force with which we began: letting them in reduces them to a medium of sameness. The medium of sameness means that I have the ability to be unable to remain silent. The naming places every single other in a medium that tends toward universality, in a medium that does violence to that singularity, that even “kills” them in their singularity. The name, so to speak, “eats” them.

⁴² Recall what Derrida writes regarding the logic of *Dasein* and other such humanist philosophies. He writes that there is “a founding sacrifice, within a human space, where, in any case, exercising power over the animal to the point of being able to put it to death when necessary is not forbidden” (91).

To deal with the certain violence inherent in the act of naming, Lawlor recommends that we remain mindful of the following conditions:

1. That everybody needs to eat, but “animals must be eaten well, with the least amount of violence”.
2. “Carry the name, not the singular other; show restraint” (i.e. treat each creature as different, not as simply belonging to the category “animal”).
3. See the name as “a kind of a shield that allows the animals to be left alone”.
4. “Recognize that this "recipe" is not sufficient (although it is necessary). The more sufficient response is still not sufficient because there is still suffering, necessarily.”
5. “Always feel compassion for the others who are suffering. Have passion with them (com-passion), which means that you must recognize that the animals, all the others, have fear in the face of death (not anxiety) since death always comes from the others, from me or you or us or them.”

I could not help but to cite nearly in full what Lawlor teaches in his “recipe” because there is a passion in it that seems to radiate love.

With the help of her lover, Alexander, A Hu Li learns that love is the force that has been missing in her life of contemplation. He helps her (albeit inadvertently) to realize that her tail does not only create illusions for others, but that it creates all the illusions possible, that is the totality of the world that she experiences all around – internally and externally. The distinction inside/outside therefore becomes porous. What it would mean – in theoretical and practical terms – to collapse this distinction entirely is a large philosophical question that I cannot take up here. But at least the recognition of the inseparability of the two – of the internal and external “realities” – offers rich possibilities of exploring how different creatures inhabit spaces (real and imagined) through perception unique

to each one. Multiply each creature's singularity of perception by the variability of perception over time and the complexity of the world becomes infinite: no two people perceive the world in exactly the same way, no two cats will respond to the same stimulus in perfect unison, no two creatures of whatever intellectual complexity, in other words, will perceive the same object or event in exactly the same manner, no one in this world is an automaton, nobody's existence is static.

4.2 THE IDEA OF UNITY

The infinite complexity of singularities, as I mentioned earlier, does not preclude the interconnectedness and a grand unity of all that is. The images used in Pelevin's work to express the idea of unity of all life (or force, in Lawlor's terms) are ample:

- 1) In *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf* it is the two inseparable concepts of "The Rainbow Stream" that A Hu-Li enters and the "Super Werewolf" that one becomes both in order to enter the stream and when entering the stream⁴³.
- 2) In *Buddha's Little Finger* (also known as *Clay Machine-Gun* and Чапаев и Пустота in Russian) it is "URAL" an acronym in Russian that stands for "Conditional River of Absolute Love (Условная Река Абсолютной Любви).
- 3) In *P5: Farewell songs of the political pygmies of Pindostan* (П5: прощальные песни политических пигмеев Пиндостана) it is the

⁴³ A Hu-Li explains, that the concept means "the world around us" (313). "You see the colours – blue, red, green? They appear and disappear in your mind. That is the Rainbow Stream. Every one of us is a super-werewolf in the Rainbow Stream ... On the one hand, the super-werewolf is in the Rainbow Stream from the very beginning. But on the other, it is not possible to enter it at all because the Rainbow Stream is simply an illusion. But this is only an apparent contradiction because you and this world are one and the same" (313).

colourful energy stream the protagonist, Lenchka, sees with the help of a praying mantis.

The oneness of being is expressed in many of Pelevin's works but emphasized more in the ones I listed above. I will not rehearse all the examples here, but offer just one more: In *The Life of Insects*, the interconnectedness of all its characters' lives is depicted complexly through shape-shifting that leaves the reader unsure about the possibility of drawing the line of distinction between the human and the insect worlds⁴⁴. Mosquitoes transform into businessmen, young prostitutes into flies, young tortured men with philosophical inclinations into moths (attracted by the "light") and dung beetles claim to have the ultimate knowledge of the essence of life. In the end all these characters are revealed to be intimately tied to each other's fates and to have one origin. The political satire of this novel aside, Pelevin's prose also achieves a worldview that has much in common with the project of posthumanities⁴⁵.

Finally, and most unexpectedly, in the context of our concern with Buddhist overtones in Pelevin's work, "the voice of Christianity" makes an appearance at the end of Lawlor's essay. He claims that "[a] more sufficient response, then, our religious response, would seem to be Christian", in the sense that the "weak force" that he describes, as I understand it to mean a kind of a love is an intimate relative of *agape* love that is taught in Christianity. The problem with even evoking the signifiers of religion such as "Christianity" or

⁴⁴ Pelevin opens his novel with a couplet from Joseph Brodsky's poem: "Я сижу в своем саду. Горит светильник./ Ни подруги, ни прислуги, ни знакомых./Вместо слабых мира этого и сильных -- /лишь согласное гуденье насекомых." In English: "I am sitting in my garden, a lantern's burning/ There is no friend, no maid, and no acquaintance/Instead of the weak in this world and the strong/There is only the insects' concurrent humming" (my translation).

