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## Animal Studies in Contemporary British Drama: Stef Smith's Non-Human and *Human Animals*

*Çağdaş İngiliz Tiyatrosunda Hayvan Çalışmaları: Stef Smith'in İnsan Olmayan ve İnsan Hayvanları*

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### Abstract

Scottish playwright Stef Smith's *Human Animals* (2016) recounts the fictional story of a government exterminating all animals in London with the pragmatic pursuit of building commercial construction sites on their natural habitats. In line with recent trends of thought, dramatic texts are getting more engaged with different natures of the relationship between human animals and non-human animals. In this context, animal studies posit a focal place in the analysis of Smith's contemporary play, *Human Animals*. Animal studies take into account the interconnections between humans and animals, thereby making it possible to problematise the concepts of anthropocentrism and speciesism in

### Öz

İskoç oyun yazarı Stef Smith'in *Human Animals* (*İnsan Hayvanlar*) (2016) adlı oyunu, Londra'daki tüm hayvanları doğal ortamlarında ticari şantiyeler inşa etmek gibi pragmatik bir arayışla yok eden bir hükümetin kurgusal hikayesini anlatır. Son zamanlardaki düşünce eğilimleriyle uyumlu olarak, dramatik metinler, insan ve insan olmayan hayvanlar arasındaki ilişkinin farklı doğalarıyla daha fazla ilgilenmektedir. Bu doğrultuda, hayvan çalışmaları, Smith'in oyununun analizinde odak noktasını oluşturur. Hayvan çalışmaları, insanlarla hayvanlar arasındaki ve farklı statüdeki hayvanlar arasındaki bağlantıları dikkate alarak, edebiyat eserlerinde insanmerkezcilik ve türçülük kavramlarını

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works of literature. This study aims to analyse Stef Smith's *Human Animals* as an example by using critical animal studies perspectives with an emphasis on the essentialist human-animal divide. In a more specific context, the article reveals the impact of anthropocentrism through a case study that exemplifies humanity's vicious plans to eradicate all non-human beings for the sake of profit and personal interest. Stef Smith presents different characters which embody disparate viewpoints and exposes the anthropocentric nature of humanity. Smith's portrayal of a dystopian setting not only aims at criticising anthropocentric line of thought but also exposes humanity's tendencies towards speciesism.

**Keywords:** Animal Studies, Stef Smith, *Human Animals*, Anthropocentrism, Speciesism

sorunsallaştırmayı mümkün kılar. Bu çalışma, örnek bir eser olarak Stef Smith'in *Human Animals* oyununu geleneksel insan-hayvan ayırımına vurgu yaparak, kritik hayvan çalışmaları perspektiflerini kullanarak analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Makale, bu bağlamda, insan-merkezciliğin etkisini, insanlığın kâr ve kişisel çıkar uğruna tüm insan olmayan varlıkları ortadan kaldırmaya yönelik kötü planlarını örnekleyen bir olay aracılığıyla ortaya koymaktadır. Stef Smith, farklı bakış açılarına sahip karakterler aracılığıyla insanlığın insan merkezci doğasını dışa vurmaktadır. Smith'in bu distopik kurgusu sadece insan merkezci düşünce şeklini eleştirmekle kalmayıp, insanlığın tür ayrımcılığına yönelik eğilimlerini de yansıtmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Hayvan Araştırmaları, Stef Smith, *Human Animals*, İnsan Merkezcilik, Türçülük

## Introduction

Animals have come a long way in terms of their relationship with humans throughout history. They have been used, sold and bought, adopted and abused countless times. This fluctuating relationship has manifested itself in a wide variety of areas and disciplines from science and history to literature and popular culture. Recent developments in animal rights have led to the flourishing of animal studies in literature and humanities in general. In this respect, the field of animal studies has evolved into several branches, fractionating into animal studies, human-animal studies and critical animal studies. The theoretical framework presents a general overview of animal studies, followed by human-animal studies and finally the activist sub-branch of critical animal studies. To this end, this article focuses on Scottish contemporary playwright Stef Smith and her activist play *Human Animals*.

This article interprets Stef Smith's *Human Animals* (2016) from the perspective of animal studies and argues that *Human Animals* manifests the supremacy of humans over non-human beings while demonstrating, in a critical manner, that humans are capable of slaughtering animals out of pure selfish, pragmatic interests. Thus, the play's ultimate purpose is to emphasise the equality of non-human animals over human human beings, or "human animals" as stated in the title of the play.

## Animal Studies: An Overview

Humans have had a long-lasting and rough relationship with animals. This relationship has often been reflected in the humanities and specifically, in literature. As a human construct, literature has incorporated the existence of animals, but their occurrence has often been minimal though continuous at the same time (Ortiz-Robles, 2016, p. 1). In ancient stories, animals were represented with substantial roles, but this cannot be claimed for the latest works of literature (2016, p. 1). In fact, from this point of view, “literature can be said to be about how humans describe themselves as *not* animals” (Ortiz-Robles, 2016, p. 1). On the other hand, this self-definition brings about the questioning of “what it would be like for a human to be an animal, or for an animal to be human” and therefore literature helps to “blur” the line between humans and animals, often in a metaphorical context (2016, p. 1). In this case, the purpose of literature is to separate humans from animals while simultaneously blending them to cause uncertainty and perplexity (2016, p. 2). Hence, “the presence of animals in literature, marginal yet constant, suggests that literature is that discourse whereby humans simultaneously declare their difference from animals, and take the measure of their suggestive similarities” (Ortiz-Robles, 2016, p. 2). To this end, the categorical divide between humans and non-humans is “a product of the human imagination” (Waldau, 2013, p. xii). Thus, humans have defined themselves in opposition to animals and have always differentiated themselves from them.

