

THE SPECTRAL AND THE COMIC ANIMAL IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH THEATRE

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1. In *Theatre and Animals*, author Lourdes Orozco proposes a number of examples to illustrate the dilemma of ethical response in relation to animal representation, among which is *After Sun* by the Spanish theatre-maker Roderigo Garcia in 2001. Half way through the performance, the audience is introduced to a scene in which an actor mimed sex acts with two live rabbits. In a subsequent scene, a hamburger is cooked on stage. The reaction kindled by these two scenes could not be more contrasting: if the former was perceived as unacceptable mistreatment of animals and resulted in about one third of the audience walking out in protest, the latter was received in a rather matter-of-fact manner and there was not a single protest or walk-out. Orozco remarks, “the spectators could not relate to the body of an animal that was no longer visible. The animal had become food, and that, somehow, seemed more acceptable than the mistreatment of live rabbits”¹. In other words, the reduction of a living animal into a piece of meat obliterates the act of killing, therefore, renders the animal’s suffering invisible, which consequently makes the ethics of murder possible. In this particular instance, visibility of the animal body appears to be a more effective approach aimed at generating an instant and intense ethical response from the audience.

2. This does not come as a surprise, for embodiment has increasingly been seen as occupying a central status in bringing into relief the link between human and nonhuman animals. Thinking based on shared embodiedness, or “creaturely thinking”², to borrow the term from Anat Pick, focuses on the commonality of vulnerability, mortality, and fragility inherent in the material body of both human and nonhuman animals rather than on the numerous differences that distinguish the former from the latter. As such, creaturely thinking opens up the door to new ethics and new politics that are capable of dealing more effectively with problems arisen from human-animal interactions. Nevertheless, the attempt to overcome the categorical distinction that is the basis of speciesism³, to

1 L. Orozco, *Theatre and Animals* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 2.

2 See A. Pick, *Creaturely Poetics – Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (NY: Columbia UP, 2011), 7.

3 “Speciesism”, according to Joan Dunayer, refers to “the assumption that other animals are inferior to humans and do not warrant equal consideration and respect”. See J. Dunayer, “Sexist Words, Speciesist Roots”, *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Exploration*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (Durham: Duke UP, 1995), 11.

identify the animal within all humans through embodiment, proves to be a path replete with obstacles. Cora Diamond aptly remarks,

The awareness we each have of being a living body, being “alive to the world,” carries with it exposure to the bodily sense of vulnerability to death, sheer animal vulnerability, the vulnerability we share with them. This vulnerability is capable of panicking us. To be able to acknowledge it at all, let alone as shared, is wounding; but acknowledging it as shared with other animals, in the presence of what we do to them, is capable not only of panicking one but also of isolating one...⁴

3. It can be speculated that among the audience who walked out during the mimed sex scene of the actor and two rabbits in *After Sun*, there must be some who were shocked or disturbed by what they saw and whose reaction was prompted by an overwhelming desire to distance from the source of distress for the purpose of self-preservation. In other words, in acknowledging the shared vulnerability between humans and animals, they also suffered from a panic attack that drove them to the act of isolating themselves. While such a conjecture on the psychological state of these viewers remains contentious because of the lack of hard evidence, there was one concrete example which illuminates the paradoxical nature in the protest of the audience against what they perceived as an abusive treatment of animals. As Orozco observed, one viewer went as far as to shout “Animals!” from the back of the theatre, as an insult to the actor and Garcia’s creative team⁵. It is an irony that in his/her expression of passionate consideration for the two rabbits’ well-being, this audience resorted to the word “animal” in its most derogatory sense and consequently, forced the subject of his/her care under the age-old violence of language. The juxtaposition of the two scenes in *After Sun* – the mimed sexual mistreatment and the hamburger cooking – also highlights the danger of animal embodiment on stage, precisely because the audience took seriously a mimetic act of violence while turning a blind eye to the real slaughter that actually transpired, to the process of rarefication that transforms a living being into an object for consumption.