⁴⁵ See Cary Wolfe's website, *Posthumanities*: < http://www.carywolfe.com/post_about.html> for an overview of approaches (positive and negative) of questioning the "human" in posthumanities.

“Buddhism” or any other name of a religious tradition is that each is as heterogenous, complex, and paradoxical in its history as can be. So Lawlor qualifies this thought by deconstructing the idea of Christianity (recalling that all of Derrida’s work could be considered a deconstruction of Christianity). He concludes that at the core his philosophy is “irreligious”. Again we are faced with a (seeming) paradox: “religious irreligiosity”. I would like to suggest that Victor Pelevin’s work can be described precisely as such. His investment into Buddhist precepts is conditioned by an understanding of the limitations (historical, political, cultural) that shape each religious teaching. It is evident in all of Pelevin’s works that Buddhism, as any other teaching, is transmitted in and shaped by language. Reminders about the abstractness of language, therefore, are scattered on most of the pages of his work.

5. LANGUAGE ON LANGUAGE

“I am inclined to think that the far greater part, if not all, of those difficulties which have hitherto amused philosophers and blocked up the way to knowledge, are entirely owing to ourselves—that we have first raised a dust and then complain that we cannot see”.

*A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, **George Berkeley.***

Berkley’s claim begins to describe the problems that arise in our relations to “knowledge” that we can categorize into knowledges/ disciplines/ discourses that have been produced and are being produced incessantly. The metaphorical dust that rises in Berkley’s mind, however, is not a matter that can easily be cleared away to reveal some pure truth that each philosopher in his or her way seeks. If we are to follow Berkley’s formulation and reflect upon the “difficulties” that “amuse” the philosophers, we might as well rename philo-sophia to philo-

poena (for pain, or punishment, as those who endeavour to write down their ideas coherently know that the most frequent reward for mental labours is the torment of Ideas that haunts in both waking and sleeping hours). But the dust that obscures the nature of things, “as they are,” from our sight is the very matter from which we form our ideas of the world around. There is no knowledge without this dust. Language is the dusty tool that has been passed down to us through generations of men, the tool that also forged men and their state of being, which is to say the privileged, Cartesian, vision of our selves that are separate from (superior to) the “Animals”.

5.1 ON ABSTRACT THINKING

In response to Alex’s question, “What do people have language for if it gives them nothing but grief?” A Hu-Li responds:

In the first place, so they can lie. In the second place, so they can wound each other with the barbs of venomous words. In the third place, so they can discuss what doesn’t exist” (265).

Prior to philosophizing about knowledge that belongs to men, Berkley prefaced his thoughts with a meditation on the treacherous nature of language and how it allows us to deceive ourselves into thinking “*abstract ideas*”.

He writes:

“In order to prepare the mind of the reader for the easier conceiving what follows, it is proper to premise somewhat by way of introduction, concerning the nature and abuse of language” (7).

It is a common gesture among philosophers of all ages to point to the limits of language. Derrida opens *The Animal That Therefore I Am* by expressing his desire to “entrust [him]self to the words that, were it possible, would be naked ... quite simply, words from the heart (1). He is also, as he says, signalling that

nakedness will be a central topic of discussion, if not *the* central one. We shall turn to this topic too. Specifically, I will look at the connections between nakedness (which implies/presupposes shame and modesty) and suffering, how both exist on a continuum of vulnerability, and how these ideas are central to A Hu-Li's narrative. Before proceeding to the final sections of analysis, I wish to conclude my meditation on language use.

Victor Pelevin, in all of his works both implicitly and explicitly points towards the problems of and difficulties with language and his readers are constantly reminded not to take words for granted:

One should not become attached to words. They are only required as fleeting footholds. If you attempt to carry them with you, they will drag you down into the abyss. Therefore, they should be cast off immediately (305).

Then later in her explanation that "higher teachings" should not rely on words:

Words are like anchors – they appear to provide a reliable grasp on a teaching, but in reality they only hold the mind in captivity. That is why the most perfect teachings dispense words and symbols (306).

We can even say that the problem of language is the *a priori* of any inquiry, whether philosophical, scientific or poetic. As Cary Wolfe said, concluding his essay on animals and language, "Nothing outside the text, indeed! Except, of course, everything" (*Zoontologies*, 48).

Grappling with the difficulty of language (that is the slipperiness, slidingness and deceptiveness of language) is the responsibility that rests on the metaphorical shoulders of the Humanities, of all the languages, literatures, and linguistics (as well as philosophy and other) departments. That is the best explanation (read: defence) for the continuing existence of the departments that

are housed there. However, the paradoxical nature of the good that Humanities offers is that it is caught up in anthropocentric hubris.

