

# Other Temporalities of Life: Zoopoetics and Animal Perspectivism

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**ABSTRACT:** “Animals, who do not think at all, the boa for whom digestion is a matter of long days, the marmot who sleeps all winter, the whale who lives for three hundred years, the seagull who flies for a month without tiring”: these creatures, evoked by Proust in *Jean Santeuil*, provide examples of relationships to reality and duration that are radically different from those of human beings. Proust, that “expert” in time, is not the only writer to be fascinated by the diversity of animal temporalities—and perhaps by unthinkable forms of extratemporalities. At the very moment of the Sixth Extinction, contemporary writers, by complex and various literary means, are attempting to immerse their readers in other forms of projection into the future. The problem is knowing whether the ark on which the Proustian zoo embarked 120 years ago is still able to float: “For you are dimming, whales! Like enormous lamps. And if you are not going to be there, you and the other beasts, do you think we will be able to find our way in the dark?” (Chris Marker and Mario Ruspoli, *Vive la baleine!*, Argos Films, 1972)

“ANIMALS, WHO DO NOT THINK AT ALL, the boa for whom digestion is a matter of long days, the marmot who sleeps all winter, the whale who lives for three hundred years, the seagull who flies for a month without tiring”: these creatures, evoked by Proust in *Jean Santeuil* at the end of the nineteenth century, provide examples of relationships to reality and duration that are

radically different from those of human beings.<sup>1</sup> Proust, that “expert” in time, is not the only writer to be fascinated by the diversity of animal temporalities—and perhaps by unthinkable forms of extratemporalities. At the very moment of the Sixth Extinction, contemporary writers, by complex and various literary means, are attempting to immerse their readers in alternate ways of experiencing the present and in other forms of projection into the future.

This otherness of animals’ relationship with time is today undermined by a rigid and compartmentalized conception of “nature,” in a contradiction revisited by many writers concerned with the *mot juste*: linguistic accuracy is a precondition of Justice. The first chapter of the book of Genesis directed *all* the living, those animated with breath, toward profusion (“Be fruitful and multiply”), after which the episode of the ark opened simultaneously on a story to be handed down and on an ethical future. Many contemporary texts, on the other hand, depict a planet transformed into a capitalist and conservative “nature preserve.” It will therefore be necessary to examine how literature can assert itself today as an ark for the future of all living things.

### **“WHAT IS TIME?”—SAINT AUGUSTINE, THE FLY, AND THE DORMOUSE**

Numerous specialists in life sciences, philosophy, or ecology have shown that the only viable future for humans is a common future with this immense living organism that is the planet—what is below ground, the atmosphere, and all of the living included. It is far from incongruous to use animals in order to consider a subject as serious and ominous as “visions of the future” and to show that literature reveals some blind spots and preconceptions regarding this topic: “animals and birds . . . have only the present tense, there is no past or future at all,”<sup>2</sup> imagines Amos Oz in his contemporary retelling of the stories of the Garden of Eden and Noah’s ark. In fact, more than allegorical animal characters, literary forms and poetic invention—when they are disarticulated—direct us toward other ways of experiencing temporality: stylistic displacements, unusual phrasing tempos, and grammar attacks<sup>3</sup> that make it possible to restore other intensities of life.

This side step is certainly never a total shift toward otherness, though it is an efficient displacement. In addition, biological kingdoms (mineral, plant, animal, . . .) represent a fragmentary classification of life that relies largely on Western attitudes to space (plants considered rooted and immobile, animals endowed with movement), with the relationship to the space itself being dependent on a culturally specific conception of time: one that moves from a before to an after. To give just a few examples: we obviously forget that forests advance or retreat over periods that are not discernible over a human lifetime and follow cycles that are difficult for a Westerner accustomed to understanding time as linear to read. We privilege the immediate growth that follows the birth of mammals over the growth of a seed or a chrysalis, which embodies a temporality centered on patience and opportunity. We are dazzled by the free movement of many animals (often vertebrates and mammals), which are characterized, just as humans are, by their individuality, and we are blind to the spatial and cyclical deployment or durational temporality of plants and collective organisms (such as hives, anthills, fungi, or corals). Consider the metamorphosis

<sup>1</sup> Marcel Proust, *Jean Santeuil*, ed. Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, “Bibliothèque de la Pléiade,” 1971), 369.

