

Same/Not Same: Nonhuman Animals, Language, and Science in Fowler's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*

Vesna Lopičić, Danijela Petković

University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of English
Univerzitetski trg 2, 18 000, Niš, Serbia
lovevuk@gmail.com

The article discusses Karen Joy Fowler's 2013 novel We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves, primarily in the context of the growing demands for nonhuman animal rights/liberation. The general thrust of the novel is in keeping with animal rights activism and the animal studies' critical examination of the human/animal relations..

Keywords: American literature / human and animal / attitude towards animals / animal rights / humanism / anthropocentrism / violence / language / science

Introduction: the violence of human animals

In a video gone viral on the social media site Tumblr, a terrified and drenched cat is tied with a leash in a large metal basin: judging by the soap suds, attempts have been made to bathe her/him. A man's voice is heard, with an unmistakable rising intonation: "No more?" The cat desperately sounds back, several times – pronouncing 'no more' as clearly as possible, especially when the voice adds "We're almost done. Still a little bit more." There is no rising intonation in the cat's rendition; just as with the man's question, the notes of terror and begging are unmistakable. "No more. No more. No more." The whole video lasts 33 seconds. There is no graphic violence in it, any blood or broken bones. Most people see it as funny – the video did receive over 160,000 likes – a cat so afraid of being given a bath it actually starts speaking! Very few people would recognize it as torture. In order to do that, one would perhaps have to know something about cats – that they groom themselves, for instance, and do not need to be bathed. That having water splashed in their face is

a highly stressful experience to most of them: being tied with a leash even more so. But let us rephrase that – in order to recognize it as torture, one would only have to watch and listen. The cat is speaking. What's more, s/he is speaking English.

This short video encapsulates several themes of Karen Joy Fowler's sixth novel, *We Are All Beside Ourselves* (2013), primarily the role of language and communication in the human-nonhuman animal relations/divide; also the inherent, casual sadism in the human-animal encounters of all kinds. The novel, moreover, demonstrates its kinship with animal activism most clearly in its take on the 'Big Gap' (Haraway 79), which, as Fowler shows, is predicated on the supposed inability of animals to communicate with/like humans, and the vital role the Big Gap plays in justifying scientific, psychological and biomedical experimentation on animals.

The novel takes its inspiration in real-life Kellogg experiment, referred to explicitly by the narrator. In the 1930s, Winthrop Kellogg, a behaviorist psychologist, twinned his baby son Donald with a baby chimpanzee Gua: the plan was to raise Gua as human, with the chimp learning human behavior from the baby boy. The experiment ended after several months because the opposite happened – Donald started imitating Gua, the possibility of which had not crossed the scientist's anthropocentric mind. Near the end of the novel, the narrator, Rosemary Cooke, references the Kellogg experiment again, this time in order to include Donald, who died in his forties, and Gua, who died at the age of three, in her list of the human/simian victims of bad science and worse parenting. Rosemary herself has had her share of bad parenting, as she tells the story of her family that is marked by tragedy – a sister who disappeared when Rosemary was five, a brother who ran away from home when she was eleven. It is as late as page 73 that the readers learn that the beloved sister, Fern, is a chimpanzee, and that she and Rosemary were twinned when Rosemary was one month old so that their father Vince, a behavioral psychologist, could follow their developmental milestones. Or at least that is what Rosemary was told – she, however, has had enough experience not to have doubts: "I am the daughter of a psychologist. I know that the thing ostensibly being studied is rarely the thing being studied." (Fowler 95) Later on she reveals her belief that the true purpose of the experiment was to see "if Rosemary could learn to speak to chimpanzees." (96)

When the sisters were five, something happened that made them lose Fern – though she did not die and is still alive in 2012 when the novel ends. The family was never the same, and several years later, the other sibling, Lowell, disappeared as well, dedicating his adult life to animal rights' activ-

ism, on the run from the FBI. Rosemary begins her story in the middle, with the damage clearly visible: she is a 22-year-old college student with an obvious PTSD who never talks about her family, who has trained herself not to think, let alone talk, about her lost siblings. But the emotional and psychological burden she experiences constantly is undeniable: “And I just didn’t think I could do it anymore, this business of being my parents’ only child.” (42) Detailing the collapse of her family, herself included, Rosemary yet offers some hope, as the novel ends with attempted reconciliation between the 38-year old sisters. But Fowler never lets the readers forget that Rosemary is telling the story simply because she is the only one of the three Cooke siblings “not currently in a cage.” (300)¹

“Language was the only way in which Viki differed much from a normal human child,” or enough with (carno) phallogocentrism(?)

