

Re-Animalizing *Animal Farm:*

*Challenging the “Anthropo-
Allegorical” in Literary
and Pedagogical
Discourse and Practice*

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Abstract: Interpretations of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* have been almost exclusively focused on anthropocentric allegory in the text and what I call the anthropo-allegorical interpretive frame. Given *Animal Farm*'s iconic and enduring status in English classrooms, I unpack this process, particularly how it is informed and perpetuated by the persistence of human exceptionalism rooted in the humanist literary tradition, and hegemonic approaches to education. I employ Derridean deconstruction to critique the humanist and educational legacies that inform the largely homogenized and de-animalized interpretation and pedagogical applications of *Animal Farm*. Then I argue for a new, hybridized reading—and teaching—that moves beyond the anthropocentric and toward a more-than-human interpretive and pedagogical orientation that speaks to the oppressions and challenges confronting multiple species, including, but not confined, to our own.

Keywords: *animals in literature; animals in education; Animal Farm; allegory; Anthro-po-allegorical, George Orwell, Animal Farm*

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Animal Farm is widely taught in English classrooms. An allegorical representation of the Russian Revolution, *Animal Farm* famously tells the story of a courageous group of farmed animals who come together to overthrow their brutal human masters only to find themselves subjugated and exploited by a self-appointed elite class of animals: the vanguardist pigs. The book depicts the tragi-ironic consequences arising from the animal characters' blind devotion to leadership, as well as their credulous susceptibility to propagandistic manipulation. Accordingly, as a teaching text, *Animal Farm* presents valuable critical teaching opportunities, especially in the perilous political and cultural aftermath of the "post-truth" Trump era.¹

Prior to this period, *Animal Farm*'s sceptical representation of revolutionary change offered an ideologically useful elixir during the geopolitical tensions of the Cold War, as well as during the political and cultural tumult emerging from the anti-oppression and counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. As Frances Stoner Saunders has shown, the CIA saw great propagandistic potential in bringing Orwell's vision of revolutionary futility to the masses and secretly purchased the film rights to produce the 1954 Disney-esque film adaptation.² In the ensuing years, *Animal Farm* would be canonized as an educational text, and, like many great teachable texts, it can be used to both reaffirm and challenge the status quo.³

Crucially, this cultural and pedagogical appropriation of Orwell's classic causes the animals themselves to be sacrificed; more specifically, the oppression and suffering they endure *as* animals is obfuscated. Referencing Angus Fletcher's analysis of allegory, Onno Oerlemans reminds us that allegory is shrouded in a competitive duality between the vehicle (the surface story) and the tenor (the allegorized abstraction). He argues that "(a)n allegorical representation asserts a hierarchy, since the vehicle of the allegory is inferior to its tenor, and at the same time belies this hierarchy because our

1 Searcy et al. "Reinterpreting Revolutions", 155.

2 Shaw, "Some Writers", 153.

3 Bibby, "Content and Context".

attention is drawn to what is immediately presented.⁴ The standard political allegorical interpretation of *Animal Farm* not only subordinates the allegorical vehicle (the animal story), but it also largely negates it, thereby adhering to John Simons's argument that animal fables use animal representations "merely as vehicles for the human."⁵ The vast majority of the scholarly analysis of the text adheres to such negation of animals, emphasizing almost exclusively Orwell's use of historical and political allegory.⁶ Through this reductive allegorical hermeneutic, animals are discursively diminished in ways that reflect, as well as reproduce, their wider material debasement.

In the Canadian educational context, *Animal Farm* is often positioned pedagogically as a transitional text for early adolescents, preparing them for the more serious themes of the adult literature they encounter during high school and beyond. *Animal Farm* summons the tradition of childhood animal stories like Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* and Margaret Marshall Saunders's *Beautiful Joe*, which typically combine human and animal interests.⁷ Indeed, *Animal Farm*'s subtitle, "A Fairy Story", signals its affiliation with a broader tradition of children's talking animal stories, even if only ironically. Consequently, the implied subversion of "the fairy story" tradition is one that would seem to undermine and devalue the status of animal stories as well. Certainly, the enduring educational application of *Animal Farm* is one that overtly disregards the book's animal figures by teaching it almost exclusively through a symbolic/allegorical interpretive orientation.⁸

Under this interpretive and pedagogical rubric, the reading of *Animal Farm* requires children to discipline their attention to the realm of exclusively human concerns. In this light, Orwell's classic becomes a valuable disciplinary resource for an educational system deeply beholden to the entrenched values of human exceptionalism that

4 Oerlemans, *Poetry and Animals*, 31.

5 Simons, *Animal Rights*, 119.

6 See, for example, Meyers, *George Orwell*, 101–113; Letemendia, "Revolution"; Kirschner, "Dual Purpose"; White, "Socialism and Utopia"; Rodden, "Big Rock"; Hamilton, "Allegory".

7 Fernandes, *Animal Fable*; Hoult-Saros, *Mythology of the Animal Farm*.

8 Fudge, "Heart of the Home"; McHugh, "*Animal Farm*'s Lessons".

undergird our socio-economic relations and structures. The allegorical erasure of animals from *Animal Farm* helps to affirm a culture of “carnism” that reduces the animal characters to mere avatars that serve human purposes.⁹ This process (re)confines the anthropocentric boundaries of subjectivity and re-casts animals as mere resources for (literal and symbolic) human consumption. This hegemonic reading of *Animal Farm* illustrates what I call the anthropo-allegorical framing: an active analytical, educational, and sociocultural process that effectively reads animals out of stories ostensibly devoted to them through the imposition of an anthropocentric interpretive orientation. It is particularly ironic that this process of animal erasure should be carried out in a text that, on the surface, is about domesticated animals being oppressed by the systems that support human exceptionalism.

Indeed, this de-subjectivizing anthropo-allegorical frame both obfuscates and reframes animals’ suffering. In *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams observed this interpretive blind spot, writing that the “existence of a long tradition of human analogies in animal terms allow[s] us to overlook the point that the revolution that is described is one of animals against men.”¹⁰ Williams’s emphasis on the primacy of animals to Orwell’s story was not only an interpretive response to the text but also a matter of taking Orwell’s preface at face value. In the preface to the Ukrainian translation, Orwell explained that *Animal Farm* was inspired by witnessing a boy savagely beating a cart-horse, which prompted him to “analyse Marx’s theory from the animals’ point of view. To them it is clear that the concept of a class struggle between humans was pure illusion, since whenever it is necessary to exploit animals, all humans are united against them, the true struggle is between animals and humans.”¹¹

Curiously, Orwell’s explicit reference to the human oppression of animals as the foundation of all human oppression was widely ignored by subsequent generations of scholars until the 2000s when animal

9 Joy, *Why We Love Dogs*.

10 Williams, *Culture and Society*, 293.

11 Orwell, “Preface”, 406.

studies and posthumanist scholars returned to the passage.¹² Literary interpretation is not limited to authorial intent, but the fact that so many scholars who do privilege authorial intent so conspicuously ignored or even rejected Orwell's statement reveals the degree to which anthropocentrism, and indeed human exceptionalism, are embedded in the tradition of literary analysis.

It is perhaps for these reasons that the spectre of animal suffering and slaughter hangs over this iconic text, unrecognized, yet in plain sight, like Poe's purloined letter. Therefore, in this paper, I will examine the limits of the anthro-allegorical reading of *Animal Farm*, paying specific attention to the pedagogical and cultural implications of the anthro-allegorical erasure. After synthesizing key literary analyses of the text, I employ a Derridean deconstructionist analysis to examine how linguistic frames consolidate cultural hierarchies that are consequential within and beyond the species divide. I then consider the historical humanist lineage of language, literacy, and literature as logocentric criteria and linguistic/discursive mechanisms which are used to define human subjectivity and are aided by the cultivation of the literary educational project to uphold the ontological premise of human exceptionalism. The dynamics have entangled material-semiotic consequences for animals and marginalized humans alike. Finally, I propose a hybridized reconceptualization of *Animal Farm* that acknowledges and confronts intersecting human and animal oppression.