Animal studies, in the broadest way, is described as the interaction between humans, human culture and non-human animals (Waldau, 2013, p. 1). In other words, “animal studies involve the human study of living beings who are sometimes only partially like us in awarenesses, intelligences, perceptions, personalities, societies, allegiances, emotions, and so much else” (Waldau, 2013, p. 2) and focus on how animals are composed and arranged in human worlds that are established through the relationships between humans and animals (Marvin and McHugh, 2014, p. 1). Animals share a vital place for human societies which are constructed “upon animal lives and deaths, conceptually as well as physically” (2014, p. 1). On many occasions, humans have defined themselves through creating a binary opposition with animals and thereby labelling themselves as non-animals. Thus, we are humans because “we have become human alongside other animals” (2014, p. 1). They have been owned, used, worshipped in ancient times but today, animals share a wide variety of functions from their use in museums to sports facilities, in zoos and their companionship to humans as pets (2014, p. 2). Animals have always been studied in medical sciences; biology, ecology, zoology, and medicine but the scrutiny of animals in connection with human beings is an innovation brought forward by animal studies (2014, p. 2).

Animal studies are generally classified into human-animal studies and critical animal studies. Human-animal studies propose: “[A] rich variety of perspectives that help us make sense of the intricate natural-cultural relations between human beings and the multispecies world(s) around them” (Ohrem and Bartosch, 2017, p. v). Human-animal studies is an interdisciplinary discipline that investigates the places that animals inhabit in human social and cultural environments, as well as the connections that people have with them. The study of how animal life interfaces with human society is central to this area (DeMello, 2012, p. 4). Hence, rather than animals alone, this field concentrates

on the interactions between humans and animals. Marvin and McHugh identify three concepts within human-animal studies explaining the nature of the relationship between the two groups: wild, domesticated and feral. Wild refers to humans in the sphere of the uncontrolled animals; domesticated pertains to animals inside the human-controlled sphere, and feral is related to the areas between these two, simultaneously displaying the intersections between such separations (Marvin and McHugh, 2014, p. 3). Thus, “this tripartite structure configures the varied landscapes within which humans and animals encounter one another. All three are terms that define the nature of those relationships and how those relations are sensed, embodied, experienced, and communicated” (2014, p. 3). More specifically, concerning the three spheres, the scholars assert that:

The domestic suggests a process and condition of human control, of shaping, of bringing animals towards humans, or allowing them to draw near, and into a close coexistence. Ideas and practices of domestication can only be understood in terms of ideas about the wild. Feral refers to animals that are interstitial, conceived as in-between the wild and the domestic, animals that have escaped from domestication and recaptured some of the qualities of the wild. (Marvin and McHugh, 2014, pp. 6-7)

As a consequence, the wild, domestic and feral stand and function in relation to one another, rather than as individual notions (2014, p. 7). Hence, these three spheres are interrelated to one another, just as they are interconnected with the human domain. Nonetheless, despite being factually correct, the coining of the above-mentioned terms is anthropocentric as they are all defined, constructed and categorised by human beings. Without the human control and oppression of animals, there would naturally be no need to create such terms. There are several reasons for the recent growth of animal studies as a discipline which are:

[T]he widespread recognition of (1) the commodification of animals in a wide variety of human contexts (2) the degradation of the natural world, a staggering loss of animal habitat, and species extinction, and (3) our increasing need to coexist with other animals in urban, rural, and natural contexts. (Kalof, 2017, p. 1)

These are the major motives that led to a rising interest in the field of human-animal studies. Moreover, in order to comprehend animal studies, it is vital to acknowledge and look into the development of animal rights and animal ethics. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, animals were regarded as “things” that were practically no different than objects and in general humans reserved themselves the right to use and abuse animals in any way they wanted, without bearing the least responsibility (Kalof, 2017, p. 27). The moral duties that humans fostered were generally towards the owners of the animals, rather than the animal itself (2017, p. 27). René Descartes even put forward that animals were not sentient, in other words, that they are similar to inanimate objects. Other thinkers like John Locke, John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham argued that animals existed for the sole pleasure and use of humans and were inferior beings that were not sufficiently developed (2017, p. 27). In short, animals were regarded as underdeveloped beings that were lower than humans.