Due to the irreversible impact of postmodernism on the one hand, and the numerous advances in sciences such as cognitive ethology on the other, it has by now become commonplace in both animal studies and animal activism to see language, together with “tool use, the inheritance of cultural behaviors” as merely one of “the old saws of anthropocentrism” (Wolfe xi), supposedly proving human uniqueness where in reality there is none. The supposed or real deconstruction of human uniqueness, moreover, is followed by demands for total animal liberation, or for extending some of the human rights to at least some of the animals – usually primates. Fowler, being a novelist and not an animal studies scholar, however, addresses the issue of human language and interspecies communication from several angles. One is to problematize the anthropocentric valuation of language over (much wider) communication. The other is to call the readers’ attention to the fact that language, as a human evolutionary adaptation, is deceptive, especially in relation to memory. Yet another is to confirm the power and the necessity of language, in this instance virtually inseparable from storytelling. The themes are explored primarily through the interactions of family members, in the twin contexts of family unit/scientific research project: the emotional impact derives primarily from Fowler’s powerful delving into the harm caused by the multi-faceted ‘failure to communicate’.

¹ ‘Cage’ and ‘prison’ as both metaphors and realistic phenomena will be discussed in another paper inspired by the same novel.

The valuation of language over communication – their essential difference – is expressed with utmost clarity by Rosemary's father, Vince Cooke. Asked by his teenage son one of the crucial questions of *Animal Studies*² – “Why does she [Fern] have to learn our language? ... Why can't we learn hers?” – Vince informs the boy that he is “confusing language with communication, when they were two very different things. Language is more than just words ... Language is also the order of words and the way one word inflects another.” (Fowler 94) In the novel, Fern communicates with signs, but according to Vince's definition, that is not the same as using language. According to this conventional definition, also, when in the video the cat says ‘No more’, s/he is not actually speaking English, but merely imitating the sounds humans produced. Language, conventional anthropocentric wisdom insists, is exclusively human: it is an intricate system that reflects the complexity of the human mind, as opposed to animal cognitive poverty.

Yet bearing in mind the many instances in the novel where language fails, it is tempting to see Vince's explanation as Fowler's deliberate, in-your-face declaration that language, indeed, is not communicating: that it can be the very opposite of it. The end of the novel seems to confirm this explicitly. Recounting the first meeting with Fern after 22 years, Rosemary says: “I can't tell you what I felt; no words are sufficient. You'd need to have been in my body to understand all that.” (303) The body never lies, as Alice Miller famously claims. Just like animals and very small children, it speaks, too, but is not necessarily heard and/or understood, especially in the culture with a heavy carnophallogocentric bias. Yet even disorders and illnesses are a form of communication: “Frequently, physical illnesses are the body's response to permanent disregard of its vital functions. One of our most vital functions is an ability to listen to the true story of our own lives.” (Miller 19) Fowler, for her part, focuses on the physicality of grief in particular. When Fern disappears, for instance, Rosemary claims that:

I felt her loss in a powerfully physical way. I missed her smell and the sticky wet of her breath on my neck. I missed her fingers scratching through my hair. We sat next to each other, lay across each other, pushed, pulled, stroked, and struck each other a hundred times a day and I suffered the deprivation of this. It was an ache, a hunger on the surface of my skin. (Fowler 103)

² As “[p]osthuman animal studies seek not to teach animals human language, but to develop a rich understanding through participation of their worlds by exploring possibilities for new modes of understanding” (Maiti 2013). Animal rights' activists, on the other hand, rephrase a question in a manner that calls attention to commonly shared emotions: “Do animals have less fear because they live without words?”

It is with this overwhelming physicality of grief that human language interferes, making the ache less vivid, less physical, and less immediate – simply by being insufficient. Partly because of this, Fowler does not attempt to call for the abolishment of language, particularly, just like Barbara Smuts, in human-animal relations. Poetically and realistically, Fowler presents language as both a curse and a blessing – as there are times in every human’s life when inhabiting the body fully is unbearable – but not necessarily the proof of human superiority over animals. Moreover, Fowler detects the same suspect, emotion-deadening insufficiency of language in relation to memories: “Language does this to our memories – simplifies, solidifies, codifies, mummifies. An oft-told story is like a photograph in a family album; eventually, it replaces the moment it was meant to capture.” (44)

Another instance of the insufficiency/redundancy of language is to be found in the relationship between the two sisters. Though Rosemary could and did talk for the both of them, she decidedly did not need language to understand her sister perfectly. Talking about this from a more experienced perspective, Rosemary adds reasonable doubt, but is not willing to give up on the belief that love and body are also languages, spoken and understood by animals and children:

I always used to believe I knew what Fern was thinking. No matter how bizarre her behavior, no matter how she might deck herself out and bob about the house like a Macy’s parade balloon, I could be counted on to render it into plain English. Fern wants to go outside. Fern wants to watch Sesame Street. Fern thinks you are a doodoo-head. Some of this was convenient projection, but you’ll never convince me of the rest. Why wouldn’t I have understood her? No one knew Fern better than I; I knew every twitch. I was attuned to her. (Fowler 94)

Yet being attuned to the animal is thoroughly dismissed by the double authorities of the father and the scientist, under the weight of the cultural/scientific construction of both animals and children. In a telling passage, “[o]ne of the early grad students, Timothy, had argued that in our pre-verbal period, Fern and I had an idioglossia, a secret language of grunts and gestures. This was never written up, so I learned of it only recently. Dad had found his evidence thin, unscientific, and, frankly, whimsical.” (Fowler 96)

Animal studies’ deconstruction of language as the criterion determining the animal’s value (and, in the majority of cases, the right to life) is only one part of the context. The other is Derrida’s despair. In *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008), Derrida speaks of a ‘wound’ suffered by all animals, reminded of it by the mute gaze of his companion cat. Furthermore, the cat’s muteness allows for anthropocentric interpretations of his gaze.

Derrida's close encounter the cat shows him how deep the abyss between them is, how unfathomable in its 'deep sadness' (19) the gaze is, and how little he understands the being before him. Though he clearly deplores man's narcissistic superiority over animal life, and recognizes the vast variety of living creatures that need to be acknowledged, to Derrida, this unreadable and mysterious gaze widens the gap between the Animal and the Human. The animal's gaze is an "address," but it precludes any kind of communication as it is "uninterpretable, unreadable, undecidable, abyssal and secret." (12) This pessimistic and myopic line of thinking negating the possibility of mutual understanding in favor of despair has been taken up by the majority of posthumanist and Animal Studies scholars. Thus Krishanu Maiti states determinedly: "As the animal experience cannot be reproduced by a human, it can only be represented through various art forms. Because no human being has the faculty of understanding of the nonhuman to act as its reproducer." Philip Armstrong, too, while aware of the "effacement of the animal gaze by twentieth-century theories of knowledge" – psychology in particular – records his own unease when faced with a tiger in a zoo. The paragraph clearly echoes Derrida:

I'm looking at a tiger, but she's not looking at me. I'm in London's Regent's Park Zoo, so of course there is heavy wire mesh between me and the big cat. She's surrounded by human visitors: the Sumatran tigers' enclosure is roughly circular and they can be seen from any point on its circumference. Indeed my snapshot captures the face of a woman peering through a window on the opposite side. But it's the animal's own gaze that gives me pause for thought. She is looking out of her cage, but not directly at me or any of her other observers. Within this animal's gaze but not the focus of it, I feel uncomfortable, guilty, ashamed. This feeling returns whenever I look at the photograph. (Taylor and Singal 175)

Remarkably, the author's guilt and shame are not associated with the fact that he is looking at the animal being imprisoned (in approximately "18,000 times less space ... than in the wild" (Van Tuyl 14), only with a supposedly unsuccessful communication across the species divide.

Yet anybody who has been the caretaker of an animal, who has shared a living space with an animal, devoted time and attention to an animal – anybody who has loved an animal – will become attuned to him or her and vice versa: both parties will teach/learn to communicate with one another. It is not a matter of science. "Science," Bekoff insists, "is still trying to catch up with what so many of us already understand." (Bekoff 12) As if to prove these points, in one of the four companion essays to Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* (1999), Barbara Smuts writes poignantly about her communication with her dog Safi:

(...) I discuss all important matters with her, in English, repeating phrases and sentences over and over in particular circumstances to facilitate her ability to learn my language. She understands (in the sense of responding appropriately to) many English phrases, and she, in turn, has patiently taught me to understand her language of gestures and postures (she rarely uses vocal communication). (Coetzee 117)

Fowler, too, is aware that interspecies communication may not be vocal, let alone linguistic. But a body cannot lie, and it is full of meaning: “She [Fern] comes over, rests the rough shelf of her forehead against my own flat one so that I’m staring straight into her amber eyes. She’s so close her breath is in my mouth. I can smell that she’s unhappy, her usual sort of wet-towel smell, but with a pungent, slightly acrid undertone.” (Fowler 77)