The language that we use to talk about animals, therefore, structures entirely how we relate to animals. Because we relate to animals and to the whole world around, through the mediation of language, it is essential not only to examine the language (or the multiplicities of discourses currently available to us) but also to think about other possible directions that language can be adapted to relate to animals in a more ethical manner. But that is just the beginning. We then have to analyze the mythologies and other ideological narratives that are written into, onto, under and over the language(s) that we use. Moreover, we owe it to ourselves to begin pondering what thinking, reading, talking, and writing leaves out of our relationship with animals. Anyone who has ever tried to “speak” to their domesticated creature (be it a cat, dog, horse, hamster, a bird, or any other creature that one has an affinity for) without words, that is through different means than verbal communication, might know that not only can many of them succeed in sending a message to their addressee, but that the communication that they receive in return may be quite unambiguous. The true reason, it seems to me, for the human desire to teach animals how to “language” on our own terms is because we are extremely uncomfortable with that system of signification we come to inhabit in a civilized world.

The “experts” call A Hu-Li’s account “a dense interweaving of borrowings, imitations, rehashings and allusions⁴⁶” (xi); this dense interweaving could be an attempt at creating the picture that, A Hu-Li says, represents the truth that each

⁴⁶ What text is not?, a deconstructionist will ask.

individual has to set their gaze upon in a particular (i.e. personally unique) manner in order to see it in focus. Moreover, since language is the root of deception then not a single word in *SBW* is to be taken at face value. Only a trace of "true ideas" intended to be expressed by the words remain. They are like road signs that have no universally assigned meanings and each narcissistic entity that we call "a being" will follow a different path in reading these signs.

5.3 LIMITED LOGIC

A Hu-Li claims that silence is the only honest answer to the question, "What is truth?" (264). Even the question itself is already a deception:

Forever wouldn't be long enough to untangle all the cunning tricks words play. You can think up an infinite number of questions and answers – you can put the words together this way and that way, and every time some kind of meaning will stick to them. It's pointless. The sparrow over there doesn't have any questions for anybody. But I don't think he's any further away from the truth than Lacan or Foucault" (265).

There is an anthropocentrism buried in this observation: how does A Hu-Li know that a sparrow cannot have questions for anybody? However, if we consider that A Hu-Li is speaking of what Wolfe calls "linguaging"⁴⁷, that is metalanguage, which is capable of referring to, "things that don't exist" then saying that the sparrow does not ask questions in metalanguage is not all that anthropocentric. The sparrow may well act in an inquisitive way (on its own terms) as many creatures are capable of doing⁴⁸. That the lack of metalingual complexity, however, is not a valid ground for evaluating any creature's eligibility for being a

⁴⁷ See "In the Shadow of Wittgenstein's Lion: Language, Ethics, and the Question of the Animal". Wolfe draws on the language studies of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. The idea is that linguaging is a "metalinguistic" practice (38 in *Zoontologies*). In so far as this complex definition is used then we can surely make observations about the differences in language use among different species (and also among people at different stages of development).

⁴⁸ I know very well when my cats or dog are asking something of me, though their inquiring may be seen as too vague or intellectually not sophisticated enough by those who crave the specificity or complexity of human language.

considered a moral patient⁴⁹ (if not an agent) should be obvious. Matters become much more difficult, though, when moral agents have to face difficult decisions such as calculations of the value of life of different creatures.

A Hu-Li, the mythical were-creature that is accompanying me on this journey towards the colourful field of posthumanities offers advice on how to “focus” one’s attention on that magical picture concealed in the “Rainbow Stream”.

5.4 VOICES

“The human mind is nervous without its writing, feels emptiness without writing”.

~ Vicki Hearne.

Instead of summarizing and abstracting to describe A Hu-Li’s mental processes, I will let her speak for herself:

“I have as many as five inner voices, with each of them conducting its own inner dialogue: and as well as that, they can start to argue with each other over anything at all. I don’t get involved in the argument, I just listen and wait for a hint at the right answer. These voices don’t have any names, though. In that sense I’m a simple soul – some foxes have as many as forty of these voices with very long and beautiful names.

The old foxes say these voices belong to the souls that we consumed during the primordial chaos: according to legend, these souls made their home in our inner space by entering into a kind of symbiosis with our own essential nature. But that’s probably all just fairy tales, because every one of the voices is mine, although they’re all different. And if you follow the old foxes’ logic, you could say I myself am a soul that someone else consumed some time in the depths of ancient history. All this is no more than pointless juggling with various summons, it makes no difference to the sum total that is A Hu-Li ” (35-6).

A Hu-Li claims that these voices distinguish a fox’s mental processes from that of a human being: “The mind follows several different paths at

⁴⁹ See Paola Cavalieri’s dialogue “The Death of the Animal: A Dialogue on Perfectionism” for a discussion of the difference between moral agents and patients and the ways in which arguments for distinguishing the two have been constructed.

the same time, keeping an eye open to see which will lead to the light of truth first. In order to convey this peculiarity of my inner life, I designate the various levels of my inner dialogue as 1), 2), 3) and so on” (37).