Animal Obfuscation in Formal Educational Spaces

The dynamics of anthro-allegorical readings intersect with larger questions about the place of animals in education. Helena Pedersen argues that human exceptionalism pervades the Western educational system in ways that effectively institutionalize animal erasure. Referencing the ideas of Steve Baker and John Berger, Pedersen suggests that education follows the humanist cultural edict to "render [...] animals, which are fully exposed to our view, effectively

12 Tiffin, "Pigs, People and Pigeons"; Harel, "Animal Voice"; McHugh, "*Animal Farm's* Lessons"; Dwan, "Orwell's Paradox"; Eisenman, *Cry of Nature*; Cole, "True Struggle".

invisible—that is, either seen as mere vehicles for the transmission of symbolic meaning or drained of any significance whatsoever.”¹³ Pedersen argues that the ideology of animal capital and human exceptionalism is operative in educational settings codifying boundaries between human and animal interests. Accordingly, schools are implicitly invested in legitimizing the “animal-industrial complex”.¹⁴ Indeed, Bradley Rowe and Samuel Rocha illustrate how this ideological messaging is embedded in the “hidden curriculum” through the continued proliferation of meat- and dairy-based lunches offered in school cafeterias.¹⁵ This messaging, furthermore, takes place in school settings often saturated with “Disneyfied” animal images and stories. This context helps situate the educational deployment of *Animal Farm*.

Animal Farm helps initiate middle and high schoolers into the governing ethos of instrumental rationality that upholds human exceptionalism. Matthew Cole and Kate Stewart argue that animal avatars and texts have been operationalized pedagogically in both official and hidden curricula to redirect children’s empathetic attachments away from animals. Accordingly, children are taught to draw clear distinctions between themselves as subjects and animals as objects, “manipulable matter” to meet human ends.¹⁶ For Cole and Stewart, the conventional pedagogical approach to *Animal Farm* would embody the ongoing Western rationalist project to “socially construct animals in ways that legitimize human uses of them”.¹⁷ Through *Animal Farm* and similar texts, students learn to discipline their animal empathy and redirect their focus toward instrumentalism: the animals serve the transcendent humanist allegory.

Recent educational studies of how the text is being taught reveal that it is used to meet various teaching objectives including language/vocabulary development, critical pedagogy, and the social

13 Pedersen, *Animals in Schools*, 59.

14 Noske, *Humans and Other Animals*, 23; Twine “Animal-Industrial Complex”, 14.

15 Rowe and Rocha, “School Lunch”, 483; Giroux, *Theory and Resistance*.

16 Cole and Stewart, *Our Children*, 34.

17 Cole and Stewart, 7.

construction of meaning.¹⁸ In my own experiences teaching *Animal Farm* at both secondary and post-secondary levels, there are usually students who read it through an animal lens, some sympathetically and others reactively, often resulting in heated classroom discussions.

Still, educational scholarship on *Animal Farm* neglects the animal question entirely. Even a recent critical analysis dedicated to re-interpreting and reconceptualizing the teaching of the book remains exclusively committed to an anthropo-allegorical reading.¹⁹ Similarly, online *Animal Farm* unit plans and curricular guides reflect a widespread dismissal of the animal.²⁰ The preponderance of these teaching resources and corresponding educational scholarship reinforces the message that “to read *Animal Farm* as a text that might have something to say about animals is to misread it.”²¹

Are Animals Represented in *Animal Farm*?

As noted, most literary scholarship on *Animal Farm* is thoroughly anthropocentric. Some exceptions are noteworthy, however, but they, too, contain surprising contradictions and omissions. In his lengthy analysis of *Animal Farm*, for instance, Richard Smyer identifies a link between “carnivoracity and colonial exploitation” in Orwell’s essay “Marrakech”.²² Yet he does not engage with the dynamics of carnivorism and oppression in *Animal Farm* itself, the book to which his entire study is devoted. Similarly, Douglas Kerr references Orwell’s personal declaration in the essay “Why I Write”, that “most

18 Brent and Millgate-Smith, “Challenging Texts”, 158; Cramer et al., “Using Experiential Exercises”; Yandell, “The Social Construction of Meaning”; Bibby, “Content and Context”; Miró Juan, “The Use of Literature”.

19 Searcy, et al. “Reinterpreting Revolutions”.

20 Erica Fudge points to Mitzi Brunsdale’s *Student Companion to George Orwell* which presents a taxonomy explaining the allegorical meaning of each animal character (such taxonomies are commonly placed in online teaching resources). A 2017 article from the popular British online educational blog, *Teachwire*, which offers educational news stories, resources, and teaching ideas presented “8 Great Teaching Tools for Reading George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* in KS4 English”, all of which revolved around the conventional anthropo-allegorical reading by emphasizing the value of the animal characters to ease the students into symbolic and allegorical reading. The ubiquity of the exclusively anthropocentric interpretations and the related pedagogical applications are clear across all contexts.

21 Fudge, “At the Heart of the Home”, 13.

22 Smyer, *Animal Farm*, 40.

of the good memories from my childhood up to the age of twenty are connected with animals".²³ Kerr cites Orwell's self-expressed animal sentiment as an essential context for understanding his searing depictions of human-animal violence in *Burmese Days*, "Marrakech", and "Shooting an Elephant", as well as to illustrate the link between colonial and animal exploitation. Like Smyer, however, Kerr curiously does not extend his analysis to the analogous concerns in *Animal Farm*. More recently, Richard Podznik extended Kerr's analysis of "Marrakech", "Shooting an Elephant", and *Burmese Days* by arguing that Orwell's representation of animal agency constituted a challenge to the tenets of human exceptionalism undergirding literary humanism.²⁴ And like Kerr, Podznik opts not to discuss *Animal Farm* directly even though he references the Ukrainian preface as evidence that Orwell's work had been animated by animal concerns.²⁵

Importantly, the rise of animal studies and posthumanism has brought much-needed critical attention to the inherent anthropocentrism that guides most literary analysis. Such non-anthropocentric analyses of *Animal Farm*, however, came relatively late. One of the first literary scholars to analyse the depiction of animal suffering in the book directly was Helen Tiffin, who rightly questions how the plight of the text's eponymous animals could be ignored for so long.²⁶ Tiffin refers to this neglect as a "disappearing act" whereby animal literary representations are read reflexively by humanist scholars through the anthropocentric allegory. Tiffin posits that it may have been for this reason that the intervention of a non-literary scholar, psychoanalyst Jeffrey Masson, was required to announce the seemingly obvious and quite subversive kernel belying the humanist allegory: the systemic immiseration and slaughter of domesticated animals for economic benefit.²⁷ Susan McHugh echoes these concerns and argues that the Western literary approach to reading animal representations exclusively as symbolic avatars for anthropocentric

23 Kerr, "Orwell, Animals, and the East", 234–35.

24 Podznik, "George Orwell's Imperial Bestiary", 440.

25 Podznik, 440.

26 Tiffin, "Pigs, People and Pigeons", 251.

27 Masson, *Pig Who Sang to the Moon*, 239n4.

purposes demonstrates the pervasive degree to which we are academically conditioned to read animals “in and around (culturally inscribed) disciplinary structures”.²⁸

Similarly, David Dwan acknowledges that the preface opens the door to an animal reading beyond the humanist allegory, acknowledging that Orwell’s allegory “raises questions about traditional distinctions between animals and humans”.²⁹ However, he ultimately closes the door on an animal reading because it would undermine the book’s allegorical conceit - an implicit acknowledgement it seems that the visceral affective force of the literal story threatens to overpower the abstract humanist allegory. Accordingly, we must disregard, or sacrifice, the animal to preserve the more significant humanist interpretation. An alternative reading might emphasize the entangled oppression of humans and animals (as Orwell’s preface suggests). Dwan’s insistence on a zero-sum reading, one that must privilege the human over the animal, reflects a fundamental precondition of humanism, namely that animals must be subservient to humans, even in the representational domain.