Rosemary communicates with Fern with all her senses, understanding her viscerally, with her body. Yet what is also present in this particular encounter is the idea of animal melancholic mourning and resignation, as if Fern, like Derrida’s cat, despairs of being mute. However, Rosemary has no problem understanding Fern’s emotions in the absence of language. Having been subjected to her father’s experiment, she develops or restores the acuity of her senses so that Fern’s gaze is not vacant or uninterpretable but quite clear in meaning – just like the ‘No more’ of the wet cat with whom we started the essay. Fowler, moreover, seems to be playing with the original meaning of the word ‘animal’ because Rosemary and Fern share the same breath proving that they belong in the same category of ‘living creatures.’ For that reason Fern is Rosemary’s sister, while Derrida finds such proximity intolerable and cannot call any animal his fellow or brother. On the subject of language and communication in the human-animal relations, Fowler thus seems much closer to ethical vegans than animal studies scholars, showing the possibility of mutual understanding, love and kinship where researchers tend to see irreconcilable and disturbing otherness.³

Yet while demonstrating that language is an untenable criterion on which to judge animals’ worth, the novel cannot but confirm the power of language. The story that Rosemary tells, with all the detours and blank

³ Not all the researchers, fortunately. How refreshing and how hopeful is it to read the following words of a true scientific revolutionary: “[A]nimals are constantly asking us in their own ways to treat them better or leave them alone. We must stop ignoring their gaze and closing our hearts to their pleas. We can easily do what they ask—to stop causing the unnecessary pain, suffering, loneliness, sadness, and death, even extinction. (...) Of course, it’s hard to speak for the animals, but because they share so much with us, it’s not presumptuous to believe that what they want isn’t so different from what we want: to avoid pain, to be healthy, to feel love. Their feelings are as important to them as our feelings are to us” (Bekoff 1–2)

spaces that are only filled in much later, is important, as a testimony, as evidence, as an act of love, and as a weapon that has the power to distract from the immediacy of pain and trauma. Although aware of the distorting power of language as well, especially in combination with memories, Fowler insists that language is not to be renounced. One can build systems of domination on the basis of language, but also transmit knowledge why and how this is wrong. Testify. Tell important stories for distraction. Tell important stories about love, loss and family. Rosemary, after all, stands for remembrance (Fowler 7).⁴

It is equally important, however, to note that not every human in the novel confirms the majesty and the ministry of language: an animal rights activist, an ALF member and a wanted domestic terrorist, Lowell is finally arrested by the FBI. Imprisoned, just like his sister Fern, Lowell gives up on language completely. His empathy with animals goes so far that he wants to be tried as one. Yet, even without language, Lowell communicates the predicament of billions of animals in zoos, shelters, science labs, factory farming, eloquently and powerfully, expressing the novel's humanist bias as well.

So far, the focus has been on humans. But Fern, being Same/NotSame as her human family members, also communicates. It is not only that her smell and sighs and non-verbal behavior are interpreted by Rosemary: Fern herself uses her whole body, sign language, and laughter to actively convey her emotions, desires and attitudes. These, moreover, are of a distinctly human kind. For instance, by giving Rosemary a red chip (which signals 'human' and 'same' throughout the novel), Fern expresses empathy (Fowler 99). By her 'mocking laughter' (of which only human beings are supposedly capable), Rosemary's twin demonstrates her amusement (Fowler 78). Same, but also NotSame.

There is something else. When Lowell recounts his meeting with Fern in South Dakota, immediately after she was given away, he mentions that "she was eerie in the way she recognized me. It was as if she felt me

⁴ Remembrance, language, animals and speaking are beautifully interwoven in Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello's Camus anecdote with which she refutes the claim that animals' lack of human language automatically confirms both their lower intelligence and muteness: "As for animals being too dumb and stupid to speak for themselves, consider the following sequence of events. When Albert Camus was a young boy in Algeria, his grandmother told him to bring her one of the hens from the cage in their backyard.

He obeyed, then watched her cut off its head with a kitchen knife, catching its blood in a bowl so that the floor would not be dirtied. The death-cry of that hen imprinted itself on the boy's memory so hauntingly that in 1958 he wrote an impassioned attack on the guillotine. As a result, in part, of that polemic, capital punishment was abolished in France. Who is to say, then, that the hen did not speak?" (Coetzee, 63)

coming. I remember thinking Dad should do a study on chimp precognition.” (Fowler 202) In fact, as early as 1919, an American naturalist, William J. Long, did publish a book called *How Animals Talk: And Other Pleasant Studies of Birds and Beasts*. The book explored “the phenomenon of vocal, silent, and even motionless communication among animals ... [theorizing] that animals are much more intelligent, emotional, and moral than we have traditionally thought and that their ability to sense the presence of other living beings is an innate ability shared by humans as well.” (Extract from the blurb) Importantly, Marc Bekoff notes in the Foreword, “animal communication, cognition, emotions, and telepathy” are topics “that some scientists would call ‘taboo’” (Long 19), thus pointing to the long history of official scientific repression/erasure of what Foucault aptly termed ‘subjugated knowledges’ – the repression which Rosemary’s father performs as well, by his dismissal of Rosemary’s and Fern’s idioglossia.