Let us follow A Hu-Li’s mental mapping by analyzing what such a layering of thinking offers to the human “more linear” (and is it always?) way of thinking:

- 1) Learning how to listen [or, more precisely, *прислушиваться* – a Russian word that adds to the act of listening with acute concentration that implies higher awareness] to the multiple strands of thoughts as they occur in one’s mind is something akin to a meditative practice of calm attention.
- 2) Let us suppose that such meditative training of one’s mind to hear the differences in its voices can lead to:
 - i. A greater understanding of the emotional and other investments into each passing thought that is analyzed.
 - ii. The differences among the voices may be a range of tonalities that upon reflection can be learned as musical notes which will allow the listener to disentangle separate tunes from the cacophony of intertwined feelings and emotions that we take to be “rational” thoughts.
 - iii. The music that one’s mind produces can pacify short-tempered behaviours and thereby reducing the risk of harmful behaviours committed “in the spur of the moment”.
- 3) The transformation that would ensue is that of *becoming* less of an “active” thinker that chases one thought at a time and becomes impatient with ideas to a more of a *passive* observer of “inner life”.

- i. The state of passive observation might reveal that there is no true difference between “inner life” and “outer reality” because the nature of time would change.
 - ii. “Being” and “time” (not a wholehearted reference to Heidegger, though these words in combination are, in some way, always tied to his work now) would become inseparable.
- 4) Perhaps we are already witnessing the splitting of attention that I am labouring here to theorize in the work of Derrida (and others) through his use of parenthetical clauses within parenthetical statements with comments on this side and that – perhaps this is one of the symptoms of a shift into postmodern (posthuman?) mentality that without the help of this calm/passive observation doctors have come to label ADHD and are attempting to treat with stimulant medications such as Ritalin.
- 5) Parentheses are great *visual* helpers in written language but not in oral communication.
 - i. This echoes the suspicion of one Russian poet (Tjutchev) that spoken ideas are more deceptive than written ones because the visual cues and the different temporality of words on a page allow for slower and more complex processing.
 - a. This final thought leads to a desire for starting an entirely new project on various conditions that shape the making of meaning in different forms of communication.

And so on. As an aside (and a sign of reluctance to stop listening to these different strands of my thoughts) a proponent of such “passive listening” can be

accused of a certain coy attempt at pacifying the world by casting a spell of meditation upon all minds. Not a false accusation this would be; however, a) all philosophy as well as yogic practice can be accused of the same and b) a judgement of this kind does not take into account the collapsing of the difference between “inner life” and “outer reality” that such passive meditation presupposes.

The multiple-voice reality of A Hu-Li’s mind processes is, no doubt, a hyper-human perspective. We can imagine a portrayal of a werecreature that, rather than relying on first-person narrative, could have instead been depicted through actions of that creature and not the thought-processed in their head. Such a character, of course, would be incredibly difficult to depict in the restrictions of the medium such as the novel. The lack of “writing” in A Hu-Li’s head would make us nervous as readers; moreover, it would be always already filtered through the mental text of the narrator who would report for us how it is that A Hu-Li experiences the world.

Finally, working in the satiric genre, the layered voices of A Hu-Li are a perfect vehicle for staging a social critique that is complex because of the range of perspectives that it offers. The more common method for constructing such critique in fiction (and one that Pelevin employs in parts of this novel as well) is to have one or more interlocutors who challenge, partly challenge or complement the main ideas expressed, let’s say, by the protagonist. Having it all play out in A Hu-Li’s mind is economical, ambitious, and innovative.

- 1) Economical: why labour to depict several characters when one will suffice?
- 2) Ambitious: because the desired affect is to train the reader to stage similar debates in one’s own head.

3) Innovative: there are few characters encountered in literature that claim to embody the experience of human history since its (known) beginnings.

The fact that all opinions expressed are housed in A Hu-Li's mind precludes the reader from identifying with the view of a particular character. Instead the reader is welcomed to choose—among a host of ideas expressed—the one that is most sound, just as A Hu-Li claims to have been doing for many centuries. Such passive meditation, I am suggesting, is what can help us in focusing on the difficult questions of morality, ethical treatment of others, and compassion for the suffering of others. Vicky Hearne writes that she seeks “a consciousness ... beyond ours” (quoted in *Zoontologies*, 1). Such a formulation, however, presupposes the outside/inside dichotomy. Perhaps instead we could discover a consciousness *alongside* ours, or a multiplicity of consciousnesses that surround us daily and most of which we ignore because of an ego-centric unwillingness to use our imagination and compassion. Elizabeth Costello, in *Lives of Animals*, claims that we should all be able to imagine “what it is like to be a bat” (33) if we open our hearts to the fullness of being.

5.5 DEFAMILIARIZATION

Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humour and serious play. It is also a rhetorical strategy and a political method...

Donna Haraway, “**The Cyborg Manifesto**”.

Speaking of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, Pelevin praises the ability of this Soviet classic to

take you from the world of things, explained and understood, liberating you, because it breaks the continuity of the explained thereby dispelling its

charm. [*The Master and Margarita*] allows you to look in alternative directions for a moment, yet this moment is enough to understand that everything that you've observed before has been a hallucination (although what you may see in these alternative directions might be another hallucination).