4. From this point of departure, we return to the British scene and realise that the decision of many contemporary British playwrights and directors to resist the use of real animals on stage derives from their wish not only to steer away from the scrutiny of various animal rights groups⁶, but also to discover other more effective means of representation in which the animal is invested

4 C. Diamond, “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy” in Stanley Cavell et al., *Philosophy and Animal Life* (NY: Columbia UP, 2008), 74.

5 L. Orozco, *Theatre and Animals*, 2.

6 Jamie Lloyd’s revival of *Richard III* in 2014 has a scene in which Clarence is drown in a tank containing a goldfish, which causes the water and sediment to churn up. After the protest from PETA, the director decided to dispense with the fish, even though the director assured that he had taken expert advice to ensure the fish’s well-being. See L. Gardner, “Animals on Stage – Should We Allow It?” *The Guardian*, 15 September 2014.

with agency. Caryl Churchill and Stef Smith are among those playwrights. If Caryl Churchill is known as one of the most critically acclaimed playwrights in the English-speaking world, with an impressive career that spans more than six decades and includes around fifty plays, Stef Smith is a considerably younger and lesser known playwright whose works only gather interest in the last five years or so. Despite their numerous differences, both playwrights reserve a crucial place for the animal in their recent works, the themes of which focus on dystopia and apocalyptic vision. Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* (2000) and *Escaped Alone* (2016), as well as Stef Smith's *Human Animals* (2016) are plays that consciously resist the visual imperative of theatre and instead, adopt a seemingly counterintuitive approach in focusing on language in their representation of animals⁷. Such an approach appears to be counterintuitive, firstly, because in the encounter with the animal, human language has been proved to be an ineffective tool. As noted by Akira Lippit, "if the animal is said to lack language, to represent the site of radical alterity, then words cannot circumscribe the being of animals as animals. The contact between language and the animal marks a limit of figurability, a limit of the very function of language"⁸. Secondly, the spectralisation⁹ of animals – rendering them invisible yet present – can also be interpreted as subjecting them to further dispossession and denying them the agency very much needed for their emancipation from human domination.

5. In this article, I would like to advance my argument that *Far Away*, *Escaped Alone* and *Human Animals* position these two concerns at the heart of their conception and production, and manage to avoid falling into the trap of unethical engagement with the animal. It is essential to emphasise that Churchill's and Smith's take on language is never meant to affirm the ability of words and narrative in capturing the animal as it is; on the contrary, they strive to destabilise language and dismantle the violence it has imposed on the animal¹⁰. The primacy of language in these three plays enables a move toward subverting the symbolic and metaphorical significances usually assigned to animals, and generates a paradigm shift in the anthropocentric and logocentric approach to animal representation on stage. The comic effect emerging from narrative representation, accordingly, has nothing to do with subjecting animals to semiotic derogation, as is

7 Stef Smith's *Human Animals* is an exception, for it still employs live insects on stage. Yet, many of the spectators are not aware of the existence of these animals until they are told, which means that despite their presence, the animals remain relatively invisible.

8 A. Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis/London: Minnesota UP, 2000), 163.

9 Terms such as "spectral", "spectrality", and "spectralisation" used in this article mainly refer to Derrida's reformulation of the concept of ghosts and haunting in *Spectres de Marx*.

10 According to Derrida, the domination of animals is encoded in the structure of language ("The Animal"). This implies that the emancipation of animals can be made possible through the deconstruction of language itself.

often the case with traditional animal comedy¹¹. Likewise, the spectralisation of animals, far from depriving them of agency, in reality, unsettles the normative, hierarchical power relation between human and nonhuman animals. If there is an animal to be laughed at in these three plays, it is the human characters whose behaviour is ludicrously absurd, not because it resembles animals', but because it is motivated by the fallacious perception that they are superior to and different from other animals. Spectrality of the animal, when leaving its mark on the human body, also appears to be an effective strategy in order to initiate a profound reflection on animal-human relation that exceeds man's usual way of thinking based on self-interest.