In the aforementioned meeting with Lowell, Fern resorts to intensely physical expressions of anger, fear and love. Yet in addition to slamming Lowell’s face against the bars and holding his hand, Fern signs. The message is painfully clear – “good, good Fern. Fern is a good girl. Please take me home now. I’ll be good. I promise I’ll be good.” (Fowler 204) Commenting on an ape abused in Wolfgang Köhler’s experiments – the ape, moreover, she believes to have been the prototype for Kafka’s Red Peter – Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello effectively summarizes Fern’s situation as well: “The question that truly occupies him [Sultan the ape], as it occupies the rat and the cat and every other animal trapped in the hell of the laboratory or the zoo, is: Where is home, and how do I get there?” (Coetzee 30)

“I knew less about the lives of lab rats then”: Science

Fowler approaches the emotionally charged issue of scientific experiments on animals with the openness not readily paralleled in modern literature – the only other example that comes to mind is Richard Adams’s *The Plague Dogs* (1977), with its memorable opening depiction of a dog who is deliberately being drowned and revived so that a scientist’s assistant might note the precise interval the animal spent fighting for his life (Adams 12). Just like *The Plague Dogs*, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* calls attention to the practices that have a long tradition in Western history, and are, in fact, quite familiar to an average animal rights’ activist. The instances of scientific sadism Fowler chooses to highlight, moreover, seem to suggest that she sides with their famous slogan “It’s not science. It’s animal abuse.”

Yet by focusing attention on the personalities of the researchers, and the impact on the (human) test subjects, Fowler seems rather to be repeating an old adage that science itself is neither good nor bad – unlike the people who wield it. Thus both Rosemary and Fowler shrink away from the full implications of the Same/NotSame status of animals. Though at some point in the novel Rosemary imagines the happy ending for her sister, which is total liberation – “They must storm the prison and demand her release” (Fowler 296) – the demand is displaced into a fairy tale. While it is hard to deny the utopian and liberating potential of fairy tales, it is nonetheless true that in real life, Fern remains in a cage.

Fern, fortunately, does not end up in a medical lab so there is no description of experiments on her, though chimpanzees are in fact a popular choice for biomedical experimentation because they are “the species most closely related to humans, and consequently most likely to be generally predictive of human outcomes when used in research aimed at the development of human clinical interventions.” (Knight 4) Even so, Fowler illustrates the sadistic tendencies inherent in science, and the use of knowledge as justification for torture. The fistulated cow, the baby macaque named Britches whose eyes were sewn shut the day he was born, Ilya Ivanovich Ivanov’s, “attempts to create a human-chimp hybrid, the elusive humanzee” by inseminating chimps with human sperm – “though his first thought had been to go the other way – human mothers, chimp sperm” (Fowler 284), are all listed as the veritable keep-you-awake-at-night scientific horrors. (Needless to say, this is not all: through Lowell, Fowler channels vegan activism in its purest form of anger and abundant information on the animal abuse in virtually all areas of human life.) Importantly, the much-praised neutrality as the scientific behavioral and writing norm is attacked as well, explicitly, as it is a matter of pride for Rosemary to be the opposite of a ‘good scientist’: “I remembered the 170 rapes over three days from Dr. Sosa’s lecture. Some scientist had observed all that, had actually watched a chimp raped 170 times and kept count. Good scientist. Not me.” (Fowler 272) In this novel, good scientists are terrible people, judging by Dr. Uljevik, Fern’s new owner, who never called Fern by her name and trained her to kiss his hand (Fowler 210), or Harry Harlow, who had “taken rhesus monkey infants away from their mothers and given them inanimate mothers instead, mothers made alternatively of terry-cloth or wire, to see which, in the absence of other choices, the babies preferred.” All the baby monkeys “turned psychotic or died.” (Fowler 197) Fowler’s critique of (modern-day) insensitive and irresponsible experimental practice is consistent throughout the book, not excluding Rosemary’s father who is otherwise loving and caring. Rosemary gives a chilling assessment

of his personality – “Let’s just say that my father was kind to animals unless it was in the interest of science to be otherwise. He would never have run over a cat if there was nothing to be learned by doing so.” (Fowler 88) Vince Cooke is yet another good anthropocentric scientist – what is one cat’s life in comparison with an increase, no matter how minimal or irrelevant, in human knowledge?