In this statement (given in an interview with Leo Kropyvjanskii, my translation from Russian) Pelevin expresses an appreciation for work that can (if we use a term from Russian Formalism) defamiliarize the everyday. Though it should be noted that the goal of defamiliarization for Pelevin is not to induce more appreciation for the common, the accepted, or as he says “things explained and understood”, but instead to dispel the illusion that our understanding of things “as such” (in Heidegger’s sense) exists in perception which is shaped by forces (such as the USSR ideology in this example) that are far from impartial. The final thread of the thought Pelevin expresses in this passage, furthermore, ties the (fairly typical) critique of whatever “opium” used on the masses to the more mystical/agnostic view that nothing ever perceived by the human subject may be accessible “as such” and that every possible direction to which we may turn our perception will offer yet another illusion, though perhaps a less maddening one than the one USSR had to offer.

The ability to turn one’s perception in different directions is highly valued for the reason that it allows one not to be (ultimately) trapped in one particular “hallucination”. Of course idealising such a capacity in human beings takes us right back to a very *Dasein*-like anthropocentrism because, presumably, animals are more trapped in one particular/narrow perception (in Heideggerian terms the state of being *hingenommen*), or that few animals have the openness to more than one (or a limited few) “disinhibitors” (see Agamben’s *The Open: Man and*

Animal). But the concept of defamiliarization is a human one and is most likely absolutely useless when applied to non-human animals.

6. A MEDITATION ON SHAME: COMPASSION FOR THE SUFFERING OF THE OTHER

*What is shame if one can be modest only by remaining immodest, and vice versa?
The Animal That Therefore I Am, Derrida.*

Now we have arrived at a point that will require as much ‘weak force’ as we can gather up in our hearts and minds to meditate upon how shame aids the ability to feel compassion for the suffering of the other. As Derrida’s words suggest, modesty is inherently immodest. The blushing cheek betrays the *a priori* knowledge of the “forbidden”, so to speak. This recognition already contains so much that is essential and necessary for thinking about the suffering of the Other and compassion for all others.

Traditionally, that is from the humanist perspective, animals are excluded from the realm of the ethical precisely because it is claimed that they are incapable of feeling shame and therefore have no access to the difference between good and evil. Such an understanding, encoded in concepts of modesty and shame, however, is a human logical construction. It has to be discarded. The concept of suffering (recall Bentham’s contribution to the question of the animal⁵⁰), as a vulnerability that distresses the creature and that the creature thus wants to avoid and hide from, is a more potent one in the task of finding the compassion for the suffering of that vulnerable Other.

⁵⁰ Derrida summarizes: “the question is not to know whether the animal can think, reason, or speak ... the *first* and *decisive* question would rather be to know whether animals *can suffer*” (*Animal That Therefore I Am*, 27).

Another way of thinking about our desire to take away the capacity for feeling shame from animals is that it is tied up with the desire to reserve the capacity for languaging as exclusively human. To follow Derrida, language is a human technology, as are history and so many other things, to follow Derrida⁵¹. What is overlooked in such disavowals is the range of experiencing shame that is not linguistically predetermined. Derrida wonders,

“is every ‘hiding oneself’ (in the experiences of the hunt, of seduction, and of guilt) tied to the possibility of modesty, even when (and this is the metonymy in question) that modesty is not directed toward the genital organs? (61).

What he is wondering about is the possibility for shame to emerge *not* from *knowledge* of what is modest or immodest, but from the *feeling* of vulnerability of one’s body in the face of great forces of nature or in the face of even minor threats to the self (from the inside and the outside). Feeling shame, not thinking it, is our goal. When even a little critter (whose cognitive skills science evaluates as close to null) hides from the threat of the “hunter” (or a pursuer of any other kind) can we not feel the compassion for that creature, for its vulnerability? And, even if we are not able to do anything to help this creature, certainly we should at least register the event instead of dismissing it. Surely, it is not too much to ask of oneself to be mindful of the suffering of others, to keep one’s heart and mind open to possibilities of helping the other (recall Lawlor suggests that we do this by naming all others to mark their singularity); even in the cases of having to (intentionally or unintentionally) bring harm to those others that threaten (a pesky tick, for example, that burrows its way into your flesh, causing the risk of

⁵¹ “There is no nudity ‘in nature. There is only the sentiment, the affect, the (conscious or unconscious) experience of existing in nakedness ... [He adds that we] have to think shame and technicity together, as the same ‘subject’. And evil and history, and work, and so many other things that go along with it” (5).

disease and of high suffering), we can deal with that critter as a singularity and not condemn every one of its kind⁵².

Foxes, in A Hu-Li's narrative, are capable of *feeling* shame. A Hu-Li describes the method by which she induces this feeling in herself during a meditation practice that "includes 'the 'contemplation of the mind' and 'contemplation of the heart'⁵³" (143). She calls the practice: "tugging of the tail":

Every child knows that if you tug a dog or a cat by the tail, they feel pain. But if you pull a fox by the tail, then what happens is beyond the understanding of even the most intelligent tailless monkey. At that moment the fox feels the full weight of all her bad deeds. This is because she uses the tail to commit them. And since every fox, apart from the total failures, has a whole heap of bad deeds to her name, the result is an appalling attach of conscience, accompanied by terrifying visions and insights (143).

Tugging her tail causes A Hu-Li some physical pain, but "it [is] nothing compared with the stream of repentance, horror, and shame" (145) that she feels, which she believes to be necessary for following the spiritual path (as a werefox, we should add. But the arbitrariness of meditative practices in ultimate terms should be evident to the reader).