The domestication of animals forms an important point as it provided a valid argument for animal rights (Beauchamp and Frey, 2011, p. 73). As more and more animals were domesticated, they constructed a community with humans, which eventually led to their acceptance into the household as members of society (2011, p. 73). Their domestic status enabled them to carry out specific tasks for the household that would grant them certain rights against their masters (2011, p. 73). Despite being pragmatic and utilitarian, this development did grant animals with some rights. However, the domestication of animals did not support any type of moral justification in favour of animals (2011, p. 74). This moral justification mainly relies on the notion that animals have aspirations and a sense of well-being similar to humans (2011, p. 74). Scottish-Irish philosopher Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) defended animal rights and pleaded for the prevention of pain:

Brutes may very justly be said to have a right that no useless pain or misery should be inflicted on them. Men have intimations of this right, and of their own corresponding obligation, by their sense of pity. 'Tis plainly inhuman and immoral to create to brutes any useless torment, or to deprive them of any such natural enjoyments as do not interfere with the interests of men. 'Tis true brutes have no notion of right or of moral qualities: but infants are in the same case, and yet they have their rights, which the adults are obliged to maintain. (Adamson and Edwards, 2018, p. 230)

Hutcheson's formulation of animal rights was more direct and daring as he associated animal rights with infant rights and emphasised the priority of the rightness of any given action. For an action to be considered right, it needs to comply with "the general good." To this end, "a right to be free of useless torment will quickly follow, since animals have a capacity to suffer and some actions that cause animal suffering are not necessary for the general good" (Adamson and Edwards, 2018, p. 230). Hutcheson's second vindication concerning animal rights was based on the notion that humans bear certain duties towards animals, but these duties were linked to maintaining the general good rather than the well-being of the animal itself (2018, p. 231). Thus, the duty remains unclear as it is associated with the general interest. On the other hand, Immanuel Kant stresses that a human with dignity and respect ought to be involved in the whereabouts of animals by directly approaching and regarding them with love and compassion (2018, p. 231). Kant insists that humans need to treat one another and animals with respect but unlike Hutcheson, Kant did not overtly mention animal rights (2018, pp. 231-232). Hence, philosophers such as Hutcheson and Kant have provided unique contributions to animal rights and have attempted to establish a moral basis for the integration of animals into human society and for the recognition of their rights as sentient beings.

Lewis Gompertz wrote one of the most influential books on animal ethics, *Moral Inquiries on the Situation of Man and of Brutes* (1824) where he argues that animal feelings are morally equal to human feelings (2017, p. 30). As a staunch defender of animal rights, Gompertz positions himself against the slaughter of animals. Besides Gompertz, Henry Stephen Salt published *Animals' Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress* in 1892. Salt became the first person in England to openly mention animal rights in moral and judicial terms (2017, p. 30). Gandhi even stated that Salt had a profound influence on him (2017, p. 30). Both Gompertz and Salt were influential figures who struggled for animal rights

in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their struggle marked the beginning of a long and tedious process of strife for animal rights. To sum up, animal studies and human-animal studies have laid the necessary infrastructure by setting animals at the focal centre and constructing a basis for upcoming, innovative trends of animal studies. All in all, the literary scope and the non-activist nature of animal studies eventually led to the emergence of critical animal studies.

### **Devoted to Liberation: Critical Animal Studies**

The movement known as Critical Animal Studies (CAS) emerged as a result of the endeavour to achieve complete liberation of the field, maintaining an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach by promoting specifically designed courses and programs (Nocella, Sorenson, Socha, and Matsuoka, 2014a, p. xxii). In 2001, Anthony J. Nocella II and Steve Best founded the “Center on Animal Liberation Affairs” (CALA) which was later renamed as “The Institute for Critical Animal Studies” (ICAS) (2014a, p. xxii). This organisation’s purpose was to “obtain creditability for animal and activists” (2014a, p. xxiii). In addition, critical animal studies challenged its predecessors, animal studies, for their history of animal testing and vivisection and also human-animal studies for emphasising the anthropocentric animal-human binary opposition which led to the objectification of animals by researchers (2014a, p. xxiii). While the former statement is still being disputed in many areas, critical animal studies discuss that their predecessors do not openly battle and condemn the abuse of animals and do not refrain from collaborating with those who engage in doing scientific experiments on animals (2014a, p. xxiii). Thus, in general, compared to animal studies, critical animal studies is a movement that supports activism and works to achieve complete abolition of animal abuse, oppression and scientific animal testing. In other words, “CAS is not only opposed to the physical exploitation, torture, and murder of non-human animals by scientists, but it also is strongly opposed to the theoretical analytical dissection of non-human animals, which is not concerned with their oppression” (2014a, p. xiv). CAS publicly declares its ethical and practical commitment to putting an end to pain and injustice and promoting human, animal, and planet freedom via psychological, moral, and social change (Best, 2009, p. 12). Accordingly, CAS cherishes “animals without borders” which “carries figurative and literal meaning in the imagined and real lives of animals, in all the complexity and contradiction the term entails” (Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2018, p. 23). The ultimate purpose of this movement is to maintain solidarity and cooperation between animals and to eradicate the dualistic opposition of the human vs. animal opposition that only categorises and objectifies animals (2018, p. 24). Esfahlani defines CAS as an academic expression of the intersection of animal liberation, advocacy, and rights movements, as well as the humanities (2017, p. 44).