Comic Relief in the Process of Unmaking Animal Metaphors and Symbols

6. No English-speaking playwright has embraced and experimented with fragmentation as thoroughly and systematically as Caryl Churchill. Throughout her career, Churchill's constant reinvention of theatrical form to articulate political and ethical issues has often been accompanied by the art of fragmentation and the principle of juxtaposition. From structural disruption to syntactic incompleteness, many of her plays experiment with extreme deconstruction of language that challenges the conventions of narrative, grammar and logic. Churchill's artistic enterprise can be considered as an example of Roland Barthes' plural, ideal text – "a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds"¹². In both *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*, we encounter her masterful manipulation of language in the discussion of animals, not in an attempt to recreate some sort of alternate verbal depiction in place of visual representation, but rather to destabilise the system of the symbolic, metaphorical and allegorical meanings conventionally assigned to different animal species.

7. In the third and final act of *Far Away*, the world has descended into complete chaos and everyone, everything is at war against each other – a total war that involves not only human beings but also animals and natural phenomena. The two characters Harper and Todd are seen discussing about who their allies and enemies are supposed to be. When it comes to the deer, Harper initially

11 By "traditional animal comedy", I refer to the type of comedy in which animal characters are heavily anthropomorphised and the narrative they help generate has nothing to do with the animals themselves. Animals in traditional comedy are mere symbols or metaphors for humans and human's relations. In the field of theatre, Ionesco's *The Rhinoceros* (1959) can be said to be a representative illustration. In terms of fiction, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) is another good example of the tendency to exploit animals in the bestiary tradition, in which each animal is assigned certain vice or virtue. In short, the link between real animals and animal characters in these works is completely severed.

12 R. Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (NY: Blackwell, 1974), 5.

expresses a rather negative opinion:

HARPER Because they [the deer] burst out of parks and storm down from mountains and terrorise shopping malls. If the does run away when you shoot they run into somebody else and trample them with their vicious little shining hooves, the fawns get under the feet of shoppers and send them crashing down escalators, the young bucks charge the plate glass windows –¹³

8. Yet, a moment later, as soon as she has made sure that Todd agreed with her that they had all the reasons to hate deer, Harper contradicts herself by claiming that “their natural goodness has come through. You can see it in their soft brown eyes”¹⁴. This sudden reverse of opinion derives from the fact that the deer changed side three weeks before their conversation, and they are now with “us”. Faced with Harper’s accusation that he hates the deer and admires the crocodiles (which are always evil), Todd confesses, “I’ve lost touch because I’m tired”¹⁵. The instability in the characters’ perception of the deer highlights the fact that the symbolic meanings we attribute to different animals are but fabricated tools used to serve our own interests, that there is no such thing as “natural goodness” or natural evil in terms of animal character.
9. Human’s misconception of animal’s nature is not a modern phenomenon in any sense. It is perhaps impossible to determine the exact point in human history when animals were first employed as symbols or metaphors; however, it has been generally agreed that the source of most Western animal-based allegory, symbolism, and imagery can be found in the bestiary. A literary genre in the European Middle Ages, bestiary consists of a collection of stories depicting certain qualities of an animal, plant, or even stone. These stories are ultimately derived from the Greek *Physiologus*, a text compiled before the middle of the 2nd century AD that is closely linked to the Bible. As a result, the “facts” of natural science in the bestiary tradition often attribute certain virtue or vice to a specific animal, which are then appropriated for moral and religious instruction¹⁶. The bestiary tradition was so popular and influential that we can still feel its vivid impact in the contemporary world, where the mere mentioning of an animal simultaneously conjures up its associated symbolic meaning.
10. In *Escaped Alone*, four women in their seventies are sitting in an English garden exchanging pleasantries when one of them mentions the eagle and steers the conversation to a comical direction due to their mismatched views on the animal.

13 C. Churchill, *Far Away* (NY: Theatre Communications Group, 2000), 39-40.

14 *Ibid.*, 41

15 *Ibid.*, 42.