Stewart Cole offers a more extensive and somewhat more sympathetic analysis of the animal question in *Animal Farm*, but ultimately arrives at much the same conclusion. He argues that “[w]hile it is true that *Animal Farm* denaturalizes our exploitation of nonhuman animals by making it the key grievance from which a revolution is launched [...], Orwell makes abundantly clear his view that nothing need be done to end that exploitation.”³⁰ The conclusion reached in his study is guided less by a textual analysis of Orwell’s book than it is from biographical observations, albeit parsed from the author’s vast oeuvre of essays. Specifically, Cole refers to Orwell’s critique of Gandhi and his religious commitment to vegetarianism, along with his more famous excoriation of the proverbial vegetarian who remains, “out of touch with common humanity” and “willing to cut himself off from human society in hopes of adding five years onto

28 McHugh, “*Animal Farm*’s Lessons”, 28.

29 Dwan, “Orwell’s Paradox”, 666.

30 Cole, “True Struggle”, 349.

the life of his carcass”.³¹ For the sake of precision, it must be stated here that Orwell’s ire clearly targets self-motivated, health-conscious vegetarians and not what we might today call ethical vegetarians or vegans (i.e. the commitment aimed at alleviating animal suffering). Nevertheless, for Cole, Orwell’s rancorous statement reflects his commitment to the “continued ratification of (human) superiority”, thereby embodying what “Derrida calls ‘carnophallogocentrism’ — that is, a vision of authority as residing at the nexus of meat-eating, masculinity, and language-driven rationality, a position that nothing in Orwell’s writings contradicts.”³²

Cole’s pronouncement is as bold as it is sweeping. Invoking Derrida for the purpose of containing textual interpretation, indeed intimating that there is one final interpretation, is ironic to say the least. Carnophallogocentrism is correctly and pithily defined by Cole. Operationalizing this term to confine and singularize the possible readings and interpretations of the book is highly problematic as there is no way to decontextualize carnophallogocentrism from the Derridean method of deconstruction. Moreover, discerning an author’s personal values (drawn from exterior works) assumes the Romantic-humanist position that a text coheres to the author’s intention — a decidedly anti-Derridean position. Indeed, the standard by which Cole determines Orwell’s values vis-à-vis animals would also cast Derrida himself as carnophallogocentric given his ambivalent stance toward vegetarianism — a claim Derrida would, furthermore, be unlikely to reject given his critique was aimed at Western culture (of which he was a self-aware product) and not at individuals.³³ Unquestionably, then, Orwell was implicated in carnophallogocentrism, but this does not prevent significant kernels of animal resistance and critique from emanating from his texts. If anything, Orwell’s essays suggest a man of complex, and often conflicting, views surrounding animals and they therefore offer inconclusive, and certainly insufficient, criteria to guide an interpretation.

31 Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, quoted in Cole, “True Struggle”, 348.

32 Cole, “True Struggle”, 349.

33 Calarco, “Deconstruction Is Not Vegetarianism”.

Indeed, much of Orwell's work has defied ethical and political consistency. As Cole acknowledges, Orwell's politics are often a jumble of contradictions on a variety of levels including gender, race, and class, referencing examples where Orwell "inferiorizes"³⁴ and even animalizes members of marginalized communities. What distinguishes these abuses from the ire he reserves for vegetarians, Cole asserts, is that these groups still manage to "retain their humanity" in Orwell's estimation. According to this formulation, vegetarians would disavow the "ontological superiority on which our humanity is founded", thereby forfeiting their essential humanness.³⁵ The degree of argumentative hair-splitting deployed here to distinguish the moral intent of Orwell's insults suggests an abiding commitment to containing the author's often shifting allegiances, if only at the species level. It is on these terms that Cole concludes that "Orwell's writing uniquely illuminates the incompatibility of speciesism and social justice."³⁶ Whatever his exterior writing reveals about the author himself, it does little to illuminate how *Animal Farm* contributes to the impasse to which Cole refers.

When Cole commits to *Animal Farm* itself, he argues that Orwell is torn between a commitment to acknowledging our essential animality and a refusal to abandon the tropes of humanism. The ending where the humans and pigs become indistinguishable from each other would seem to enact this very tension. And yet, Cole suggests that this fraught tension disqualifies an animal reading largely because it remains unresolved. This is a high bar indeed, a standard that again is not applied to the many humanist contradictions percolating through Orwell's works. At the end of his analysis, Cole questions whether our own "institutionalized speciesism [...] signals an ongoing violent attempt to consolidate our superior humanity in the face of forces and events that daily call it into question."³⁷ I agree and if we are committed to challenging such institutionalized speciesism then we must thoroughly interrogate the standards that uphold it.

34 Cole, "True Struggle", 350.

35 Cole, 330.

36 Cole, 338.

37 Cole, 350.

Dismissing such an explicit engagement with the horrors and ruthlessness of animal capitalization because the author may not have approved of such a reading upholds institutionalized speciesism. Rigorous, deconstructive engagement with the text itself, not the author, is needed.

I return to Derrida's neologism to argue that even if it is established that Orwell embodied carnophallogocentric qualities, *Animal Farm* presents a challenge to the human supremacy that feeds carnophallogocentrism. The novella begins with a group of farmed animals convening to reflect on their shared immiseration at the hands of their human oppressors. A senior pig, Old Major, leads the meeting and proceeds to outline an explicitly detailed litany of the horrors awaiting the farm's animal inhabitants. Before the reader has the opportunity to commit to a narrow anthropo-allegorical reading of the book, they are presented with a compelling critique of the systematized violence inflicted on farmed animals, albeit in an anachronistic pastoral setting. Indeed, this seemingly innocent setting deepens the critique as it recasts the enduring, anodyne notions of "Old MacDonald's Farm" into a dystopian space.

Animals who have experienced cruelty have been presented sympathetically in a range of popular texts, including Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, Margaret Marshall Saunders' *Beautiful Joe*, Felix Salten's *Bambi*, and Richard Adams's *Plague Dogs*. Such depictions of abuse, however, are typically isolated to the careless or sadistic actions inflicted on specific animals by individual people. Old Major identifies the larger source of animal subjugation and slaughter, and it is not limited to the individual evil of Mr. Jones, the proprietor of the farm. Consistent with Orwell's preface, Old Major indicts humanity along species lines, declaring "the evils of this life of ours springs from the tyranny of human beings."³⁸ It becomes increasingly clear that Old Major's critique is also systemic in scope; he identifies the economic processes supporting the practice of carnism or carnivorousness as the oppressive human system that must be overthrown. His references to animal domination, exploitation, and slaughter are explicit, for

³⁸ Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 5.

instance, when he states that “the very instant our usefulness has come to an end we are slaughtered with hideous cruelty.”³⁹ They can, furthermore, not be decontextualized from institutionalized carnivorism — at least not without a deliberate effort.