Critical animal studies challenges and contests “the conceptualization of human existence as something superior and opposed to animals and animality” (Nocella, Sorenson, Socha, and Matsuoka, 2014b, p. 3). For this reason, CAS deconstructs and exposes the notions that consolidate “human superiority” namely, anthropocentrism, humanism, speciesism, and carnism (2014b, p. 3). On the other hand, contemporary CAS has a strong connection with feminism, postcolonial theory, and, in particular, 1970s and 1980s ecofeminist literature (Taylor and Twine, 2014, pp. 5-6; Sorenson, 2014, p. xxi). “How the material and symbolic exploitation of animals connects with and helps preserve

dominant categories of gender, race, and class” is shown by ecofeminist effect on CAS (Taylor and Twine, 2014, p. 4). In addition, anthropocentrism is the thought which places humans at the centre of the universe. Along with the support of humanism, the freedom of humans is established upon the deprivation of the freedom of all non-human beings (Nocella, Sorenson, Socha, and Matsuoka, 2014b, p. 3). In other words, anthropocentrism represents much more than a mere concept:

Anthropocentrism is a belief system, an ideology of human supremacy that advocates privileging humans (and those who approximate humanity). Anthropocentrism, as an ideology, functions to maintain the centrality and priority of human existence through marginalizing and subordinating non-human perspectives, interests, and beings. Anthropocentrism requires that a society have a concept of humanity, assign privileged value to it, and measure all other beings by this standard. (Nocella, Sorenson, Socha, and Matsuoka, 2014b, p. 4)

Anthropocentrism dictates that everything ought to be measured through human perception and perspective. Additionally, it may take on different shapes such as human-animal dualism which overtly categorises humans above animals and non-human beings, creating hierarchical supremacy in favour of humans only (2014b, p. 5). Moreover, anthropocentrism also shares a reciprocal relationship with humanism, that is “a belief system that defines human beings as ontologically free through a universally shared essence such as reason, and considers humans as the source of knowledge and value” (2014b, p. 5). According to Jacques Derrida’s analysis, anthropocentrism signifies “an interlocking series of thoughts and practices that revolve around a sharp human/animal binary, a division that ultimately functions to reduce the multiplicity and radical alterity of animals to a single shared essence” (Turner, 2018, p. 283). Thus, anthropocentric thought provides the rationalisation and normalisation of the sharp division between animals and humans.

Besides anthropocentrism and humanism, critical animal studies also faces speciesism which is “the unjustified disadvantageous consideration or treatment of those who are not classified as belonging to one or more [privileged] species” (Nocella, Sorenson, Socha, and Matsuoka, 2014b, p. 10). Thus, anthropocentrism represents the ideological version of humanism as well as speciesism altogether (2014b, p. 10). In this respect, critical animal studies challenge all the facets of the human sphere that prioritises humans and labels non-humans as the others. Furthermore, speciesism is commonly associated with carnism whose most common and visible incidents are also the most banal: the abuse, objectification, and consumption of animals as food (2014b, pp. 20-21). Therefore, carnism is described as: “a sub-ideology of speciesism that dichotomizes non-human animals into ‘edible’ and ‘inedible’ categorizations and legitimates the exploitation and consumption of animal others” (2014b, p. 21). The biggest function of carnism is that it ensures the abuse of non-humans for specific human interests. As a result, carnism acts like an ideology that enables the internalisation of all non-human beings as “edible” and its structure of thought classifies some animals as “edible” while labelling others as “inedible” (2014b, p. 21). It acts as the justification and legalisation for the slaughter of millions of animals. Carnism constitutes a system of victimisation that yearly victimises 10 billion animals by slaughtering in the US. alone (2014b, p. 22). In addition, carnism has evolved into neocarnism which strives to refute the principles defended by veganism: “animal welfare-rights, the environment, and

human health” (2014b, p. 24). What makes neocarnists different from their predecessors is the fact that those who abuse animals display “moral concerns” towards non-humans (2014b, p. 24). As a solution to the carnist exploitation, “the vegan praxis must emphasize animal freedom but also highlight the necessity of complete freedom” (2014b, p. 25). In other words, animal abuse and torture has to be opposed at all cost.

Furthermore, animal experimentation forms another controversial issue in the field of critical animal studies. In this context, opposers of animal experimentation fall into two distinct categories: reformers and abolitionists (McCance, 2013, p. 55). The abolitionists are stark and unconditional adversaries of animal experimentation who resist animal testing whatever the cause or result may be. Reformers, on the other hand, assert that some animal experimentation (if not most) could be viable and acceptable (2013, pp. 55-56). Reformers also proclaim that alternative solutions, those without animals, could take the place of animal experiments (2013, p. 56). The only common ground between the abolitionists and reformers is their acknowledgement of “human exceptionalism” where humans “stand outside (either above or below) any necessary (or dependent) relation to other species” (Weil, 2012, p. 132). Disregarding all personal and political views, animal experimentation must be opposed and resisted at all costs. The first two articles of UNESCO’s “Universal Declaration of Animal Rights” (1978) declare that: “All animals have equal rights to exist within the context of biological equilibrium. This equality of rights does not overshadow the diversity of species and of individuals. All animal life has the right to be respected” (ESDAW, n.d.). However, despite this declaration, governments around the world fall short to combat crimes against animals.