16 See “Bestiary”, *Britannica Academic, Encyclopædia Britannica*.

LENA	Eagles you get eagles as national
VI	eagles are fascist
LENA	America has the eagle
VI	well
MRS J	I wouldn't mind being an eagle
SALLY	very often fascist
LENA	shame for the eagle really, it little knows
VI	an eagle wouldn't have much empathy ¹⁷

As the US national emblem, the bald eagle stands for long-life, strength, majestic appearance, as well as uniqueness – all qualities that the US prides itself with as a democratic, world-leading nation. Yet, one is also reminded that eagles used to feature prominently in fascist symbolism. It is a “shame for the eagle,” indeed, for the animal does not have any say in choosing what it represents. Human beings do not only give themselves the right to name animals but also to essentialise them and to appropriate these sometimes contradictory interpretations as they see convenient. The subjugation of the animal at the symbolic and linguistic level through essentialisation is brought into relief. Here, laughter may emerge from recognising the inherently absurd aspect of human language in its attempt to anthropomorphise animals as well as the elusiveness, the radical alterity of the animal that is never to be captured by language.

11. Thinking in terms of species does not only separate human from nonhuman animals but also reinforces a hierarchical structure among the latter, which is, once again, determined by man. Not all animals are perceived the same way and as a result, their suffering generates strikingly different emotional reactions and ethical responses from those who witness. A rather simplistic example: most people would not be moved by a cockroach or a pigeon losing one of its legs but would find themselves in distress seeing a crippled dog or cat. Such discrepancy in our attitude explains why in *Human Animals*, it is the pigeon, the fox, and the rat that are exterminated first when London starts to be infested with wild animals. This is followed by domestic animals. Those perceived as favourite public figures such as the dolphin in the aquarium are the last to be killed. One character aptly remarks, “Funny that it’s a pity when a dolphin is to be killed but not when it’s a fox”¹⁸. It

17 C. Churchill, *Escaped Alone* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2016), 26-27.

18 S. Smith, *Human Animals* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2016), 83.

becomes clear that animals who contribute to the well-being of humans, be it as food, tools of production or spiritual support, are placed in higher priority compared to those perceived as harmful, useless, or simply too inferior to even be taken into account. It is not a coincidence that those belonging to the latter group are often used as allegorical stand-ins for vices.

12. In *Human Animals*, Stef Smith voices her challenge against these anthropocentric assumptions through the character Jamie. From the beginning of the crisis, Jamie holds a nonconformist stance, which his partner Lisa finds incomprehensible and nonsensical. Jamie's intention to bury a dead fox in their garden is met with strong opposition from Lisa:

JAMIE I'm trying to be respectful.

LISA I'm not sure foxes give a shit about respect and it's not the fox's garden.

JAMIE Well maybe it is.

LISA What?

JAMIE Maybe, just maybe a fox and his kids lived there, hundreds of years ago and then we came along and fucked it up for him. I mean I would say he has a right to be buried there, on his great-grandfather's father's land, on his ancestors' land.

LISA Is this really what you're saying?

JAMIE What I'm saying is that fox – out there – has a right to be buried wherever he wants.¹⁹

Here, Jamie's argument for the fox's right to be buried wherever he wants because the land might have belonged to his ancestors presents an intrinsically ambiguous attitude in advocating for animal rights on the basis of human rights. On the one hand, interment is essentially a ritual that only human beings perform or care about. Jamie thinks that he is showing respect to the dead fox by burying it while in fact, he is unconsciously subjecting the fox to our human's systems of morality, ethics, and value judgement. The first part of Lisa's rebuke – "I'm not sure foxes give a shit about respect" – is, therefore, a valid remark and a powerful reminder of Jamie's misconception. On the other hand, we tend to concur with Jamie's argument for animal share in the planet ownership claim that humans often make²⁰. Towards the end of the play, driven by an unshakable conviction that "it's