<sup>2</sup> Amos Oz, *Suddenly in the Depths of the Forest* [Pitom be-'omek ha-ya'ar; 2005], trans. Sandra Sonderson (New York: Harcourt, 2011), 102.

<sup>3</sup> See letter to Madame Straus, November 6, 1908, in *Marcel Proust, Selected Letters*, ed. Philip Kolb, trans. Terence Kilmartin, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 408–9.

of insects, the molting of serpents, the replacement of antlers in deer. Indeed, many animals, like certain insects and amphibians, are confined to a territory barely larger than that of a climbing plant (accused of being “invasive” . . .). Finally, the immense variety of relations to time (up to and including its irrelevance) does not refer simply to the variety of species or kingdoms but to that of human cultures. Exterminations and globalization have considerably reduced or rendered uniform the marvelous diversity of ways of experiencing time, be that of minority populations within the Western world or of the non-Western inhabitants of the globe.

It is therefore necessary to reject the abstract concept of time in order to consider it—Saint Augustine and Proust each expressed it in his own way—as an *experience* of embodiment or even possession: “What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not.”<sup>4</sup>

Narrative entanglements and poetic resplendence allow us precisely to abandon the verb “to be” (“what it is”) and the gnomic present—defining and definitive—which haunts the French language; and in doing so, they also make it possible to escape the unfolding and unraveling of lived experience. Literature already accepts a complex challenge in trying to re-create the many ways mankind has to constitute itself from the temporality that has not yet come into being—that is, the future—and yet, from a phenomenological point of view, is always already “there,” since it is our horizon. How, then, can one account for the temporal experience of animals—inasmuch as they all have one? How to project the vision of the future of a hexactinellid sponge, a collective organism whose assemblages are more than 10,000 years old; of gorillas whose territory is drastically reduced; of the ephemeral mayflies, which live barely a day and are one of the oldest extant winged insects (they first appeared in the Carboniferous period, between 250 and 350 million years ago); of cetaceans whose song—spatial sonar or language particular to the species—is scrambled by the ocean’s noise pollution; of Cayenne, Donna Haraway’s dog, who eagerly anticipates the time for a walk?

Changing the skin, “being a beast” to use Charles Foster’s expression, is illusory only for the naive who imagine becoming-animal as a metamorphosis (an illusion against which Deleuze and Guattari have warned us in *A Thousand Plateaus*).<sup>5</sup> After extensive readings in physiology and ethology, Foster embarked on a sometimes hilarious physical immersion in the concrete world of a swift and an otter, a world populated by edible insects and raw fish, a world where time has unimaginable units, linked, among other things, to an untransposable speed of movement. Foster, a veterinarian and professor at Oxford University, knew in advance that his undertaking was impossible; he also knew that attempting it would have a certain value that only experience would reveal—as witnessed by his awareness of the importance of our corporeality in our understanding of time.<sup>6</sup>

Limitrophy and the transfers and the deterritorializations specific to literature and philosophy respond to this narrative attempt that has a physical basis. At the end of his life, in his *ABC Primer*, Deleuze, despising the “human relationship with the animal,” thus adheres to “having an animal relationship with the animal.” According to him, literature carries “language and syntax

<sup>4</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Complete Nicene and Post-Nicene Church Fathers Collection, ser. 1, vol. 1 (New York: Catholic Way Publishing, 2015), bk. 11, chap. 14, 283.