In conclusion, non-human animals serve significant roles in human society and it needs to be acknowledged that we exist altogether on a planet that ultimately has limited resources (Gruen, 2011, p. 2). For non-human beings to find their equitable place amongst humans, it is essential to raise awareness about anthropocentrism and the need to deconstruct it to pave the way for an ecocentric worldview. All in all, the branch of animal studies has contributed new perspectives to the humanities in general and the literary canon in specific. Hence, animal studies “if it is to be something other than a mere thematics, fundamentally challenges the schema of the knowing subject and its anthropocentric underpinnings sustained and reproduced in the current disciplinary protocols of cultural studies” (Wolfe, 2009, pp. 568-569). Therefore, the necessity and functionality of these studies, whether animal, human-animal or critical animal studies is evident and imperative. Despite being primary stages, animal and human-animal studies continue to exist while simultaneously evolve into newer trends and movements such as critical animal studies. In short, as a dynamic movement within the humanities, animal studies will continue to develop as a flourishing field of scholarly research.

### **A Critical Analysis of Stef Smith's *Human Animals* (2016)**

The discussion of animal studies as represented in dramatic literature has become more widespread with the increasing employment of animals or animal characters in recent works of contemporary British drama. This has become possible with the increasing tendency to put dystopian



and/or (post)apocalyptic visions in plays in line with the playwrights' growing interest in ecological matters. As they have handled ecological concerns in their plays, they started to observe nature as a habitat not just for human beings but also for their non-human others. Stef Smith's *Human Animals* (2016), which premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London, is an example of these plays where both ecological concerns and a discussion of animal rights activism are observed. *Human Animals* is about the discrepancy between human animals and non-human animals and illustrates a society that finds it a lot easier to dispense the latter when the concerns of the humans are prioritised. Therefore, Smith's work is an apt example to analyse contemporary animal studies as it is reflected on the stage.

In *Human Animals*, animals are used both on stage in glass cages and in an offstage context that is reported to the reader/audience by the characters' words. Smith specifically chooses London as the setting of the play to enhance the relationality of the subject with the audience, and she notes that the setting might be changed if the play is to be staged elsewhere. Obviously, Smith's aim is to address the audiences of London and to immerse them in the main argument of the text. Through the use of the setting, the message of the play is enhanced as the audience becomes more familiar with it. This strategy gives the idea that Smith wants the audience to consider the events in the play as real and urgent as possible by making the setting close to the audience's ordinary habitats. In the intended setting of the play, the society has to face an animal-induced pandemic and to fight this, the state decides to get rid of all animals that surround the human-populated lands. In this process, six characters of the play are divided in their views regarding the eradication of animals "for the greater good" (Smith, 2016, p. 69). The state chooses to slaughter all animals, blaming them for the epidemic, and this mass massacre is displayed in the play through periodic gunshots and pigeon blood strewn across the glass stage. While some of the characters support the idea of killing animals, some of them are ready to sacrifice themselves for the salvation of animals as they are aware that the pandemic is a fictional plot created by the state to get rid of animals and use their natural habitat for the creation of more profitable enterprises.

Besides offering a critical view about the human/animal divide, Smith's play is primarily about speciesism, which she denounces as a very crucial problem in animal studies. Marvin and McHugh's observation concerning the three types of human-animal relationships; wild, domesticated, and feral is useful in this discussion. The play presents wild animals as in the case of the fugitive lioness roaming on the streets of London and spreading fear; domesticated animals as in the case of Nancy's lost cat; and feral animals like the pigeons and foxes that the play mostly deals with. The play's characters' approach to each type of animal differs as it is seen that they are afraid when they hear about the lion, they are sad when the cat disappears, and most of them are ready to get rid of pigeons and foxes, which they assume "no one likes [...] anyway" (Smith, 2016, p. 53). According to the dominant discourse about speciesism, human's treatment of various types of animals differs a lot. They refer to a conflicting understanding of human beings' appreciation of wild animals in comparison to their "sofa-based companions" in the words of Rosi Braidotti (2013, p. 73). Humans are more hostile to very little creatures, such as insects, and wild animals, due to the danger and threat associated with such "uncontrolled" species. Similarly, Stef Smith's concern is to prove this idea through the representation

of characters that strive for the well-being of non-human animals regardless of their species, whereas others see animals as an obstacle in the way towards a better capitalist standing.

An evaluation of the characters' responses to the killing of different animal types proves speciesism to be the fundamental theme of the play. The characters fail to recognise that the pests that are killed by the state are not any different from the ones they care for at home. This case is most evident as they search for the lost cat, and do not care about the mass killing of foxes and pigeons every day. June Pham (2018) observes that this tendency is noticeable in the play with the choice of which animals to kill first: "[...] 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" (par. 11). The characters embody a different type of sensitivity towards different types of animals. When they are not "pets" but "pests" in the words of Isla Cowan (2021, p. 161), it becomes easier to dispense them. When the scale of the animals gets bigger, and when human beings start to consider them as companions, they become much more sensitive to any harm they might face. To make this clear for the audience, the play subtly gives the idea that the exploitation of nature caused by human-animals and their lack of care for pests and much smaller animals might in turn do more harm to them as not only the pigeons and foxes are killed in the play, but Nancy's cat also dies in the same process. Cowan (2021) interprets this scene as a note about the dangers of speciesism and anthropocentric practices for human beings as well: "While references to the missing cat are used throughout to highlight the distinction between how humans treat 'pets' and 'pests', his ending reinforces their essential 'similarity, as both 'pets' and 'pests' have suffered due to human actions" (p. 164). The consideration that human beings would not be touched by the death of pest animals is dominantly used in the play as they are largely seen as "animals that cause more damage than benefits to human-valued resources and social wellbeing" (Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, 2017, p. 4), the use of a pet animal in the same context is an apt choice to raise the viewers' consciousness on this matter.