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

²⁰ The belief that man is the master of the world as well as all living beings that move on the earth can be traced back to the Bible: "Elohim said: 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness! Let them have authority over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens, over the cattle, over all the wild beasts and reptiles that crawl upon the earth!'

their world too”²¹, Jamie risks his life to conceal and protect a small number of animals, including foxes, pigeons, hedgehogs, shrews, sparrows and magpies. Under normal circumstances, such an act of self-sacrifice may be deemed foolish and derisible, especially when the animals for whom one’s life is put on the line are wild animals usually seen as carriers of diseases and virus, and their existence, if not perceived as a threat to human health, then at the very least, is frowned upon as an unpleasant thing people have to put up with. Nevertheless, the situation Jamie and other characters in *Human Animals* find themselves in is anything but normal and this requires having a different relationship not only to animals but also among human beings. In such situation, it is sticking to the daily routines that appears ridiculous, just as when Lisa is all worked up because she ran out of apple sauce for her peanut-butter cookies:

LISA It’s the end of the month which means it’s Sweet-Tooth Friday at work and it’s my turn. It’s my turn and so I’m baking.

JAMIE This isn’t exactly the time for cupcakes /

[...]

JAMIE I think people at work will understand if /

LISA But it’s my turn. [...] In a couple of weeks’ time, it will be like this whole thing never fucking happened and all I want to do is bake fucking peanut-butter cookies.²²

Lisa’s attitude exemplifies the common attitude held by many when faced with extreme threats exceeding a human’s capability to comprehend. Nevertheless, her self-denial, deflection, and insistence to stick with conventional normalcy (“It’s my turn”) does not last long, for reality finally catches up with her personally. Soon enough, her house is destroyed, her partner is beaten after her boss betrayed them and turned in Jamie’s secret. In staging a discussion about speciesism, Stef Smith helps dismantling the hierarchical structure imposed on different animals and compels us to reconsider our system of value judgment regarding which species are worth saving and which are not. Furthermore, she also highlights the inherent problem in the anti-species position that strives to eradicate all differences between human and non-human animals while unconsciously subjecting animals to human’s standards and ways of thinking.

Elohim therefore created man in his image, in the image of Elohim he created him. Male and female he created them. Elohim blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, have authority over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens, over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” [Gen. 1:26-28; trans. Dhormes]. See J. Derrida, “The Animal”.

21 S. Smith, 78.

22 *Ibid.*, 61.

13. Compared to *Human Animals*, the world presented in *Far Away* is an even more extreme image of crisis, in which the demarcation between normality and abnormality has been erased completely.

TODD But we are not exactly on the other side from the French. It's not as if they're [the cats are] the Moroccans and the ants.

HARPER It's not as if they're the Canadians, the Venezuelans and the mosquitoes.

TODD It's not as if they're the engineers, the chefs, the children under five, the musicians.

HARPER The car salesmen.

TODD Portuguese car salesmen.

HARPER Russian swimmers.

TODD Thai butchers.

HARPER Latvian dentists.²³

The comic effect here can be analysed from the perspective of the incongruity theory. The randomness of the list, the impossibility to rationalise or to establish at any logical basis for association, defy the audience's expectation. Similarly, when Todd says he has done boring jobs, the audience would not imagine that one of them is working in abattoirs stunning pigs and musicians, or that the more exciting jobs he has experienced include shooting cattle and children in Ethiopia, gassing mixed troops of Spanish, computer programmers and dogs, and tearing starlings apart with his bare hands²⁴.