The layering of consciousness, which I previously examined, is essential to practicing meditation for the foxes. The consciousness is "layered off into three independent streams":

- 1) the first stream of consciousness is the mind which remembers all its dark deeds from time immemorial.
- 2) the second stream of consciousness is the mind which spontaneously and unexpectedly makes the fox tug her own tail
- 3) the third stream of consciousness is the mind as the abstract observer of the first two streams and [of] itself.

⁵² This statement is coming from, I cannot resist adding, someone who has a severe case of Entomophobia -- the fear of insects.

⁵³ "The heart plays no part in this practice, apart from a metaphorical one. It's an accident of translation: the Chinese hieroglyph 'xin', which stands for 'heart' here, has many different meanings and 'contemplation of the innermost essence' would probably have been a more accurate translation" (SBW, 143).

The effect of such a meditation is that it allows the fox to see not only her own nature, but also her place among all other living beings. Her description of what she experiences merits to be reproduced here:

“The faces of those who had not survived their encounter with me floated past in front of my face, like yellow leaves drifting past a window in an autumn storm. They emerged from non-existence for only a second, but that second was long enough for each pair of eyes to sear me with a glance full of bewilderment and pain. I watched them, remembering the past, with the tears pouring down my cheeks in two great streams, as repentance tore my heart apart.

At the same time I was serenely aware that what was taking place was simply the insubstantial play of reflections, the rippling of thoughts that is raised by the habitual draughts of the mind, and that when these ripples settled down, it would be clear that there were no draughts and no reflections, and no mind itself – nothing but that clear, eternal, all-penetrating gaze in the face of which nothing is real” (145).

Suffering for the suffering of others that she had caused, A Hu-Li’s tears of shame and repentance reveal to her the continuity of all living beings in the vulnerability to suffering that we all share. In Buddhist terms, this is expressed by the word *dukha*⁵⁴. Of course the question that preoccupies anybody who recognizes life as *dukha* is the possibility of ending the cycle of *samsara* (rebirth), i.e. ultimate salvation. The final paradox that A Hu-Li, and we along with her, has

⁵⁴ A Hu-Li says “life is *dukha* – suffering and pain”. Also, *A Dictionary of Buddhism* gives us more insight into this complex concept: There is no word in English covering the same ground as *dukha* in the sense it is used in Buddhism. The usual translation of ‘suffering’ is too strong, and gives the impression that life according to Buddhism is nothing but pain. As a consequence, some regard Buddhism as pessimistic. While *dukha* certainly embraces the ordinary meaning of ‘suffering’ it also includes deeper concepts such as impermanence and unsatisfactoriness, and may be better left untranslated ... The concept of *dukha* is explained as having three aspects. Ordinary *dukha* refers to all kinds of suffering in life, such as illness, death, separation from loved ones, or not getting what one desires. The second aspect of *dukha* ... is produced by change ... resulting from the impermanent nature of all things. The third aspect of *dukha* ... is the most important philosophical aspect of the First Noble Truth. This teaches that what we call an ‘individual’ is, according to Buddhism, a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces known as the ‘five aggregates’... This is known as the doctrine of ... no-self. Although some believe this means that according to the Buddha one has no identity, more recent scholarship views the doctrine as a description of how a being functions. Because of their ever-changing nature, the five aggregates are themselves identified with *dukha*. More importantly, like everything else the individual ego is dependently originated and conditioned ... Holding to the illusion of a independently originated self, according to the Buddha, makes one crave for the satisfaction of this self. However, since everything is *dukha*, and impermanent, there cannot be enduring satisfaction”. See <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/views/BROWSE.html?subject=s22&book=t108>>.

to grapple with is the paradox of the impossibility of individual salvation (or the entering of the *Rainbow Stream* in the novel's terms).

A Hu-Li explains that her meditation has to be practiced for a long time as a preparation for the next stage, “which is called ‘tail of the void’ or ‘artlessness’” (144). There is no explanation given for what this means. She claims that nobody knows for sure. But what she learns from the Yellow Master in the early 9th Century in China may elucidate this point.

6.1 DIFFERENT WORLDS – DIFFERENT LIBERATIONS

“The Buddha gave many different teachings. They include teachings for people, teachings for the spirits, and even teachings for the gods who do not wish to be cast down into the lower worlds. There is also a teaching for magical foxes treading the path above the earth, but will you place any credence in it if you are told of it by a man?”

Sacred Book of the Werewolf, The Yellow Master.

When A Hu-Li encounters the Yellow Master, he gives her The Glorious One's teaching for the magical foxes. He also reveals to her that humans are mistaken in thinking that their “birth is the most precious one” (302), that is that humans, in the cycle of reincarnation, are the closest to liberation:

The inhabitants of every world are told that it is the most propitious for salvation. [And in response to A Hu-Li's question about the application of this rule to animals] ... where there is no such concept [of salvation], it follows of itself that there is no need to save anyone.'

The return to differentiation between creatures who possess conceptual, abstract, ideas such as “salvation” and those who do not make us hear the humming of the anthropological machine at work. But the Yellow Master takes A Hu-Li's mind further, teaching her that

when we speak of form, salvation is different in every world. But its inner essence, it is the same everywhere, because the nature of the mind that dreams all these worlds never changes (301-2).