A point that intensifies this argument is that Jamie envisages a fearful future when there is no animal left, human beings would be killed: "First they kill the birds, then the foxes and next it will be us. They'll kill the poor first when we run out of food. They'll kill the poor for the rest of us to eat. After all people just love to eat meat... And no one will notice or care, just like no one cared about the birds" (Smith, 2016, p. 84). As seen in this example, Smith first uses the cat with whom the characters share a living to increase their awareness about the urgency of the mass killing. Then, with Jamie's foreshadowing, Smith seeks to persuade those who are unconcerned about the non-human world to recognise the connection between this horror and humanity. In an interview, Stef Smith makes her argument about the human/animal divide clear, which suggests her position against the dominance of anthropocentrism:

Scientists have found out that we are actually predispositioned to not engage with global warming. There's something that happens in our brains, we've got the idea is too big. I'll protect myself from it so I wouldn't engage with it, and this is cognitive distancing that happens. (Smith, 2020, 3:58-4:12)

The cognitive distancing Smith refers to is based on the long-established idea that human beings are superior to non-human animals. As long as human beings stay away from ecological concerns as if they did not affect them in the same manner, they assume a self-protective position and regard ecological problems as the concerns of the non-human animal world rather than their own. What she argues, contrarily, is that human beings inhabit the same space as non-human beings. To support this idea, Smith presents three characters, Lisa, Nancy, and Si as advocators of anthropocentric worldview as opposed to three others, Jamie, Alex, and John who act as proponents of animal rights.

The play's concern with anthropocentrism is evident in the choice of the title, *Human Animals*. The title's inclusion of the two seemingly disparate words, human and animal suggests the actual close association between the two. With this choice, Smith makes it clear that human beings are also among the animal family, and this connotes that there is not a big difference between the two species. The play makes its stance clear even from the title that humans and animals should not be taken as separate entities, rather they constitute the same family whose problems and concerns need to be handled. Furthermore, the staging of the play plays an important role in the process of raising awareness in the audience about the dangers of anthropocentrism and speciesism. The set where characters perform is designed as a cage made of glass. In the background, there are also several glass cages in which fish are placed, and their movements are projected onto the screen by way of cams installed within the cages. The parallel between the scenery and the setting of the play illustrates the idea that there is not a huge difference between the two groups as they are both placed inside cages, which enhances the play's dystopian undertones and gives the sense that they are used and monitored by a larger social mechanism. As seen, all the technical aspects of the play's writing and staging accompany the criticism of anthropocentrism and speciesism as the central ideas of the play.

The dualism of these ideas is given with characters who support anthropocentrism and speciesism in contrast to those who do not. A dialogue between the couple, Jamie and Lisa, illustrates Lisa's anthropocentric worldview:

JAMIE 'There are five survivors, four normal adult human beings and a dog. The boat will support only four. All will perish if one is not sacrificed. Which one ought to be cast overboard?'

LISA The dog.

JAMIE Why?

LISA Because it's a dog. (Smith, 2016, p. 12)

Jamie's question sounds like a tricky one given his extra care for the dead pigeons. Lisa's hasty reply also shows her readiness to accept an animal's killing for the sake of human beings' salvation. The contrast between Jamie and Lisa continues as Lisa learns that Jamie is eager to protect and heal animals that are shot by state forces:

LISA Where is the pigeon?

JAMIE It's in a box in the bathroom.

LISA In our bathroom?

JAMIE It's the warmest room in the house. I'm nursing it. The thing obviously wants to live. It would have died if it didn't want to live. I've got a lot of respect for pigeons.

LISA Well I don't. (Smith, 2016, p. 15)

Especially Jamie's statements have a lot of respect for pigeons and his belief that pigeons do have a will of their own are exemplary statements of his unmatched sensitivity about animals. Lisa, on the other hand, says she does not have any respect for them, suggesting her support of the state and its decision to kill animals to protect human beings. A detail about Lisa is important in this sense as she works for Si's firm that profits from killing animals. Likewise, Lisa's initial criticism of Jamie can also be seen as an extension of her support of speciesism as she mentions that she would be happy to own a labradoodle, a special-bred animal, "a cross between a Labrador and a poodle" as a pet (Smith, 2016, p. 34) as she does not care for the animals on the streets. In this regard, Lisa epitomises an example behaviour condemned by the animal-rights supporters because she not only differentiates between species but also chooses to pet a specially produced dog, which illustrates she does not consider all dogs as equally "pet"able.