Yet it is not Rosemary’s scientist father who kills a cat. As the novel progresses, it is revealed that this is a false memory invented by Rosemary to protect herself from the traumatic experience involving Fern. The traumatic memory that Rosemary has kept buried and misrepresented is that, as a five-year-old girl, she took a kitten from his agitated mother and gave him to curious Fern, who dashed him against the tree and tore his belly open with her nail. Rosemary finally admits that it was Fern’s “remorselessness, the way she’d stared impassively at the dead kitten and then opened his stomach with her fingers” that had shocked her “to the core.” (Fowler 266) Ironically, it is the good scientist behavior that Fern exhibits in relation to the kitten – utter detachment, remorselessness, and curiosity that is only satisfied at the price of the animal’s life. Thus the shock that Rosemary experienced is arguably intended to initiate ‘the shock of recognition’ in the reader as well. Fern truly is a human mirror image in more ways than one.

But the novel does not stop at animal experimentation in its examination of the massive role science plays in cementing the abusive power dynamics between humans and animals – more often than not, simply by not recognizing its anthropocentrism. Literary studies, for example, can be accused of the same crime. “Take a European literature class and find on the syllabus Kafka’s *A Report to an Academy*, with its ape narrator, Red Peter, which your professor will tell you is a metaphor for being Jewish and you’ll see how it might work that way, but it’s not the most obvious reading.” (Fowler 124) The most obvious reading, of course, is the literal: an ape speaks English, and expresses his love of freedom and his experience with the world of men filled with bars and cages. Not only are animals transformed into mere metaphors for human experience, which is violence in itself, but examples from the animal kingdom are employed to confirm patriarchal heteronormativity and rape culture as well. In one of his lectures, Rosemary’s college professor, Dr Sosa, upholds the bonobo society as “peaceful and egalitarian,” emphasizing that this is achieved exclusively through “continual and casual sexual congress.” The professor’s conclusion is that “[t]he road to peace is through more sex, not less.” (146) Rosemary notes down her fellow students’ reactions: “This went down well with the male students. (...) They were okay with being told, by infer-

ence, that reluctance, mostly female, was the root of all evil. This reaction was less surprising.” (146) Luckily, there are dissenting voices, coming from a female student, calling attention to the patriarchal social organization of the bonobos and explicitly questioning the professor’s conclusion.⁵

Yet despite the undeniably critical stance towards (practitioners of) science, Fowler, however, does not call for liberation of the test subjects and the abolishment of “macabre experiments in secretive laboratories.” (Castricano 265) While reading about Britches, for instance, Rosemary learns that the plan for the baby monkey with sewn eyes was “to keep him alive for about three years in a state of sensory deprivation and then kill him to see what that had done to the visual, auditory, and motor-skills parts of his brain.” (Fowler 137) The knowledge is a bonus: the monkey’s eyes were sewn shut “in order to test some sonic equipment designed for blind babies.” (137)

Rosemary comments: “I didn’t want a world in which I had to choose between blind human babies and tortured monkey ones. To be frank, that’s the sort of choice I expect science to protect me from, not give me. I handled the situation by not reading more.” (137) While Rosemary refuses to choose and learn more – yet believes in science – Fowler is more vocal on this difficult issue. In an interview she puts it as simply as possible – “if it’s my child who needs some medication that I’ll know it’s effective because there have been animal trials, I’m going to want the animal trials.” In this, Fowler in fact resembles Donna Haraway, who supports biomedical research conducted on animals on the basis of utilitarianism. In a coda to her essay *Sharing Suffering: Instrumental Relations Between Laboratory Animals and Their People*, Haraway responds to her friend’s Sharon Ghamari-Tabrizi’s provocative challenge to “defend the slaughter of lab animals in biomedical experiments.” (Haraway 87) Haraway’s answer is: “I will defend animal killing for reasons and in detailed material-semiotic conditions that I judge tolerable because of a greater good calculation.” (87) Earlier in the essay attempts were made to justify the necessity of killing animals by resorting to a downright forbidding discourse – and a wholly gratuitous use of the adverb ‘responsibly’: “The problem is to learn to live responsibly within the multiplicitous necessity and labor of killing, so as to be in the open, in quest of the capacity to respond in relentless historical, nonteleological, multispecies contingency.” (80) Steve Best warns that within the academic field of animal studies “the professionalization of discourse has transformed language from a potential medium of clarity into an opaque tool of obfuscation that ultimately reinforces systems of power.”