Undoubtedly, this scene is crafted to support its allegorical Marxian tenor, but the affect generated through the viscerally detailed animal vehicle threatens to overwhelm that tenor. Such affective engagement recalls the tradition of promoting animal welfare through children’s literature, and it becomes impossible to ignore or seamlessly transpose onto its anthro-po-allegorical tenor (i.e., the cruel exploitation of the proletariat). If the animal cruelty described by Old Major drives the allegorical affect, it raises an obvious though roundly neglected question: why should we not also be concerned with the animals’ oppression? Is it not more powerful to recognize the animals’ suffering along with the entangled human-animal oppression that belies the humanist allegory? The fact that such hermeneutic pains have been taken to repress this human-animal entanglement is quite telling and require critical unpacking. In Derridean terms, I would argue that *Animal Farm* has simply not been sufficiently deconstructed. Scholars and educators have quite successfully encoded a highly restrictive and enduring humanist interpretation that has persisted largely unchallenged for decades.

Deconstructing the Humanist Legacy

As outlined so far, scholarly interpretations and analyses on *Animal Farm* have largely settled on the anthro-po-allegorical reading. The more recent attempts to re-animalize the text have been more aspirational than analytical, while attempts to analyse animality have largely concluded that an animal reading is either at odds with the allegorical tenor or authorial intention. *Animal Farm*’s interpretive boundaries would therefore seem largely settled. Is it *Animal Farm* itself that resists new readings? Or is our potential to (re)read the text uniquely restricted by a pervasive carnophallogocentrism that obfuscates its more troubling animal implications? As Derrida

³⁹ Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 3.

has argued, there is no final book and no final interpretation of the book—the book changes with us. *Animal Farm*, therefore, demands a re-reading, re-interpreting, and re-teaching reflective of our cultural moment, a culture increasingly sensitive to issues of animal suffering and slaughter. Emphasis on a constructed consensus of Orwell's authorial intention is perpetuated while his stated inspiration (human oppression of animals) is ignored. It is a very selective form of *authorization*, indeed.

For Derrida, the idea that a textual form can be reduced to a singular authoritative reading is rooted in the four-thousand-year-old tradition of writing, one that attempts to reduce writing to a mere extension of speech. Accordingly, the text becomes a mere substitutive instrument manipulated by the author to extend his (it is almost exclusively a “he”) speech to geographical and temporal spaces (i.e., the future beyond the author's death) in order to safeguard the integrity of the speaker's (i.e., the author's) intention. As such, the text becomes analogous to the paternalistic desire to ensure the integral continuity of a father's offspring. For this reason, Derrida devised the neologism phallogocentrism to link patriarchy and rational-textual authority. For Derrida, the persistent, singular interpretive orientation of *Animal Farm* would be rooted in this desire for textual fidelity, so it coheres to a singular, paternalistic intention—that is to reflect the *authority* (typically the imagined authority) of the speaker/author and one that is more likely to reflect the dominant values of the context in which the text is interpreted. Authoritative interpretation aims to *tame* writing through a hierarchically imposed linearity (i.e., religious and later humanist-rationalist authority) to contain meaning and limit contestation. Derrida argues, however, that such linearized projects were doomed to fail because the very structure of writing is founded on an inherent representational infidelity between signifier and signified or between sign and referent. With allegory, we could say that the vehicle corresponds with the signifier and the tenor corresponds to the signified. In the traditional anthropo-allegorical reading of *Animal Farm*, the animal narrative serves as the signifier from which the humanist political allegory is signified. As with other signifier–signified relations, an inevitable slippage between the

two occurs over time as new interpretative possibilities emerge. If the perceived authorial intention begins to be breached, a conservative response corrects such infringements by deferring phallogocentrically to the word of the authorial father. To revisit the denial of Orwell's preface through this lens then, the fidelity of the established anthro-po-allegorical reading is disrupted by the author's own words. Yet the humanist interpretation continues to subsume consideration of the surface-level animal themes.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida argues that post-war Western culture found itself positioned at a fulcrum linking "two ages of writing. Because we are beginning to write, [and] to write differently, we must reread differently."⁴⁰ This looming transition marked the endpoint of a century-long revolution (beginning with the assault on the linear consensus of discourse led by Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud) that laid siege to the linear model of reading and writing upholding Western logocentrism. Linearity and singularity gave way to delinearized and "pluridimensional" modes of writing and reading. What was at stake here, Derrida understood, was the question of subjectivity and who defines it. For Derrida, this could not be reduced to a "simple regression toward the mythogram" as many of his contemporary critics had argued, but "on the contrary, it makes all the rationality subjected to the linear model appear as another form and another age of mythography."⁴¹ In other words, the activation of new orientations, interpretations, and subjectivities ultimately cast scrutiny on who precisely determined the dominant, linearized mode of authoritative logos—the supposedly transcendental subjectivity—repositioning it as a "white mythology".

Central to Derrida's project then is the requirement that we deconstruct the sources of textual authority and interpretation until they are rendered transparent. In *Animal Farm* we must consider why the authoritative linearized (i.e., anthro-po-allegorical) reading has dominated the cultural, critical, and pedagogical imaginary until well after the eruption of "pluridimensionality". Could it be that these

40 Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 87.

41 Derrida, 87.

carnivoristic tensions, so overtly present in the book, point uncomfortably to an internal cultural contradiction (not to mention cultural trauma) that required repression? If so, why even elevate such a potentially volatile text to the educational status it has long occupied? One reason may be that the animal consumption economy was naturalized for so long that it was left largely unexamined in the broader culture and therefore logically ignored in a text in which it was so frankly depicted. A more compelling possibility, however, may be rooted in what Helena Pedersen has identified as a pervasive “institutional anxiety regarding the question of the animal,”⁴² an anxiety motivated by a desire to uphold rather than disrupt the human exceptionalism operative in both education and humanities-based academic research. *Animal Farm*’s literal story of animal liberation being so adamantly disregarded suggests a strong commitment to upholding human exceptionalism. Of course, with a text as enduring and as widely translated as *Animal Farm* there is a range of cultural and historical influences informing its reception and interpretation, but the seemingly ubiquitous commitment to the anthropo-allegorical suggests a near-hegemonic exclusion of (even partial) animal-centric engagement.

The commitment to the Soviet revolutionary allegory, for example, remains as entrenched in the post-Cold War period as it was during the Cold War. Perhaps more so given that, with very few exceptions, scholarship surrounding *Animal Farm* presupposes this historical allegory even if much of it examines propaganda and the manipulation of language.⁴³ Through this process of erasure and anthropo-allegorical replacement, questions of animal subjugation and liberation are more effectively invalidated. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue, the abstraction of a resource is designed to conceal its extraction, and as Nicole Shukin has shown, this same principle is operative in the economy of “animal capital.”⁴⁴ In this economy, symbolic

42 Pedersen, “Education, Anthropocentrism”, 172.

43 Elbarbary, “Language as Theme”; Fowler, *Language of George Orwell*; Sewlall, “Orwell’s *Animal Farm*”; White, “Socialism and Utopia”; Bibby, “Content and Context”; Ferrari, “A boot stamping”.

44 Hardt and Negri, *Assembly*, 164; Shukin, *Animal Capital*, 7–8.

avatars populate popular culture as an alibi for the mass slaughter of animals locked in the dystopian machinery of the animal-industrial complex. Accordingly, systematic animal suffering and destruction are symbolically affirmed through their interpretive omission. To understand why literary scholars have ignored the animal in *Animal Farm* for so long we must explore the embedded legacy of human exceptionalism in literary education and scholarship.