14. In this frightening yet highly comic depiction of a world engulfed in total war, it is important to note that what ceases to exist or to be relevant is not only the distinction between normality and abnormality, between moral and immoral behaviour, but also that between human and nonhuman animals. There is striking similarity between Churchill's manipulation of language and that found in a Borges' passage, quoted by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*. Borges, in turn, quotes a certain Chinese encyclopaedia in which animals are divided into:

(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g)

23 C. Churchill, *Far Away*, 36-37.

24 *Ibid.*, 40-41.

stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.²⁵

This short passage arose a “laughter that shattered,” which has resulted in

all the familiar landmarks of [Foucault’s] thought – our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other.²⁶

Like Borges’ strange world captured in an encyclopaedia entry, Churchill’s depiction of the chaotic, apocalyptic world in the last act of *Far Away* engenders a heterotopia in which speech is desiccated, words are stopped in their tracks, and the possibility of grammar is contested at its source²⁷. Such a heterotopia leads to a kind of thought without space that opens up to unexpected and unlimited alternatives. It is a kind of thought that is essential if we are to better understand the interconnections between human beings and his world – including non-human beings and the earth itself. By grouping pigs and musicians, or dogs and computer programmers in the same categories, Caryl Churchill dismantles the hierarchical structure that is the basis of speciesism and classic humanism, while presenting us with vitalist posthumanism in which human and non-human animals exist in a spectrum. By presenting signifiers as signifieds, by resisting to put any closure to interpretation, the author achieves the goal of liberating animals from the symbolic burden of language and as such, makes it possible for them to occupy an equal status to man.

Spectrality and the Comic Animal

15. Churchill’s and Smith’s decision not to show and showing that they are not willing to show, in other words, their emphasis on language and narrative instead of visual representation, has rendered the animal a spectral quality that is capable of inducing fear and anxiety among those who are haunted by it – human animals. In all three plays, *Escaped Alone*, *Far Away* and *Human Animals*, the notion of the animal as spectre is suggestive of Derrida’s hauntology. Defining the spectre, Derrida writes:

25 Quoted in M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London, New York: Routledge, [1966] 2005), xvi.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*, xix.

C'est quelque chose qu'on ne sait pas, justement, et on ne sait pas si précisément cela est, si ça existe, si ça répond à un nom et correspond à une essence. On ne le sait pas : non par ignorance, mais parce que ce non-objet, ce présent non-présent, cet être-là d'un absent ou d'un disparu ne relève pas du savoir. Du moins plus de ce qu'on croit savoir sous le nom de savoir. On ne sait pas si c'est vivant ou si c'est mort.²⁸

The spectre, neither dead nor alive, neither present nor absent, defies knowledge and threatens the very foundation of human's notion of scientific progress, which largely relies on an epistemic approach. Fredric Jameson further elaborates on this point as he explains that a belief in spectre has nothing to do with believing in the existence of ghost, either literally or metaphorically. He writes:

Spectrality does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist or that the past (and maybe even the future they offer to prophesy) is still very much alive and at work, within the living present: all it says, if it can be thought to speak, is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us.²⁹

The power of a spectral figure, thus, lies in its ability to expose the truth of lack and limitation of the living present, the porous fabric of the world we live in and with it, all known power relations, including that between human and non-human animals. As a result of this exposure, man is made acutely aware of his unstable status as master of all living beings. The ubiquity of animals in the three plays examined, despite their invisibility (or, precisely because of their invisibility), can be said to be the cause of panic, fear, and anxiety for many characters, as they found themselves back in the trauma of predation – one of the original traumas of human beings as preys whereas animals once again assume the role of predators. Such atavistic fear and instinct are something the modern man tends to forget, especially when he is born and raised in a society that incessantly disseminates the self-assuring message of man as *the* conqueror of nature. Faced with an open challenge to his status, it is only expected that man would do whatever it takes to re-establish his dominance, no matter how extreme or irrational the act might be. In *Escaped Alone*, one of the four characters – Sally – suffers from severe cat phobia.

SALLY [...] I have to make sure I never think about a cat because if I do I have to make sure there's no cats and they could be anywhere they could get in a window I have to go round the house and make sure all the windows are locked and I don't know if I checked properly I can't remember I was too frightened to notice I have to go round the windows again back to the kitchen back to the bedroom

28 J. Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), 25-26.

29 F. Jameson, "Marx's Purloined Letter" in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's "Spectres de Marx"*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London-New York: Verso, 1999), 39.

back to the kitchen back to the bedroom the bathroom back to the kitchen back to the door [...] ³⁰

The lack of punctuation and the repetitive structure in Sally's explanation correspond to the nature of phobia and anxiety – an endless, relentless process of compulsive behaviour that reinforces its own vicious cycle in order to entrap its victim. It is simply a matter of time before the victim abandons all rational thinking and gives in to fear completely.