Jamie stands out as the most caring character in the play as he pushes the limits when he buries a dead fox in his garden. The encounter between Jamie and Lisa is symbolical in terms of the depiction of the conflict between the two opposing views:

LISA [...] Normal people just leave dead animals. I hope you washed your hands before touching anything.

JAMIE I was 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. (Smith, 2016, p. 16)

The usage of the word "respect" repeatedly sticks out because anthropocentrism is defined by a lack of respect for non-human species. Jamie's repetition of this term suggests the need to establish this attitude towards other living beings as thought to be the others, including his partner Lisa, who lacks it. Another important point in Jamie's words is his acknowledgement of a history of animals and their ancestors. When he mentions "his ancestors' land," he uses not so ordinary a word for non-humans as it is mostly used for human beings who are considered to be exceptional in terms of having a lineage of their own. By arguing that the fox might have had its roots on their soil, Jamie also offers the idea that the lands currently inhabited by human beings previously belonged to animals, hence

pointing out the need to acknowledge their existence apart from and even before the existence of human animals.

A similar conflict is observed between characters Nancy and Alex, who, despite their mother-daughter relationship, disagree most of the time in their views about the animal world. One example is when they talk about dolphins, Alex voices that she would be very happy to see a wild dolphin while Nancy considers a dolphin in an aquarium pretty much the same thing (Smith, 2016, p. 37). Nancy's argument that the "dolphin is having a bloody wonderful time" (Smith, 2016, p. 37) echoes a rather common attitude among contemporary societies and their interest in the use of animals in the entertainment industry. Stef Smith uses Alex's views here to suggest the idea that a wild dolphin in its natural habitat cannot be the same as a dolphin caged in an aquarium.

The most hostile character in the play that holds an anthropocentric view is probably Si as he not only represents anthropocentric ideology but also a capitalist one. Si works in a chemical distribution, which has profited a lot from the extermination of animals. "We've done three hundred and twenty-four per cent more business than usual" (Smith, 2016, p. 46), he says, and voices even more greedy attempts as he considers investing in incinerators, which he hopes "will be good for business" (Smith, 2016, p. 54). He, manifestly, only cares for business and hopes to get profit out of the destruction of animals. Jamie, on the other hand, tries to make Si realise the atrocity of this inhuman attitude by drawing an analogy between the act of burning animals and burning humans in concentration camps:

JAMIE What do you do with the bodies of the animals you kill? Consider it an unofficial enquiry.

SI We do as we're told – we burn them.

JAMIE Like how they used to gas and burn people? (Smith, 2016, p. 83)

The parallel Jamie draws is unable to find equivalence for Si as he does not consider non-humans as comparable to human beings. In this regard, Si seems to be the antagonist figure of the play as opposed to the animal-rights activist characters like Jamie and Alex.

The play's criticism of anthropocentrism extends to criticism of capitalism, as well, since it prepares the ground which makes people more concentrated on gaining power through money and ignore all that get in the way. As Smith uses the character Si for such criticism, she also mentions the role of media in the reinforcement of capitalist ideology and the negligence of the concerns of animal and ecology activists. As an animal-rights activist in the play, Alex, suggests the hypocrisy of the media: "The newspapers are fear-mongering. You know they've wanted that park gone for years. It's valuable land. Land where they can build shopping malls and flats. It's just an excuse. They're spreading fear to get what they want. It's what they always do" (Smith, 2016, p. 54). Accordingly, the population's fear of non-human beings, specifically pests, is created in organising humans to kill animals and prepare the ground for the use of animals' natural habitat for the establishment of shopping malls and flats, which constitute the architectural embodiments of capitalism.

In a manner that intensifies the criticism of capitalism, another animal-rights supporter character in the play, John voices his concern towards the exploitation of animals by capitalist industries with a reference to the show business that uses polar bears in unnatural and inappropriate venues including zoos: “That polar bear in that zoo that hits its head off the ground. There was something on the radio about it last year. Shouldn’t have been so out of its natural habitat or something” (2016, p. 73). The fact that zoos are not ideal places for animals is also evident as John reports that “[t]hey’ve started shooting all the animals in the zoo too. Anything with four legs or two wings they’re killing. As a precaution” (2016, p. 76). It needs to be noted that animal studies has gained momentum with the increasing awareness about the recognition of commodification of animals and degradation of their natural habitat. Therefore, John’s sensitivity appeals to one of the seminal concerns of animal-rightism: the loss of the natural world, and its role in the extinction of certain species. Thus, the character’s criticism turns out to be right as it is seen through the end of the play that the state burns down John’s house as a punishment for catching three sparrows and keeping them on his roof (2016, p. 75).