<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Charles Foster, *Being a Beast* (London: Profile Books, 2016).

to the limit that separates man from animal; we must be on this very limit,” between “thought” and “non-thought.” Derrida might have remembered this when he gave his lecture “The Animal That Therefore I Am.” Deleuze here takes the opposite view from Heidegger, for whom animals were, according to *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, the “poor in world” (*weltärme*),<sup>7</sup> monopolized by their urges and locked in their present. On the other hand, Deleuze sees the little cat as a being-for-death, like man: “I saw . . . how an animal looks for a corner to die.”<sup>8</sup>

Death’s near or distant future is not an antonym for pure animal presence but its circumference. However, considering a projection into death as a permanent concern, seeing in caution and vigilance the negative of animal freedom, means to dramatize the wealth of animal modes of existence that include moments of stasis, pleasure, or the instantaneous vital impulse beloved by poets. Still, the latter have also been fascinated by the relationship of animals to agony, whether restoring their energetic struggle or their resigned acceptance, no doubt because this particular present, lived entirely from what comes after but has not yet occurred, fundamentally connects all creatures, humans included. Literature then takes charge of the deflation of the universe that each being, however small, institutes through its life. It also aims to particularize that agony, rejecting the anonymity of the species. Marguerite Duras thus transforms the death of “that fly” into an “event”—that is, into a moment worthy of narration, literally grievable and contained in a terribly “long” immediate future—lasting “between five and eight minutes”: “The death of a fly is still death. It’s death marching toward a certain end of the world, which widens the field of the final sleep. When you see a dog die, or a horse die, you say something, like *poor thing*. . . . But when a fly dies, nothing, we don’t record it.”<sup>9</sup>

What Duras calls “this displacement of literature”<sup>10</sup> has been tried by others, from Béatrix Beck<sup>11</sup> to Marie Darrieussecq: the fly and its “eyes with many facets”<sup>12</sup>—extending the field of vision to 360 degrees, to the body wavering between monstrosity and wonder, to the life contained between the present minute and the future minute—have fascinated more than one writer. Being “infra-animal,”<sup>13</sup> minuscule and despicable, the fly offers a radically other perspective on the world and time.

Radical or not, a displacement toward another animal’s relationship to the future, even a mammal’s, can be both arduous and fascinating. In Jacques Lacarrière’s *Le pays sous l’écorce* (The country under the bark), the narrator passes (perhaps in a dream . . .) “between two worlds,” leaving, imperfectly, his skin of a “hominid.” He molts and reaches a different understanding of time: “Yes, I was lucky to meet a dormouse when I got out of the bark. With an annelid, a myriapod, an

<sup>7</sup> It should be mentioned in passing that this expression, whose philosophical character was taken for granted in the innumerable comments to which it gave rise, has never been related to that of the officious black notebooks, recently published, which define the Jews as totally “worldless” (*weltlosen*): “metaphysics” and its “fundamental concepts” do have an ideology.

<sup>8</sup> “A as in Animal,” in *L’abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* [Gilles Deleuze’s ABC primer], interview with Claire Parnet (1988), directed by Pierre-André Boutang and Michel Pamart (Sodaperaga, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Marguerite Duras, *Writing [Écrire]* (Cambridge, MA: Lumen Editions, 1998), 25.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 23–25: “It lasted about five to eight minutes. It was long.” “Yes. That’s right, the death of that fly has become this displacement of literature.”

<sup>11</sup> Béatrix Beck, *Confidences de gargouille* [Confessions of a gargoyle] (Paris: Grasset, 1998), 217.

<sup>12</sup> Marie Darrieussecq, *My Phantom Husband* (New York: New Press, 1999), 158.