[...] once they're in they could be anywhere they could be under the bed in the wardrobe up on the top shelf with the winter sweaters [...] a cat could be in the biscuit tin, a cat could be in the fridge in the freezer in the salad drawer in the box of cheese in the broom cupboard the mop bucket a cat could be in the oven the top oven under the lid of the casserole in a box of matches behind a picture under a rug [...] a cat could be under my hand when I put out my hand ³¹

Here, the spectral characteristic of the cat allows he/she/it to exist in the most improbable places such as in the freezer, in a box of matches, or under one's hand, and this in turn, compels us to reconsider the hierarchy of power in human-animal relation. The forever elusive but omnipresent cat conjured up by language, by a mere mentioning or a passing thought, haunts Sally and inflicts on her the most primal fear – a sort of violence that is intangible and therefore inescapable.

16. In the like manner, *Human Animals* and *Far Away* address the theme of entrapment of man caused by animals and its consequences. In *Far Away*, the crisis of trust creates a scenario in which humans are trapped in the watchful, omnipresent gaze of animals and of nature. When Joan risks everything to arrive at Harper's place, Harper anxiously questions Joan, "Did anyone see you leave? which way did you come? were you followed? There are ospreys here who will have seen you arrive"³². To these, the latter simply replies, "Of course the birds saw me"³³. On her way, Joan was forced to cross a river in order to avoid running into the Chilean soldiers upstream and the fourteen black and white cows downstream having a drink. In short, it is the animal that defines man's behaviour, which implies that man occupies a passive, reactionary position at the same time that he is made aware of his illusion of mastery over nature. The unnoticed gaze of animals returns once again on the stage of *Human Animals*, where several insects such as cricket, maggot, locust, mealworm and cockroach are kept in hamster cages that are miniature replicas of the set itself. Because of the size of these animals, most of the spectators are unaware of their existence unless they are told, and this unawareness creates a shift in power – if power is to be associated with the

30 C. Churchill, *Escaped Alone*, 25.

31 *Ibid.*, 26.

32 C. Churchill, *Far Away*, 42.

33 *Ibid.*, 43.

possession of visibility: it is the human spectators who are being looked at, observed by the insects, not the other way round.

17. Furthermore, in these two plays, animals, including those usually thought of as being fully domesticated and tamed such as cats, are generally perceived as a threat for man's self-imposed power because of their utter unpredictability.

HARPER The cats have come in on the side of the French.

TODD I never liked cats, they smell, they scratch, they only like you because you feed them, they bite, I used to have a cat that would suddenly take some bit of you in its mouth.³⁴

18. Todd's opinion on cats can be said to be an attempt to see animals as they are, to establish an animal relationship with them and to unsettle the ideal, familial image of cats that has been widely circulated around social media in our contemporary society. Moving one step further, Jamie in *Human Animals* seems to have figured out that the only solution for a better understanding of animals lies in acknowledging the fact that their behaviour does not conform to human's norms and expectation.

LISA How do you know it's not infected?

JAMIE Infected with what?

LISA They're worried people can get it.

JAMIE Get what!

LISA Whatever it is that's making the birds and the foxes and the rats crazy.

JAMIE Oh, heaven forbid the animals are acting like animals. I'm more scared of humans than foxes. That's the truth.³⁵

What Lisa views as crazy behaviour from the birds, the foxes and the rats is in reality, natural reaction to dramatic changes in their living environment. Ironically, the only animal that behaves insanely in this situation is no other than man himself. Without any scientific basis for the nature of the infection, or if there is any infection to begin with, his immediate solution is to impose quarantine and to exterminate all living beings that are not humans. Such hasty response shows strong influence from speciesism ideology, which not only separates human from nonhuman

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁵ S. Smith, 32.

animals but also considers man's life to be more valuable. The entrapment occurring here is both physical and spiritual, as many of the characters refuse to break free from the constraint of speciesism to engage in a more fruitful, meaningful manner with animals.