⁵ See also Lopičič, “Literature and the Discourse of Science.”

Peter Singer, too, though widely regarded as ‘the father of modern animal rights movement,’ explicitly supports animal experimentation, including vivisection (in addition to euthanasia and limited medical care for human beings) on the grounds of the greater value of (some forms of) human life. Ironically, it is the very father of animal rights movement who reinforces the ‘old saws of anthropocentrism’ – including language, which he terms ‘complex acts of communication’ – in his examination of what constitutes the higher value of a human life. Moreover, the Same/Not Same nature of animals is simultaneously affirmed and dismissed as irrelevant in the context of the taking of life:

While self-awareness, the capacity to think ahead and have hopes and aspirations for the future, the capacity for meaningful relations with others and so on are not relevant to the question of inflicting pain...these capacities are relevant to the question of taking life. It is not arbitrary to hold that the life of a self-aware being, capable of abstract thought, of planning for the future, of complex acts of communication, and so on, is more valuable than the life of a being without these capacities. (Peter Singer quoted in Francione and Garner¹⁰)

But being firmly against animal experiments is not an expression of childish sentimentalism towards animals. Ironically enough, such experiments are indefensible on strictly scientific grounds, as:

[t]he stress caused by laboratory housing and environments, routine laboratory procedures, and in all likelihood other stressors such as those associated with wild capture, transportation, and invasive procedures may result in profound, statistically significant distortions in a range of physiological parameters, including cardiovascular parameters and serum concentrations of glucose and various hormones. Behavior may be markedly altered, and behavioral stereotypies and increased aggression may develop over time. (Knight 36)

Conclusion: “Threadbare, ravaged by love – as who amongst us is not?”

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves shares kinship with both animal studies and animal rights activism. The most important contribution of the novel in the direction of animal rights is the insistence on Fern’s being Same/NotSame as humans, and scattering abundant information about the multifaceted abuse of animals in virtually all areas of modern life. Moreover, the NotSame part is, in the recognizable approach of animal studies, revealed to be the social/scientific construct enforced by law, police and the prison-industrial complex, for the sake of maintaining and justifying

various interlocked systems of oppression – including, but not limited to, biomedical research on animals. Furthermore, in the novel ostensibly centered on language, language is problematized and not upheld as the only means of communication, especially across the human/animal divide. Other methods of communication are offered as equally, if not more, efficient, from smell, body response to highly controversial precognition. In direct opposition to mainstream Western literary studies, moreover, Fowler resists turning an animal into a metaphor for human experience. Unlike Derrida and the animal studies scholars following his trail, Fowler, too, resists transforming an animal into a wholly mysterious and uninterpretable other, allowing instead for the possibility of a degree of mutual understanding through that mental, emotional and physical investment known as love. Marc Bekoff's description of his scientific approach – "I take the facts that have been established about animal sentience and emotions and look at how they affect our society's current value system ... I freely mix science with ethics, morality, and emotion" (Bekoff 6) – seems to be an accurate summary of Fowler's novel's method as well.

Yet the novel is anthropocentric in the sense that, despite considerable criticism and wariness of the supposedly human-specific traits, it affirms language, storytelling and human capacity for love, knowledge and change. Even in its criticism of sadistic science and bad parenting it cannot help being anthropocentric, as the focus is on problematic human practices and human beings, with animals as innocent, passive victims. It is exactly there, in the novel's treatment of legal/scientific punishment and suffering, that *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* affirms humanism as well. Namely, Lowell's Christ-like mute/eloquent suffering in prison is not the same as Fern's being gang-raped by older chimpanzees at the age of five. Lowell's sacrifice is a matter of choice, and has to be acknowledged and valued as such, unlike his sister's Fern's forced imprisonment on the basis of her species. (This is certainly not meant to imply that Lowell's suffering is in any sense greater, more important, more in need of *rectification*.) While there is no single human character in this novel that is not deeply flawed, Lowell does embody the best characteristics of humanity – selflessness, empathy, sacrifice, love, dedication – at the price of his freedom and mental health. Both a warning and an ideal, it is Lowell who demonstrates all the loving possibilities of a human being. However, by never allowing the reader to forget even for a moment Lowell's troubles with the law, and the fact that this man – who in his activism has never harmed a living being, human or nonhuman – is labeled and treated as a domestic terrorist, Fowler speaks volumes about her corporate, capitalist, speciesist culture. It is there that animal activism and literature

intersect, and there that the greatest value of this novel lies – because, as Lesli Bisgould reminds us:

[t]he struggle of animal advocates consists not only of political battles to change laws and practices but also, and *first*, of intellectual battles to encourage people to try on new ideas, to confront the inconsistencies in old ideas that seem normal to them. (...) Animal advocates must search constantly for ways into minds that have been closed by a culture that increasingly favors corporate messaging over thinking and worships profit-making ideals above almost everything else. (in Catricano 267, *italics in the original*)

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves provides one such way into both minds and hearts of its readers.