<sup>13</sup> See “Animots infimes d’Anne Simon” [Anne Simon’s tiny *animots*], *Techniques et culture*, January 16, 2018, <https://tc.hypotheses.org/798>.

arthropod, I would certainly have felt discouraged. Too many abysses separate us and especially too many different mouthparts.”<sup>14</sup>

However, this first encounter and this first metamorphosis lead to a dead end. Indeed, it is difficult to communicate with an animal for whom hibernation—where dream and reality are inseparable—is the key to the world and who cannot project toward the future because it does not distinguish the past (“*Be-fore*,” he repeated in a worried voice; “What is that?”) from the present: “Every time, I had to start all over again: introduce myself, make myself recognized. And, especially, reassure him. Do dormice have no memory?”

In the context of this article I will not return to the issue of anthropomorphism that I have addressed elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Let me just remind you that anthropomorphism is not an unavoidable condition of our relationship to the world, nor is it an a priori aporia of animal literature. Indeed, before being anthropomorphic, humans are primatomorphic, mammalomorphic, and simply biomorphic:<sup>16</sup> not only the Darwinian logic of evolution but also a common historical coevolution<sup>17</sup> explain that figural language and very complex narrative inventions, specific to the human species, can account for animal emotions and *forms* of life. In return, animals’ varied movements, gestures, and rhythms nevertheless institute the animals as powers of expression, at the very heart of the living world (*Lebenswelt*) favored by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.

It is therefore logical that animals should be part of our narratives, whether transmitted, invented, or explanatory: the horizon of the human world is poetic and hermeneutic, and in this world woven from words, animals move, inextricably constituted from their own experiences, their tempos, our words and assemblages that connect them to us, for better or for worse. The phenomenologist Wilhelm Schapp thus postulates that “we accede to a tree, a plant and an animal only insofar as they arise before us as entangled in stories”: “the animal and the plant can come to us only under the category of a story.”<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, as we have seen with Lacarrière’s dormouse, animals do not simply offer an ahuman apprehension of the future or a departure from Western temporality, which connects sight (a sense that is irrelevant for many species) to a projection forward from an individual psychic center and to progress. Animals’ modes of existence, sometimes so close and sometimes so foreign to ours, also propose a future for a certain type of literature, one that takes its momentum from its uprooting and its capacity to make one step out of oneself. George Steiner showed how, when it becomes historically and psychologically impossible to write in one’s native language, some writers chose to write in another language, to inscribe into its misuse this principled “displacement.”<sup>19</sup> Taking, in turn, this powerful idea, zoopoetics postulates that exile outside oneself, especially out of one’s species, does not occur despite literature but because of it and within its

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Lacarrière, *Le pays sous l'écorce* (Paris: Seuil, 1980), 14–16 for all the quotations from this work.

<sup>15</sup> See esp. Anne Simon, “Literature and Animal Expressiveness: Of the Cognitive and Ethic Aspects of Zoopoetics,” in *Outside the Anthropological Machine: Crossing the Human-Animal Divide and Other Exit Strategies*, ed. Chiara Mengozzi (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> See Brian L. Keeley, “Anthropomorphism, Primatomorphism, Mammalomorphism: Understanding Cross-Species Comparisons,” *Biology and Philosophy*, no. 19 (2004): 521–40; Baptiste Morizot, *Les diplomates: Cohabiter avec les loups sur une autre carte du vivant* [The diplomats: Cohabiting with wolves on a different map of the living] (Paris: Wildproject, 2016), 163.

<sup>17</sup> See Paul Shepard, *The Only World We've Got: A Paul Shepard Reader* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Wilhelm Schapp, *Empêtrés dans des histoires: L'être de l'homme et de la chose* [Entangled in stories: The being of man and things], trans. Jean Greisch (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992), 162–63.