In “Rules for the Human Zoo: A Response to the *Letter on Humanism*,” Peter Sloterdijk posits that literacy has historically instilled cultural divisions that perpetuated a “yawning gulf between the literate and the illiterate,” one whose “insuperability amounted almost to a species differentiation”.⁴⁵ In Sloterdijk’s estimation, literacy offers the subject access to a humanism whose express purpose is to “tame” our animal nature. Along these lines, he wryly observes how the very “label of humanism reminds us (with apparent innocuousness) of the constant battle for humanity that reveals itself as a contest between bestializing and taming tendencies.”⁴⁶ Here Sloterdijk points to humanism’s original mission: to elevate humans above animals. Accordingly, he unveils the teleology of the humanist literary and pedagogical project—to define humanity in contrast to animality. As Cary Wolfe contends, human subjectivity is discursively constructed: language (and by extension literacy) become the determinants of subjectivity, a condition that excludes animality. Hence, he writes, the “formation of Western subjectivity [...] relies on tacit agreement that the full transcendence of the ‘human’ requires the sacrifice of the ‘animal’ and the animalistic.”⁴⁷

Drawing on the work of German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, Wolfe argues that the only way to distinguish language from non-language is *through* language. In such a fashion, language constitutes a framing mechanism that separates inclusion (i.e. inside the frame) from exclusion (outside the frame). Wolfe connects Luhmann’s notion of exclusion to Derrida’s concept of “sacrificial structure” underlying

45 Sloterdijk, “Rules for the Human Zoo”, 23.

46 Sloterdijk, 15.

47 Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 6.

symbolic economies.⁴⁸ For Derrida, the outside is “always ‘to come’” since it comprises the excluded voices that constitute the inside’s eventual source of “pluridimensionality”, as when the barriers governing Eurocentric notions of subjectivity are challenged. For Wolfe, the most crucial and enduring barrier is the one that upholds the species divide between human and animal. Sloterdijk’s analysis reminds us why this boundary remains so resilient in the context of the humanist literary and pedagogical project—it is the foundation upon which the edifice stands. This is what is so revealing about *Animal Farm*’s pervasive and enduring anthropo-allegorical interpretive schema. The surface-level animal themes constitute a challenge to the “transcendence of the human” and are consequently “sacrificed” or excluded from the interpretive schema altogether. Such exclusions, following Wolfe’s analysis, may simply constitute onto-epistemological “blind spots” to that which exists outside the humanist interpretive schema—they are rendered unrepresentable within the symbolic economy of the humanist allegory. An emphasis on the systematized immiseration and subjugation of animals raises irreconcilable ethical and ontological tensions with the transcendent humanist allegory, despite Orwell’s avowal that it was the coterminous oppression of humans by humans and animals by humans that inspired the novel. Such conspicuous neglect of the animal in the overwhelming majority of scholarly interpretations of *Animal Farm* would seem to uphold what Sloterdijk and Wolfe separately argue, namely, that the human cannot easily co-exist alongside the animal within the onto-discursive schema of literary humanism.

Along similar lines, literary scholar Robert McKay argues that the persistent dismissal of the animal in Western letters reflects the “compulsory humanity” that undergirds the Humanities.⁴⁹ Extending Judith Butler’s concept (by way of Adrienne Rich) of “compulsory heterosexuality,” McKay analyses Margaret Atwood’s symbolic application of animals in her 1972 novel *Surfacing*, along with her explicitly stated literary theory (as outlined in *Survival* from the same year) that animals should only be written and read symbolically in service

48 Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 205.

49 McKay, “Identifying with the Animals”, 209.

of the human (master) narrative. Accordingly, when an animal figuratively suffers or dies in a literary text, she or he is excluded from what Judith Butler has termed “grievable” status and can, therefore, at most be interpreted as a symbolic manifestation of deeper human trauma.⁵⁰

In *Animal Farm*, the gruesome death of the perseverant workhorse, Boxer, pushes this conceit to its limits. After the pigs betray the revolutionary principles of animalism and commit themselves to the same ruthless, instrumentalist rationality that guided their human oppressors, they come to similarly dominate their fellow animals. Boxer’s inexhaustibility is a crucial exploitable resource to the pigs, as well as an inspiration to the other animals. When his body finally breaks down and he ceases to be of exploitable value, at least as a living animal, the pig leaders surreptitiously resort to a capitalistic scheme—to sell Boxer to the knackers where he will be slaughtered. Under the pretence of being taken to the veterinarian, he is loaded into a truck marked “Alfred Simmonds, Horse Slaughterer and Glue Boiler, Willingdon. Dealer in Hides and Bone Meal. Kennels Supplied.”⁵¹

Boxer’s slow realization that he is going to be destroyed and sold for consumable parts presents readers with a scene of indelible and horrifying pathos. In terrified desperation, Boxer attempts with all his remaining strength to free himself from the knacker’s truck, “But alas! His strength had left him; and in a few moments the sound of drumming hoofs grew fainter and died away.”⁵² According to Atwood’s prescribed linearized reading, Boxer’s death, in and of itself, is “ungrievable” because his animality is radically excluded from our own interpretive orientation—even in the presence of such visceral, animal-specific horror. The scene presents the reader with a rare depiction of an animal’s terrified realization and anguished resistance in the face of imminent slaughter. Yet readers have been trained to re-direct their empathy to an anthropocentric abstraction.

⁵⁰ Butler, *Precarious Life*, xiv.

⁵¹ Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 82.

⁵² Orwell, 82.

Anyone who has read this scene with students, however, will understand that Boxer's death is eminently grievable, on its own terms. He is, first and foremost, a terrified horse before he is rendered metaphoric grist for the anthro-po-allegorical mill. This affective first response to the scene tends to be disregarded and callously redirected into anthro-po-allegorical oblivion. It is one thing to frame this scene with allegorical meaning, but to interpret (not to mention teach) it as a uniformly human tragedy is quite another—a dissonant framing device that is not only wilfully blind but one that forces children and young adults to masochistically deny any personal traumatic response brought on by their empathetic engagement with animal suffering. To read Boxer's impending slaughter strictly metaphorically requires an ironic detachment that succeeds in amplifying the anthro-po-allegorical impact while suppressing the affect that would otherwise be evoked. Indeed, this would seem to engender a coarsening and erosion of affective engagement with the suffering animal, illustrating Horkheimer and Adorno's claim that "to show concern for animals is considered no longer merely sentimental but a betrayal of progress."⁵³

In pursuit of children's developmental progress, the compulsory humanist imperative renders the animal casualties of carnivorousness unreadable unless they are refracted through the anthro-po-allegorical interpretive frame. Undoubtedly, Boxer's gruesome demise embodies the ultimate tragedy of capitalism, namely that those who produce value for the system are consumed by it, quite literally for the animals, as they actually *are* devoured by an economic system fuelled by the blood of animals.⁵⁴ Read in this fashion, Boxer's death embodies the entangled, but asymmetrical, oppression of humans and animals trapped in the cold, dystopian machinery of instrumental capitalism that figuratively (in the case of humans) and literally (in the case of animals) eats those who serve it.⁵⁵

53 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 211.