WORKS CITED

- Adams, Richard. *The Plague Dogs*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1986.
- Armstrong, Philip. "The Gaze of Animals." *Theorizing Animals: Re-Thinking Humanimal Relations*. Eds. N. Taylor and T. Signal. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011: 175–199.
- Bekoff, Marc. *The Animal Manifesto: Six Reasons for Expanding Our Compassion Footprint*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2010.
- Best, Steve. "The Rise of Critical Animal Studies: Putting Theory into Action and Animal Liberation into Higher Education." *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, 7.1 (2009): 9–52.
- Bisgould, Lesli. "Power and Irony: One Tortured Cat and Many Twisted Angles to Our Moral Schizophrenia about Animals." Ed. J. Castricano. *Animal Subjects: An Ethical Reader in a Posthuman World*. Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008: 259–271.
- Burns Gunther, Teresa. "An interview with Karen Joy Fowler." *Bookslut*. October 2013. Web. 27 Feb. 2016. http://www.bookslut.com/features/2013_10_020334.php.
- Coetzee, John Maxwell. *The Lives of Animals*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow)*. New York: Fordham University Press: 2008.
- Fowler, Karen Joy. *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*. London: Serpent's Tail, 2014.
- Francione, Gary L., and Robert Garner. *The Animal Rights Debate: Abolition or Regulation?* New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Haraway, Donna J. *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- "No-moorreee." Web. 1 Feb. 2016. <http://thebestoftumbling.com/post/127268197129/no-moorreee>
- Knight, Arabella. *The Costs and Benefits of Animal Experiments*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Long, William J., Marc Bekoff and Rupert Sheldrake. *How Animals Talk and Other Pleasant Studies of Birds and Beasts*. Rochester, Vermont: Bear & Company, 2005.
- Lopičić, Vesna. "Literature and the Discourse of Science: Nino Ricci's Darwinism." Eds. Vesna Lopičić, and Biljana Mišić Ilić. *Jezik, književnost, diskurs: književna istraživanja*. Niš: Filozofski fakultet u Nišu, 2015: 387–397.
- Maiti, Krishanu. "The Animal That Therefore Derrida Is: Status of Animal in Derridean Posthumanism." *Bhatter College Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*. Special Issue on Animal

- Studies Volume III, 2013. Posted: December 11, 2013. Web. January 18, 2015. <http://bcjms.bhattercollege.ac.in/theorizing-the-animal-in-derridean-posthumanism/>.
- Miller, Alice. *The Body Never Lies: The Lingering Effects of Hurtful Parenting*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.
- Van Tuyl, Chris, ed. *Zoos and Animal Welfare*. Farmington Hills: Greenhaven Press, 2009.
- Wolfe, Cary, ed. *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Enaki/neenaki: ne-človeške živali, jezik in znanost v romanu Karen Joy Fowler *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*

Ključne besede: ameriška književnost / človek in žival / odnos do živali / pravice živali / humanizem / antropocentrizem / nasilje / jezik / znanost

Članek obravnava roman Karen Joy Fowler *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013) v kontekstu vse glasnejših zahtev po pravicah oziroma osvoboditvi ne-človeških živali (nonhuman animals). Splošna poanta romana se sklada s težnjami aktivizma za pravice živali in kritičnega preiskovanja odnosov med človeškim in živalskim v živalskih študijah. Za razliko od brezkompromisnih živalskih liberacionistov, kot so Gary L. Francione, Tom Regan in Steve Best, Fowlerjeva razvija bolj zapleteno moralno perspektivo zlasti na področju znanstvenih/medicinskih raziskav na živalih, ki jo bolj približa Donni Haraway in Petru Singerju. Čeprav avtorica nikakor ne zanika strahot industrijskega kmetovanja ali biomedicinskih eksperimentov z živalmi, njen roman obenem ostaja tako antropocentričen kot humanističen. V nasprotju s tem, kar ima hitro rastoče polje živalskih študij povedati na temo antropocentrizma in humanizma, v romanu *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* to nista nujno slabi besedi.