The final discovery A Hu-Li makes (before making the final leap into the void) is that not only is salvation unique in each world, but also that in each world each creature creates its own world (or reality) through perception⁵⁵. The difference is that the love that each creature is capable of, according to her, can open up the boundaries of perception and allow different creatures' perceptions to interact. Of course the tick, even if it could swell with love, is not likely to spare my flesh. But the countless examples of compassion among many creatures of this earth⁵⁶ (whose cognitive capacities we deem inferior) should convince us that even the tick has its right to existence (a right not granted by humans but by life itself), and the systematic extermination of any species – such as factory farming we are all witness to today – is simply wrong.

ON THE PATH TO (NOT) CONCLUDING

7. NO MORAL UNIVERSALS

Thomas O'Hearne, a professor of philosophy at Appleton College in J.M. Coetzee's story, *The Lives of Animals*, challenges the protagonist, Elizabeth Costello, in a public, academic, debate about the animal rights movement and its limitations. His first critique is of unreserved enthusiasm (of the West) for universal practices and standards in treatment of animals and the notions of "obligation to animals," which is, historically speaking, he points out, barely two centuries old. He concludes his first critique thus:

⁵⁵ It would be interesting to elaborate this idea in relation to Jacob von Uexküll's theory of the "*Umwelt* – the environment world that is constituted by a more or less broad series of elements that he calls 'carriers of significance' ... which are the only things that interest the animal" (quoted in Agamben, 40). After all, Agamben writes that Uexküll did believe in the existence of any objective reality "as such".

⁵⁶ I am thinking of feral children suckled and raised by animals; the friendships that we observe in interspeciesial homes; the stories of wild animals (dolphins in particular) coming to the rescue of human beings, and so much more.

As long as we insist that we have access to an ethical universal to which other traditions are blind, and try to impose it on them by means of propaganda or even economic pressure, we are going to meet with resistance, and that resistance will be justified (6).

Costello's response to Dr. O'Hearne is as humble as it is complex, the complexity deriving from her attention to language (in particular to the word *kindness*):

You are correct, of course, about the history. Kindness to animals has become a social norm only recently, in the last hundred and fifty or two hundred years, and in only part of the world. You are correct too to link this history to the history of human rights, since concern for animals is, historically speaking, an offshoot of broader philanthropic concerns—for the lot of slaves and of children, among others. However, kindness to animals—and here I use the word *kindness* in its full sense, as an acceptance that we are all of one kind, one nature—has been more widespread than you imply. Pet keeping, for instance, is by no means a Western fad: the first travellers to South America encountered settlements where human beings and animals lived higgledy-piggledy together. And of course children all over the world consort quite naturally with animals. They don't see any dividing line. That is something they have to be taught, just as they have to be taught it is all right to kill and eat them (60-1).

Our ability to abstract an infinite variety of singularities into the concept "animal" has led humanity to other complex machinery: from guns that secured our dominance over the natural world, as Costello points out, to more sinister machinery for mass destruction. And yet among this there is medical machinery and machinery of transportation that has raised the quality and longevity of human life far beyond that of our recent ancestors. What can we make of this double edged sword of technology? To recall Dr. Haraway's argument from *The Cyborg Manifesto*, technological development is intimately connected to military ambition. Haraway's strong contention in her manifesto, however, is that cyborgs, as she envisions them (i.e. as vehicles for positive causes of feminism and social justice), are "illegitimate children" (152) of the military and do not at all have to remain faithful to the original causes of the forces that mothered/fathered

them. In other words, she argues that the hybridity of cyborgs is what empowers them to renounce the violence and war-mongering and instead help the disempowered of this world.

7.1 INSIDE/OUTSIDE (of law)

There is between sovereign, criminal, and beast, a sort of obscure and fascinating complicity or even a worrying mutual attraction, as worrying familiarity, and *unheimlich*, uncanny reciprocal haunting (17).

The Beast and the Sovereign, Derrida.

Perhaps this uncanniness (that as Derrida or David Clark⁵⁷ and all those who believe in examining the repressed content of both feelings towards and rational conceptualizations of beasts and those others, like criminals or sovereigns who seem to exist outside of certain laws) is a repression of the desire to belong to the special category of the “beyond” within any being who is capable of narcissism. Freud considered primary narcissism to be an intrinsic attribute of even the simplest of organisms, such as an amoeba⁵⁸. However, what I am trying to suggest here is that if all creatures can be said to exhibit narcissistic behavior then the desire to act out according to self-interest without any sort of consequence whatsoever (in the particular realm of social relations that is affected by the behavior) is the repressed content that makes beasts, sovereigns or criminals all seem uncannily complicit.

A Hu-Li’s worldview is paradoxical – something that should be acutely familiar to the reader accustomed with introspection and self-analysis. Despite

⁵⁷ I am following David Clark’s advice to “read philosophical articulations of animality not so much *conceptually* for what they say about living creatures (as boundlessly intriguing as they are) but *symptomatically* as the site of (dis)avowed and haunted desires, of repressions and displacements that register the ways in which the *anthropos* is inconceivable both with *and* without a conception of animality”. “Towards a Prehistory of the Postanimal: Kant, Levinas, and the Regard of Brutes” (9).