54 Shukin, *Animal Capital*; Drew, "Rendering Visible", 207.

55 Coulter, *Animals, Work*; Donovan and Adams, *Feminist Care Tradition*.

Talking Animals: The Anthropomorphic Dilemma

If we want to re-subjectivize animals, both attention and care are needed. Anthropomorphized animal representations, such as those in *Animal Farm*, have long been critiqued by critical animal studies scholars for appropriating animals in service of anthropocentric objectives.⁵⁶ Indeed, Derrida himself has argued that animal symbolic representation erases the animals' essential alterity. This erasure, however, is in actuality informed by the essentially carnophallogocentric reception and interpretation of the text—consistent with “compulsory humanity”—rather than being inherent to the text itself.⁵⁷ Onno Oerlemans, for instance, argues that a carefully guided engagement with anthropomorphism can promote greater engagement with animal subjectivity.⁵⁸ Similarly, Sam Cadman states that a progressive form of anthropomorphism offers a possible avenue for countering anthropocentrism from the inside out.⁵⁹ By contrast, Jane Desmond denounces the “magical fantasy of anthropomorphism” as “an extended instance of domination through incorporation”.⁶⁰ Helena Pederson subsequently applies Desmond's insights to the school setting and sees parallels to Homi K. Bhabha's notions of indeterminacy and colonial mimicry. For Bhabha, the colonial other is “a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite [...] continually producing its slippage, its excess, its difference.”⁶¹ Pedersen sees a similar “double articulation” at work in the anthropomorphizing of animals, rendering them “almost human, but not quite”. She argues that students' repeated exposure to entertainment and educational anthropomorphic iterations work *ironically*, in Bhabha's term, to “re-inscribe the same boundaries that they are challenging”.⁶² This ironic reproduction of species difference works to contain animals in a subordinate, instrumentalized cultural position.

56 Crist, *Images of Animals*; Beer, “Animal Presences”.

57 Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 91.

58 Oerlemans, “Defense of Anthropomorphism”.

59 Cadman, “Reflections on Anthropocentrism”.

60 Desmond, *Staging Tourism*, 210.

61 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 86.

62 Pedersen, *Animals in Schools*, 30–31.

There remains, however, a crucial dimension of Bhabha's argument that requires further unpacking and that is his notion of the "enunciative split". Bhabha derives this concept from Frantz Fanon who observes that cultural enunciation is a double-edged sword for both the colonizer and colonized, which is a key dimension of Bhabha's "double articulation" theory. Fanon's vision for revolutionary change resides in what Bhabha calls "the intervention of the Third Space of enunciation" which opens an unstable, ambivalent space between colonizer and colonized or the dominant and dominated.⁶³ This ambivalent space is often massaged away by the dominant group but, following Fanon, Bhabha sees the emancipatory potential of the third space to displace ideological orthodoxies supporting dominant interests. For Bhabha, the enunciative split establishes an "in between space" characterized by hybridity in a way that obliterates notions of a stable unifying culture or identity. Bhabha argues that this hybridic, ambivalent space is forged in negotiation, while the hegemonic narratives of the dominant interests remain products of negation — a negation of the other's experience and value. By negotiating the hybridic potential of the "third space," we may, Bhabha argues, "elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves".⁶⁴

Cary Wolfe applies Bhabha's enunciative cultural theories to his own analysis of mimetic power across species lines in Michael Crichton's *Congo*, before ultimately concluding that Bhabha's "work remains captivated [...] by the figure of the human".⁶⁵ Wolfe argues that because Bhabha's notion of the subject is "located" in the very same enlightenment liberal humanism that he seeks to critique, his analysis necessarily "constitutes its own repression".⁶⁶ However, even if Bhabha's subjective positionality may foreclose a broader cultural analysis of the emancipatory potential of more non-human subjectivities, it still generates critical space for the deconstruction of humanist discursive tropes (i.e. anthropomorphic devices). If we are to

63 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 54.

64 Bhabha, 56.

65 Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 188.

66 Wolfe, 5.

interrogate anthropocentric narratives through Bhabha's theoretical frame, then we must leave room for both sides of the double articulation in modes of cultural enunciation. Humanist anthropomorphic narratives (or more specifically their hegemonic interpretations) do re-inscribe species boundaries between human and other, but not through negotiation, rather through negation.

The orthodox anthropo-allegorical reading and teaching of *Animal Farm* typically persists in negating the animal anthropomorphically, but it does not necessarily follow that those anthropomorphic narratives must always erase the otherness of animal experience, especially when read through Bhabha's double articulation frame. By giving anthropomorphic voice to farmed animals, *Animal Farm* offers readers the rare opportunity to engage empathetically with the plight of exploited and oppressed animals. In this way, we achieve Donna Haraway's feminist epistemological goal to realize "splitting" perspectives. For Haraway, a commitment to "splitting" perspectives recognizes that the "topography of subjectivity is multidimensional, and so, therefore is vision".⁶⁷ Accordingly, we may allow ourselves to see in new ways and from different perspectives. In this light, Old Major's disquieting summation of the systematic, almost absurd, cruelty pervading farm animal existence rings perhaps truer today in the era of advanced industrial "farming" techniques:

[W]hat is the nature of this life of ours? Let us face it, our lives are miserable, laborious and short. We are born, we are given so much food as will keep the breath in our bodies, and those of us who are capable of it are forced to work to the last atom of our strength; and the very instant our usefulness has come to an end we are slaughtered with hideous cruelty. No animal in England knows the meaning of happiness or leisure after he is a year old. The life of an animal is misery and slavery: that is the plain truth.⁶⁸

While this passage may suggest a Marxist analogue of human exploitation, does it not evoke the literal reference to animal suffering

⁶⁷ Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 193

⁶⁸ Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 3.

first? Why does the human subtext so thoroughly “nullify” the animal text at the surface when the two can exist, and indeed inform, one another?⁶⁹ Students are tasked with reading through and beyond the animal suffering depicted in the book, treating the animals in these passages as mere instrumental mirages serving a higher, human-centric purpose.

Negation, however, is something we learn through cultural inscription. The negation of the animal that occurs when teaching *Animal Farm* can only be achieved through an active process of silencing the literal story of the book. Students should be given the opportunity to negotiate the convergences and divergences between the animal and human concerns of the book. Reading in such a fashion allows students to register the “others of our selves,” as Bhabha would have it. This allows them to see the oppressive and predatory human customs as observed from the defamiliarized position of the non-human animal other. Old Major’s declarations attest to this:

Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals. He sets them to work, he gives back to them the bare minimum that will prevent them from starving, and the rest he keeps for himself.⁷⁰

This passage is similarly inscribed with much of the same allegorical connotations as the previous passage. But when readers are encouraged to focus actively on the double articulation on which the allegory depends, both human and animal dimensions are foregrounded. The reader may see themselves reflected as other through the eyes of a subjugated animal. In many instances throughout the book there remains a conspicuous slippage that cannot be neatly enclosed into the conceit of allegory. This movement rather reverberates in ways that problematize the conventional anthropo-analogical reading, as, for instance, when Old Major’s lament continues:

⁶⁹ See Harel, “Animal Voice”, 15.

⁷⁰ Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 4.

[N]o animal escapes the cruel knife in the end [...] every one of you will scream your lives out at the block within a year. To that we all must come—cows, pigs, hens, sheep, everyone. Even the horses and the dogs have not better fate. You, Boxer, the very day that those great muscles of yours lose their power, Jones will sell you to the knacker, who will cut your throat and boil you down for the foxhounds. As for the dogs, when they grow old and toothless Jones ties a brick round their necks and drowns them in the nearest pond.⁷¹

It is difficult to read this passage as subordinate to the humanistic allegory. As Dwan suggests, the analogical abstraction collapses under the weight of the all too real evocation of animal slaughter, one that does not extend neatly to the analogue of proletarian oppression.⁷² The visceral emphasis on animal death overpowers the relatively remote analogy to proletarian disposability, viscerally compelling one's attention to the terror and anguish of the doomed animals. At the very least, the book offers an unequivocal "consensus that animals ought to be treated humanely."⁷³ The broader literary negation of the animal experience and their suffering only reveals the empathetic limitations of "our speciesist interpretive bias."⁷⁴ This is not to reject the anthro-allegorical subtextual conceit, but rather that the animal and human dimensions of *Animal Farm* need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, through a Bhabhasian lens it becomes clear that an anthro-allegorical narrative cannot have the one without the other. As readers, scholars, and educators, we can privilege negotiated reading over one of negation.