<sup>19</sup> George Steiner, “Extraterritorial,” *TriQuarterly* 17 (1970): 119–27.

core. This is a thesis I stand by: poetic language is capable of restoring plural views of the world; otherness is thus included in it. Béatrix Beck writes in *L'enfant chat* (The girl cat; a kitten with the name of Soizic, called "S" by the narrator): "S plays with an argus [a type of butterfly], utters peacock cries, knocks it down, eats it. An ant carries a beam. S tries to catch these creatures, overtakes them instead of reaching them, is unable to slow down. Her galloping ideas propel her into the distance. I can still see her by my side when already she has ventured *as far as the eye can see*."<sup>20</sup>

The difference in vital rhythm between a human and a cat that is so fast that it becomes invisible cannot be reduced to a quantifiable difference. It induces another relationship to the future, inseparable from the terrain (of attack, of rest, or of play). The future (in French *avenir* is composed from *à* and *venir*: i.e., "what is about to come") is still there, not projected into an afterworld like that of humans, but included in the very present of an emotion: "Performs every act excluding everything else. The absence of follow-up in ideas is one of the elements of its beauty."<sup>21</sup> This motion outside itself—"off-subject," including the grammatical one—takes the form of doing, of a gesture, of a movement, that is to say, in the poetry of adverbs ("away," "still," "already") and verbs in the present tense ("exceeds," "propels," "ventures"). Furthermore, Beck underlines the intermingling of all the dimensions of time constructed by many Westerners. Thus, encountering snow for the first time, the little cat Soizic "tries to leave by the back door, believing that it will open on another season": spatial thresholds are openings toward a future experienced as an articulation or a dimension of the present.<sup>22</sup>

### STUFFED NATURE, FROZEN FUTURE

This emulation of the present and the future and this ability to be ahead of oneself, which is one of animals' modalities of being, are both fundamentally linked to the possibility of creating and surveying a territory, of constructing hiding places or nests, and drawing boundaries. With habitat loss and the concomitant extinction of many species, a political and economic rhetoric has developed to express, with worn-out and interchangeable terms, the future of nature and the diversity of living beings. Notions of "nature conservation," "saving the species," "nature preserves," and "gene banks" (especially for seeds, such as the Svalbard in Norway), deriving from the seemingly laudable idea of "protecting nature," raise issues examined by many, often dystopian, novels.

Anticipating the big red-haired brother's complete extinction in *Sans l'orang-outan* (Without the orangutan), Éric Chevillard suggests that it will not just produce a hole in "biodiversity" that humans can accept with a little nostalgia. What will disappear along with what in Malay is significantly called "the man of the forest" (*orang + hutan*) is a way of being in the world that no human will be able to reinvent, as well as emotions that are masked precisely by an objectivizing term such as "biodiversity": "During the time of the orangutan, . . . I would take my head out of the bag, I breathed more deeply, there was this big-bellied, hairy man, this redhead who with a large arm gesture embraced vast perspectives and showed us new directions; wherever he used to stand, where he is no longer, vertigo overtakes me, my legs are shaking, all my self-confidence leaves me, I know only how to fall."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Béatrix Beck, *L'enfant chat* (Grasset: Arléa, 1984), 46 (my emphasis).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>23</sup> Éric Chevillard, *Sans l'orang-outan* (Paris: Minuit, 2007), 45–46.

A future without orangutans is a mutilated future, which has been deprived of possible gestures and grace linked to bodies that invested a world that was originally common and shared in other ways and that was not the monospecific human niche. This future—and less paradoxically than it may appear—is an inhuman future. Romain Gary understood that “the unrestricted existence” and “cumbersome form” of elephants were a paradigm of all liberty, and that humanity does not exist without an elsewhere that he calls a “margin.”<sup>24</sup> Humanity “in itself” (this “in itself” always leads to “among itself”) is a contradiction in terms suggested by Chevillard: “to live without them, to adapt, to reposition everything in this new context, to reorder everything, to learn to do without their great gestures, their four able hands—I already know that I cannot, some disorganization will inevitably occur in our lives.”<sup>25</sup>