⁵⁸ A taxonomy of types/degrees of narcissism, described in Freud’s work as well as observed in a broad range of creatures is an investigation that merits a separate and extended consideration.

the fact that she is not (and cannot be) a follower of any organized religion⁵⁹, she believes in heaven and hell and in retribution. The concept of salvation is also, of course, impossible without its opposite: the failure to be saved, or a condemned existence. Pelevin's work insists that all such concepts are illusory. Yet the difficulty seems to be that the binary "heaven/hell" is one of the most successful human inventions that inspires virtuous behaviour. Is it necessary to have a "dream of paradise"? we may ask (I am paraphrasing Derrida, *Beast and Sovereign*, 403).

7.2 VEGETARIANISM IS NOT DECONSTRUCTION

I am quoting the title of Dr. Calarco's essay that argues against facile alignment of vegetarianism and deconstruction⁶⁰. In Pelevin's work, A Hu-Li asks the Yellow Master if she needs to "switch from men⁶¹ to vegetables" in her diet. His response is that "Buddha did not leave any instructions on that score. Listen to what your heart tells you" (307). Any attempt at forcing vegetarianism on people is unethical. Most are not ready at this point in human history. However, we could imagine that such a day would come. For the time being, I would suggest that giving children the choice not to eat meat (at least when they refuse to) would be a step in the right direction.

Finally, in depicting Elizabeth Costello's feeling of "woundedness" in the face of all the cruelty to animals, Coetzee stresses the impossibility of universally

⁵⁹ I say "cannot be" because anyone who has lived for several millennia would surely be aware of the violence and of what Derrida calls the sacrificial kernel around which religions are formed. This would likely undermine a devotional attitude towards such systems. Yet the feeling of transcendence that results from a certain (albeit vague) conception of a higher being is present in A Hu-Li's mind.

⁶⁰ "Calarco writes, "in arguing that deconstruction should not be strictly identified with vegetarianism, I am not advocating the position that deconstruction is consistent with meat-eating, but rather pointing toward the necessity for a thorough deconstruction of existing discourses on vegetarianism of existing discourses on vegetarianism, a project that remains largely to be developed" (177).

⁶¹ She means the "life force" that she draws from human clients when they are under her spell.

virtuous conduct. This is summarized succinctly in Costello's refusal to be praised for her vegetarianism: "I'm wearing leather shoes ... I'm carrying a leather purse. I wouldn't have overmuch respect if I were you" (43). This lack of pride about one's virtuous behaviour is also advocated by Matthew Calarco:

"the aim is to undercut completely the possibility of achieving good conscience in regard to questions of nonviolence toward the Other. The idea of ethical purity is ruled out a priori as structurally impossible" (136).

In his descriptions of the concept of a "weak force", Leonard Lawlor also stresses the insufficiency of both philosophical speculation about compassion and even of all attempts to practice unconditional compassion. Suffering is a part of life. But the responsibility to not act on one's repressed desires for domination of the Other lies on the shoulders of each individual.

8. THE FIGURE OF GENOCIDE

I promised, in the beginning, to return to the issue of using the Holocaust as a comparable stand-in for the animal suffering in slaughterhouses and science labs around the world. What I want to say is not profound, but it needs to be said in the simplest way possible:

1) The figure of a genocide (even as horrific/unthinkable as the Holocaust) should not be deemed *morally* objectable. To suggest that such a gesture would belittle the men, women and children who suffered from the Nazi (and the Stalinist) violence is humanist perfectionism par excellence. Harlan Miller, in "No Escape" points out that "Human interests outrank nonhuman interests *ceteris paribus* (Lat. all else being equal). And yet he says, "You will not convince me that my suffering is worse than the cat's, nor in itself more important than the cat's" (67).

2) Yet conflating events of different mass killings or any other violence against a group undermines the law of singularity that we were exploring here. Rhetorically such a comparison is powerful: the shock of the title of Patterson's book is necessary in today's prevalence of animal cruelty in factory farms and beyond. But ultimately the comparison cannot be turned into a clichéd way of thinking because that would erase the heterogeneities of individual suffering.

Could we strive, instead, for an understanding of suffering that is pluralistic and unconditional, yet not universal? A Hu-Li teaches us to feel shame for not choosing to spare another creature's suffering, if it can be helped. Opening up one's mind and heart to the vulnerability of all creatures expands all notions of liberation. There is no saviour and no personal salvation. Every creature's life is precious. To quote A Hu-Li,

The chosen ones are those who understand that any worm or a butterfly, or even a blade of grass at the edge of the road, are chosen ones just like them, only they don't know about it for the time being, and you have to take great care in order not to offend any of them accidentally" (313).

A Hu-Li is a creature of the in-between, since, according to legend, her soul was frightened by the cruelty in both human and animal worlds and never found a place in either. On her journey of adjusting to this displaced position A Hu-Li finds love and compassion to be potent agents in negotiating the violent clashes and paradoxes of existence. She alters the suffering of her perpetual estrangement into compassion for the differences, limitations and singularities of each and every being, including her own.

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