As such, a negotiated approach to reading embraces language's inherent shiftiness and unreliability which corresponds to Derridean "pluridimensionality". Under these terms, language becomes less invested in policing the boundaries of subjectivity, in a way that exemplifies Mel Y. Chen's project of "feraliz[ing]" discourse.⁷⁵ For Chen,

71 Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 5.

72 Dwan, "Orwell's Paradox", 667.

73 Ortiz-Robles, *Literature and Animal Studies*, 175.

74 Harel, "The Animal Voice", 17.

75 Chen, *Animacies*, 18.

language has been domesticated to serve the exclusionary framework of the dominant white supremacist, ableist, hetero-patriarchal, and speciesist mode of subjectivity. They argue that a “feral” discourse is required to confront the hierarchically imposed shackles of linearity. The stakes for challenging language’s linearization, or what Chen calls “domestication,” are high indeed, and such challenges have profound implications for the human and more-than-human alike. Building on linguist Michael Silverstein’s work on “animacy hierarchies,” Chen argues that entrenched linguistic hierarchies frame cultural perceptions of possibility. Animacy hierarchies help assign agential status to humans, while denying agency to marginalized human and non-human others through a careful, but largely invisible, project of linguistic and discursive codification. This project is mainly dependent on an uncontested and sedimented legacy of metaphorization.

Pluralizing the Cultural and Literary Discourse: Beyond Metaphorization

As Derrida asserts, metaphorization is a crucial component of logos’s affirmation of “white mythology” and is instrumental in calcifying cultural tropes that sustain dominant ideologies. Metaphor in this sense works as a linearizing linguistic mechanism that frames our thoughts and perceptions through a constructed lens of analogized similarity, which promotes commensurability and familiarity. Metaphor and its linguistic siblings, simile, symbolism, personification, and allegory, all serve the same reductive, linearizing function. In such a fashion, *Animal Farm* has been read, analysed, and taught almost exclusively in an anthropo-allegorical manner, reducing the animal representations to mere traces on which an anthropocentric symbolic interpretation could be realized. Here, the “animacy hierarchy” subordinates the animal thereby reproducing the onto-epistemological imperatives of Western logocentrism and human exceptionalism. As Derrida, Wolfe, Chen, and others have demonstrated, this has profound consequences for humans and animals alike.

Carey Wolfe’s discursive theorization of the species divide hinges on the Derridean “structural sacrifice” that excludes animals from

subjective status. For Wolfe, like Horkheimer and Adorno before him, the category of the human depends upon the sacrifice of the animal “and the animalistic, which in turn makes possible a symbolic economy in which in which we can engage in what Derrida will call a ‘noncriminal putting to death’ of other *humans* as well by marking *them* as animal.”⁷⁶ The reductionist anthropo-allegorical frame through which *Animal Farm* is read, theorized, and taught is therefore not only limiting but also deeply implicated in the linguistic-discursive reification of exclusionist and oppressive cultural hierarchies. According to Timothy Snyder, Stalin’s farmland collectivization program during the early 1930s inspired a propagandistic project to associate farmers with pigs—the crude analogical implication being that farmers now shared the expendable status of the slaughter animal.⁷⁷ The confiscation of land that followed led to the Great Soviet Famine and the Holodomor in Ukraine. In *Animal Farm*, Orwell re-imagines the land confiscation with the chickens representing the farmers. Napoleon, the post-revolutionary Stalinist pig autocrat, enforces an egg collectivization program that the chickens refuse. Napoleon selects three of the hens and numerous other animal “traitors” and publicly slaughters them one by one, “leaving the air heavy with the smell of blood, which had been unknown since the expulsion of Farmer Jones.”⁷⁸ Understanding this weaponization of metaphor to link farmers to their own farm animals presents an additional, and essential, allegorical tension, which may also shed light on Orwell’s selection of pigs as the post-revolutionary oppressors.

As slaughter animals, pigs are “made killable.”⁷⁹ The distinction between farmer and pig (slaughterer and slaughtered) is dissolved in the metaphorical alignment of farmer and pig consigning as Snyder argues, the resistant Soviet farmers to the “killable” status of their slaughter animals. In *Animal Farm*, this power dynamic is inverted but the metaphoric alignment is preserved—the farmers are no longer pigs, but the pigs have become farmers. Here, we

76 Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 6.

77 Snyder, *On Tyranny*, 33

78 Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 57.

79 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 80.

see the volatility of metaphoric associations and their oppressive power. Orwell's allegorical representation of this historical tragedy reveals the intersecting depths at which animal and human oppression, and indeed slaughter, are connected and even mutually reinforce one another aligning with Wolfe's Derridean formulation of the "non-criminal putting to death' of other humans [...] by marking *them* as animal".⁸⁰ Erasing the animal dimension from *Animal Farm* thus upholds the mythology of human exceptionalism, while negating what should be two essential and intersecting lessons from the book: that human and animal oppression are semio-materially entangled and that domesticated animals suffer terribly at the hands of their human oppressors.

Thus, the dominant anthropo-allegorical reading of Orwell's classic reinscribes species-based hierarchies within the symbolic economy of literature and literary education, and instrumentalizes the representations of animal suffering for humanist ends. There is an extractive dimension to this engrained anthropo-allegorical formulation that aligns comfortably with colonial and settler-colonial ideologies. Anishinaabeg scholar and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson argues that extractionist capitalism pervades all facets of settler-colonial culture, including education.⁸¹ She argues for a "Nishnaabeg anticapitalism" based on what she calls "grounded normativity" recognizing that "we live embedded in networks of humans and non-humans".⁸² Similarly, Robin Kimmerer invokes the Sky Woman Falling creation story shared by the Indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes of what is now Canada and the United States as an illustration of the "chain of reciprocity" guiding Indigenous multispecies ethics.⁸³ In the story, a woman falls from the sky but her life is saved thanks to a multispecies intervention to break her fall. She then embraces a life of mutual reciprocity with the animals and plant life on Turtle Island. In this spirit, Kimmerer points to the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving address that describes "our mutual allegiance

80 Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 6.

81 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 76.

82 Simpson, 80.

83 Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 20.

to the democracy of species”.⁸⁴ She argues that schools would better serve Indigenous and settler communities alike by “pledging reciprocity to the living world”.⁸⁵

Along these lines, Nathan Snaza calls for new syllabus projects that responds to the protest movements of Black Lives Matter, Idle No More, and Standing Rock by “generating lists of texts that don’t respect disciplinary traditions, regimes, and canons. They [instead] gear education not in the service of a humanization oriented toward Man [sic], but toward ways of seeing the (colonialist, settler) state as violent, extractive, and unnecessary.”⁸⁶ In my situated space of south-western Ontario, Canada there is an emerging effort at the board level to decolonize and Indigenize education by integrating Indigenous texts into the syllabus. In addition to representation, Indigenous scholars like Simpson and Kimmerer argue that education requires ethical and epistemological transformation which challenges the hubris of embedded Western humanism. Furthermore, Billy Ray Belcourt argues that the systematized subjugation and slaughter of animals is deeply entangled with the colonial oppression of Indigenous peoples. To this end, he contends that “animal domestication, speciesism, and other modern human-animal interactions are only possible because of and through the historic and ongoing erasure of Indigenous bodies and the emptying of Indigenous lands for settler-colonial expansion.”⁸⁷ For Belcourt, speciesism is a settler-colonial concept and hence efforts to promote speciesism, or to leave it unchallenged, also serve to promote colonialism. Thus, the unchallenged anthropo-allegorical reading of *Animal Farm* not only validates species-based hierarchies but also implicitly affirms notions of Western cultural supremacy in its repression of the animal and its refusal to consider how violence against animals is discursively entangled with systemic violence directed at Indigenous (and other marginalized) peoples.