Other writers return to the a priori of the terms evoked above. Thus, in his *Rivières de la nuit* (Rivers of the night) Xavier Boissel describes a lost “ark,” in other words a seed reservoir intended to repopulate a lifeless planet, which ends up disappearing together with its guardian, the last man. The shelving in this deadly ark is in the shape of a petrified library, which, by a principle of reversion, freezes the very virtuality of the future in order to transform it into a necessity: “Things had been methodically planned, nothing was left to chance. Here, everything was legible and I suffered a few seconds of vertigo, like walking toward an ideal, abstract line, but one that foreshadowed a time when the universe would have revealed its key, put end to end the fragments of the same secret that was being abolished in this library, illuminated, infinite, perfectly motionless, armed with precious volumes—incorruptible.”<sup>26</sup>

In his *Mémoires de la jungle* (Jungle memories), Tristan Garcia imagines a near future in which a chimpanzee narrator describes a sanctuary for experimental animals—between H. G. Wells’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, Joseph Kessel’s *The Lion*, and Robert Merle’s *The Day of the Dolphin*—a perverted “Earth Zoo,” subject to a deluge of rain, tears, and lies.<sup>27</sup> These works suggest that zoos and other menageries presuppose what is “nature” and what are human/animal relations: the zoos are models of a future that cannot be filled with anything other than this present which announces it.

Nature thus becomes a fetishized idol: a *stuffed* nature, frozen in a cultural representation that is also a very handy politico-economic decoy. As a trainer points out in *Que font les rennes après Noël?* (What do the reindeer do after Christmas?), the pretext of animal welfare is what feeds the modern myth of nature considered as a material receptacle: “The animals must remain well balanced because they are being used for intensive breeding, they are used to replenish nature, it is necessary that they keep bits and pieces from the period.”<sup>28</sup> “Preservation” and “conservation” are contrary to nature seen as perpetual surge and invention: “Certainly Greek man was far less quick than we are to identify *phusis* with some inert ‘given.’ Perhaps it is because, for him, nature is itself living that *mimêsis* can be not enslaving and that compositional and creative imitation of nature can be possible.”<sup>29</sup> In wanting to maintain “nature” in a pseudosavage state by means of a transformation of a few individuals into genetic reservoirs or museum exhibits,

<sup>24</sup> Romain Gary, “Dear Elephant, Sir,” *Life* 63, no. 25 (December 22, 1967): 126–38.

<sup>25</sup> Chevillard, *Sans l’orang-outan*, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Xavier Boissel, *Rivières de la nuit* (Paris: Éditions Inculte, 2014), 33–34.

<sup>27</sup> Tristan Garcia, *Mémoires de la jungle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Olivia Rosenthal, *Que font les rennes après Noël?* (Paris: Gallimard, Verticales, 2010), 93.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (London: Routledge, 1981), 48.

we denature natural *processes* as well as create unpredictable intertwinings among the living. Any possibility of evolution and any indeterminacy are forbidden: what is a future blocked by the present but a future consigned to settlement? With the objectification and mechanization of life, humanity has transformed its world (*Welt*) into an environment (*Umwelt*), complains Michel Deguy, about the current ecocide: “the plantigrades are ringed, the birds have electronic chips, the fish are counted. Infinity is stocked.”<sup>30</sup>

Animals are thus summoned to make themselves the guardians of a static and fixed state, at the antipodes of the dynamism and the momentum that characterize animal life according to Hans Jonas; the present of animal life is a promise of inventiveness much more than a state of reactivity (to stimuli, in particular).<sup>31</sup> “If we want an orangutan to remain an orangutan we must interfere as little as possible, otherwise we humanize it,” says a trainer.<sup>32</sup> The natural world is now framed by cultural injunctions that turn the present into a horizon of all living things enclosed upon itself. The social “acceleration” of time diagnosed by Hartmut Rosa produces onsite what is reproducible, that is, everything, except for a surge or a future (*à-venir*):<sup>33</sup> “The declared goal of animal parks is to perpetuate the species such as they are and ultimately to make their reintroduction into the wild possible. We must therefore maintain the animals’ instincts, reproduce in captivity their way of life.”<sup>34</sup>