As activist characters are defeated by the systemic forces, their initiative turns out to be more revolutionary. For instance, Jamie has been feeding some animals to protect them from extermination in the hope of setting them free once the plague is over. If he wants to save them, he has to set them free from his sanctuary prematurely as he knows that he is about to get caught upon Si’s report. He shares this with Lisa as follows: “I let all the animals go before they got here. At least twenty foxes, fifteen pigeons and six squirrels. Back out there. If I did one small thing, I saved them – for now. For now, they are free. I’d forgotten what it felt like – to be free” (Smith, 2016, p. 89). Once Jamie is aware that the state is going to take and exterminate the animals he has been trying so hard to protect, he decides to let them go. Instead of handing them over to the state forces, he has to abandon them to their fate. Unsurprisingly, like John, Jamie’s anarchic stance causes him to be hammered by the state, as well: “Once they realised I let the animals go. They hit me until I blacked out” (Smith, 2016, p. 89). The characters’ fight to save the animals is punished by the state, which goes hand in hand with a criticism of the establishment that accompanies the previous parts of the play.

Towards the end of the play, in line with the intended message to raise awareness concerning animal rights and welfare, some of the characters who seem to be at ease with the extermination of animals at the beginning start to change their views. For example, despite the long-lasting conflict between her and her daughter Alex, Nancy starts to understand Alex’s activism and decides to be of help by finally “sharing responsibility for the bird’s egg and replanting roses for the bees” (Voigts and Tönnies, 2020, p. 308). Another similar change is observed as Lisa joins Jamie in his self-sacrificial attitude towards animals. Lisa’s initial attitude in the play forms a contrast with that of Jamie’s as he tries to save pigeons. However, as she also shifts her attitude, we observe these two characters in a scene offering their flesh to feed foxes. According to Eckart Voigts and Merle Tönnies (2020), this act is a “posthuman flattening of the age-old hierarchies between humans and animals” (p. 309). These critics argue that this scene should be taken in a figurative sense as Lisa and Jamie are presented as characters who have transgressed the boundaries of the human/animal divide and strive to ensure

salvation for all. Their act manifests that they do not wish to inhabit a nature that they do not share with their non-human counterparts.

Despite the play's evident criticism of an anthropocentric worldview, some of the reviews seem to have misinterpreted the play's message as seen in the review of Michael Billington in *The Guardian* that sees animals as the cause of the pandemic in the play. According to Billington's observation, the play portrays "a London where the balance of nature has been so destroyed that large parts of the city suffer animal infestation" (2016, par. 1). This statement shows that the play's concern for animals has not only been misinterpreted but has also been comprehended in a limited way as there is mainly an emphasis on how "human animals" suffer this infestation and strive to get through. Another review by Paul Taylor (2016) in *The Independent* points to a very different orientation as he reads the play allegorically and interprets the extermination of certain animals as "a metaphor for ethnic cleansing and the hysteria whipped up against minorities" (par. 3). This reading illustrates a more conventional approach in the analysis of texts that include animal characters. However, in our age, with an increasing interest in critical animal studies and larger ecological matters, it is essential to accept non-human characters in literary texts as non-human characters rather than representative of human beings. Such metaphoric readings also hinder the political associations of the play as it is argued by Isla Cowan (2021) that the play functions as a commentary on the state's current treatment of animals:

Smith's dramatization of prejudices against these specific 'pest' animals recalls 'the hostility displayed in then Mayor Ken Livingstone's by-law prohibiting the 2003 feeding of pigeons in Trafalgar Square, as well as his successor Boris Johnson's condemnation of foxes as urban 'menaces' in 2013 after one attacked a small child in the borough of Bromley. (p. 160)

Accordingly, in an attempt to raise consciousness about how human animals react to the eradication and extinction of certain non-human animals, the play also resonates with some political statements of Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson that reinforce speciesism.

## Conclusion

A survey of animal studies as a literary criticism shows that literature as a human-constructed field primarily deals with the human world and treats the non-human world and characters as not equally worthwhile. The dominance of anthropocentrism in literary works is gradually scrutinised by some recent contemporary British dramatists like Stef Smith and Dawn King. With the initiative of such playwrights, non-human characters are used to increase human animals' awareness about the common aspects between themselves and other animals, hence see their problems as their own and attempt to bring about possible solutions. The increase in the discussion of such matters in literature and literary criticism has become possible with the recognition of problems that mainly concern animals such as their commodification, extinction, and degradation of their habitats. The need to evaluate matters that concern animals also corresponds with the increasing sensitivity towards other larger ecological issues in literary works.

Stef Smith's *Human Animals* provides an example text which makes it possible to analyse the hegemony of human beings over the animal world. The play poses anthropocentrism and speciesism

as among the most urgent issues related to animal studies. Anthropocentrism allows characters to assume an alleged superiority, which enables them to exploit animals to the extent of extinction. As an exemplary scenario, Smith envisages a London that is on the verge of collapse due to an animal-induced plague created by the state. Accordingly, all animals are killed or burnt right away so that they cannot spread contagion. However, the actual reason for this mass killing, as it turns out, is to get rid of the animals that inhabit natural lands and to use these areas to build new shopping malls and flats to meet the capitalist demands of the increasing human population. Smith's play presents strong activist characters to fight against this social war, and through their representation, establishes a consciousness about the enemies of natural riches. In a sense, each activist character works hard to illustrate the dangers of these forces. Alex, for example, criticises capitalism, Jamie criticises anthropocentrism, and John illustrates how capitalism exploits certain animals. By portraying these strong-willed characters and their struggle with their family members and the state, the play attempts to bring about a social change in terms of appreciating non-human animals as no different from *human animals*.



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