84 Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 116.

85 Kimmerer, 116.

86 Snaza, *Animate Literacies*, 159.

87 Belcourt, “Animal Bodies”, 3.

Language and discourse determine power in *Animal Farm*, and those who have a monopoly on discursive power (first the humans, then the pigs) determine the value systems (in this case, cold instrumentalism) that will ultimately govern the others not in power. But how the empowered class justifies their privilege is a pressing concern for Orwell. *Animal Farm*'s iconic axiom "All animals are equal... but some are more equal than others" represents the most famous of many aphorisms operationalized by the pigs to constrain the subordinated animals.⁸⁸ It is important to remember that this cynically ambiguous aphorism devolves from a simple revolutionary edict — "All animals are equal" — but is later affixed with the second clause to validate the pigs' privilege and dominance over the other animals. There are six other revolutionary commandments that are programmatically qualified until they are divested of their original emancipatory intention and potential. The other animals become confined in this linguistic web and are unable to resist the pigs' gaslit project of discursive manipulation that gradually narrows their material conditions until they are returned to pre-revolutionary levels of immiseration. Although the original edict pronouncing animal equality signified animal liberation and presented a clear species divide between non-human and human animals, the qualified edict begins to blur that very distinction. Towards the end of the book, the pigs begin to walk upright on two legs rather than four, violating the second commandment, which proclaimed, "whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy".⁸⁹ The pigs' chant of "four legs good — two legs better!" further dissolves the human-animal divide.⁹⁰

In this light, the qualified edict "some animals are more equal than others" assumes a different character now that the pigs are emulating human qualities. In the book's final passage, when the pigs confer with the human farmers, the species line is fully dissolved when several of the subordinated animals gather to spy on the congregants and they shift their attention, "from pig to man and from man to pig

88 Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 90

89 Orwell, 15.

90 Orwell, 89.

[. . .] but already it was impossible to say which was which.”⁹¹ Through the political anthro-po-allegorical reading this seemingly phantasmagorical transformation symbolizes the ultimate indistinguishability between Soviet socialism and Western capitalism. Through this conventional reading we seem to reach a nihilistic impasse, one that grants this book such value to the apparatuses of capture. It passively validates the capitalist status quo by invalidating a revolutionary alternative and this appropriation becomes all the more potent when the literal animal representations are obfuscated leaving the species-based hierarchy informing the analogy (and conveniently, the animal capital foundation supporting Western capitalism) unexamined. Interestingly, to return to Cole’s analysis, he further disqualifies an animal reading because he believes Orwell leverages the animals’ “inhumanity to help delineate a humanism that, while ostensibly undergirding an egalitarian political ideology, actually proves exclusionary not just across species lines but within them.”⁹² This is a crucial insight, but one applicable for the opposite of what Cole intended. The ending problematizes the humanist delineation in a way that resonates with Cary Wolfe’s contention that species boundaries are discursively constructed while simultaneously referring to the “arbitrariness behind the concept of equality, and to reflect on our most fundamental attitudes and practices involving animals.”⁹³ Importantly, Orwell’s description of the metamorphosis privileges the pig’s transformation into the human with no explicit elaboration on humans becoming pigs (i.e., “[n]o question now what happened to the faces of the pigs”⁹⁴). The pigs become indistinguishable from the humans, and vice versa, because the pigs’ aspirational trajectory toward human status is complete. The ending thus confirms that the most exceptional, or “more equal” animal here is indisputably the “two legged” human animal but, as Orwell’s preface intimates, human supremacy precedes intra-human hierarchies.

91 Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 95.

92 Cole, “True Struggle”, 337.

93 Boremyr, “Reading Orwell’s Animals”, 5.

94 Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 95.

Crucially, before the ultimate humanization of the pigs, Mr. Pilkington, the once hostile owner of Foxwood Farm now praises the ruthless efficiencies of Animal Farm, informing the pigs that he intends to apply their methods on his own farm before drawing the analogy, “If you have your lower animals to contend with [...] we have our lower classes!”⁹⁵ Here, the entangled exclusions across and between species lines become apparent. Pilkington’s statement suggests that the lessons learned from the oppressive subjugation of farmed animals could be applied to the exploitation of disempowered humans, again consistent with the oft-neglected human-animal thesis of Orwell’s Ukrainian preface. Such a reading challenges the hegemony, indeed the very legitimacy, of humanism. The ending of *Animal Farm* therefore reveals a concept of the human founded on the very inter and intra-species exclusions to which Cole refers, one devoted only to the tenets of instrumentalism and exploitation. Accordingly, humanism becomes the alibi that papers over the abhorrent legacies and ongoing injustices inflicted on the abject human and animal world through the “necropolitics” of colonial capitalism.⁹⁶ Indeed, the pigs’ final humanization is dependent on them subjugating their fellow animals — the pathway to human membership is therefore paved on the sacrifice of animal bodies much as the anthro-po-allegorical reading is forged on the disavowal of an animal reading. Contrary to upholding humanism, reading the animal in *Animal Farm* destabilizes the humanist alibi and in so doing presents a rare opportunity to confront the entangled human-animal legacies of instrumentalism, exploitation and immiseration on which Western human(ist) exceptionalism rests.

Conclusion

Animal Farm presents a world in which animals are granted access to subjectivizing language and, as a result, their collective subjectivity is slowly and paradoxically undermined and all but erased by the very language and discourse that shapes their world. Similarly, the hegemonic anthro-po-allegorical interpretation, guided by literature’s

⁹⁵ Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 92.

⁹⁶ Mbembe, “Necropolitics”, 11.

“compulsory humanity”, consigns the animal characters to a humanist avatar status that erases not only their essential animality but crucially disregards the representation of human-imposed systemic animal immiseration. The “talking animals” of *Animal Farm* unequivocally disclose the legacies of animal blood that have fueled carnophallogentrism, and the literary and educational dismissal of their perspectives reflects the miasmatic embeddedness of these values in our culture and institutions.

If scholars and educators lack the ethical commitment and capacity to confront animal exploitation and slaughter, both discursively and materially, for the sake of the animals themselves, then we might consider it for the sake of the students we are tasked with educating. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson laments how Western education’s emphasis on anthropocentric, instrumentalist values fails Indigenous people. Robin Kimmerer’s suggests Western education adopt the Haudenosaunee pledge of “mutual allegiance to the democracy of species”⁹⁷ to prepare students for the reciprocal and sustainable values that will be required to confront the climate emergency. Western humanism and its penchant for reading animals anthropo-allegorically obstructs such alternatives while supporting the colonial semio-material violence towards nature, humans, and other animals.

Along these lines, Helena Pedersen points to Greta Thunberg’s disavowal of an education for a future denied by ecological catastrophe.⁹⁸ Implicit in Thunberg’s challenge to education is an awareness that education is not only neglecting the challenges of the future but is in fact complicit in accelerating our demise through its commitment to recalcitrant values and ideologies that are radically opposed to our long-term survival. She is pointing to a new educational possibility, disassociated from the kind of human exceptionalism that turns a blind eye to the cruelty of agricultural animal containment and slaughter, and towards one that also understands, especially in these pandemic times, how both human and

97 Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 116.

98 Pedersen, “Education, Anthropocentrism,” 174.

animal fates are fatally and eternally entwined. Such a pedagogical orientation requires an ethical commitment beyond the parochial species-specific narcissism of Western humanism; to a devotion that recognizes the shared, but asymmetrically distributed, frailties that confront all animals, human and otherwise. When such an educational vision is enacted to confront the ethical and existential limits of human exceptionalism, *Animal Farm's* long-repressed animal story may finally be heard.

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