19. In bringing into relief the comic animal within man, *Far Away*, *Escaped Alone*, and *Human Animals* attest to Derrida's argument that discussion on the boundary between the human and the animal only becomes interesting once, "instead of asking whether or not there is a discontinuous limit, one attempts to think what a limit becomes once it is abyssal, once the frontier no longer forms a single indivisible line but more than one internally divided line, once, as a result, it can no longer be traced, objectified, or counted as single and indivisible"³⁶. It is noteworthy that in all three plays, there is little attempt on anthropomorphism or zoomorphism, as both approaches have been known for their own problematic implications. Anthropomorphism, while extending to animals the principle of moral and legal equality, simultaneously confirms the unbridgeable gap between humans and animals, and denies the specificity of the latter altogether. On the other hand, zoomorphism appears to be more empowering for animals, as it is the animal that defines the human. However, one cannot overlook the fact that the animal is still subject to the rhetoric of symbol and metaphor in the first place, either intentionally through the writer's and/or director's decision, or unintentionally as a result of the audience's interpretation. Churchill's and Smith's decision to avoid both approaches, consequently, brings prominence to the positive aspect of undecidability when it comes to distinguishing the animal from the human and presents a zone of proximity in which "becoming animal" is possible.

Becoming Animal – Encounter through Suffering

20. Becoming animal, according to Deleuze and Guattari, "does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal"³⁷. To become, as Deleuze argues,

is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferenciation where one can no longer be distinguished from a woman, an animal, or a molecule – neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and non-preexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form.³⁸

36 J. Derrida, "The Animal", 399.

37 G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1987), 238.

38 G. Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (London/NY: Verso, 1997), 1.

21. If Deleuze's "becoming animal" can be interpreted as promoting a sort of impersonal relation with animals, then Donna Haraway "becoming with animals" presents a clear counter point in calling for personalisation in the encounter with animals in order to generate emotional exchanges³⁹. Despite their differences, both Deleuze's and Haraway's concepts converge in their belief in the possibility of inter-species assemblage and encounter through the common denominator of suffering – in other words, through shared embodiedness.

22. This takes us back to the beginning of the article, in which animal embodiment has been called into question as it presents us with a dilemma in ethical response. It now becomes clear that embodiment made possible by the physical presence of human actors accompanied by a spectral presence of the animal that leaves its mark on the human body may be the best answer in the struggle to arrive at the optimal mode of representing human-animal interaction. In *Stigmata*, Hélène Cixous recounts the story in which she was bitten by her dog, Fips. Cixous describes these indelible scars as *felix culpa*, or "blessed wound," which resides in her mind like a stigma and renders Fips "the most living of the departed"⁴⁰. These scars, which return in the text as a spectral presence, leads to a transformation in Cixous' thinking about their shared fate and suffering. Her early self-interest is replaced by a profound reflection on animal-human relation: Fips suffers from violence because he is like her, identified as a member of a Jewish family; at the same time, he suffers because he is different from her, identified as a non-human being.

23. The same revelation occurs in *Human Animals* when Jamie is bitten by a fox that he is trying to protect from the authority.

LISA Does it hurt? When they eat you?

JAMIE No more or less than anything else.

If you roll up your sleeves they can get a better bite.⁴¹

The wound on Jamie's hand is a constant reminder of the shared vulnerability of humans and animals in the face of violence. It also represents a site of indifferenciation where the animal and the human converge in their suffering. The spectral animals, free from any linguistic burden, gain more agency than ever not only through their power to evoke the comic animal aspect within man, but also through the mark they leave on the human body that facilitates the process of "becoming

39 See D. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2007).

40 H. Cixous, *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 184.

41 S. Smith, 101.

animal” in man.

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