Animals are thus subject to a contradictory imperative: on the one hand, to live in their own way by inventing behavioral and affective responses to events and, on the other, to remain what people imagine they are. The irony of the above quotation implies that animals are asked to imitate themselves in order to continue to be—in the future—what they were according to humans (but never were according to their own perspective). But “nature” in general does not exist; as Anna Tsing has shown, it is an assemblage with moving vanishing lines, where a multitude of creatures, forms of existence (like that of a mushroom or a revenant), and stories—tragic or resilient, antagonistic or fusional—are entangled.<sup>35</sup> It is therefore necessary to leave the confrontation between man and animal—the devouring as shown by John Vaillant in *The Tiger*, is an entanglement among others, like the caress, the dressage, the sale, the fable, or the avoidance.<sup>36</sup> In fact, these interconnections have to teach us about the future possibilities of “survival . . . in precarious times.”<sup>37</sup>

This present that prepares a standardized, measured, and controllable future is denounced in many narratives, including those to which I could have returned in the context of this analysis, involving industrial farming and its mechanized temporality.<sup>38</sup> As Günther Anders pointed out,

<sup>30</sup> Michel Deguy, “Un poète devant Heidegger” [A poet before Heidegger], in “Philosophie, poésie: Q & R: Michel Deguy” [Philosophy, poetry: Questions and answers: Michel Deguy], *Critique*, no. 743 (April 2009): 290–91.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

<sup>32</sup> Rosenthal, *Que font les rennes*, 88.

<sup>33</sup> Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Rosenthal, *Que font les rennes*, 90.

<sup>35</sup> Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, “Enabling Entanglements,” in *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), vii–xvii.

<sup>36</sup> John Vaillant, *The Tiger: A True Story of Vengeance and Survival* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Tsing, “Enabling Entanglements,” 2.

<sup>38</sup> See Anne Simon, “Zoopoethics: Literature Challenged by Industrial Livestock Farming,” trans. Margot Lauwers and Bénédicte Meillon, in *Dwellings of Enchantment: Writing and Reenchanting the Earth*, ed. Bénédicte Meillon (forthcoming); Anne Simon, “Biopower and the Contemporary Novel: Writing the Objectification of the Animal,” trans. Miranda Mueller, *Inmunkwahak: The Journal of the Humanities* (Yonsei University, Seoul),

our present is no longer an epoch full of memory to be transmitted and of desire for invention but a mere “delay” before an enclosed future, which will not open to any present or to any future: “the cemetery that awaits us is such that the dead who rest will leave no one behind.”<sup>39</sup> This cemetery and its sordid pits were dug in many ways in the twentieth century for millions of humans. Some writers, who were directly affected, felt the need to change their skin and put on that of dumb animals in order to account for a widespread explosion of the living. Vasily Grossman in “The Road” thus places the reader in the perspective of a mule enduring averbal suffering in order to present the hypnotic and senseless vision of an Eastern Front transformed into an eternal present, white, frozen, and haunted by the undead.<sup>40</sup>

Closer to us, in 1997, Svetlana Alexievich, in *Voices from Chernobyl*, offers a chorus of polyphonic testimonies. In such a context of human disaster, in a way that is less incongruous than it seems, love and pity for the animals take on an unexpected form: without being our fellow beings, they are considered as our intimates—sometimes as our little ones. Thus, one of the eyewitnesses, Arkadi Filin, remains stuck in his activity of “eliminator.” The collective struggle of “us” against radioactivity is transformed into a fight against diversity and the promise of life, lived at a level of individual responsibility by a traumatized “I”:

We buried the forest. We sawed the trees into meter-and-a-half pieces and packed them in cellophane and threw them into graves. I couldn't sleep at night. I'd close my eyes and see something black moving, turning over—as if it were alive—live tracts of land—with bugs, spiders, worms—I didn't know any of them, what they were called, just bugs, spiders, ants. And they were small and big, yellow and black. All different colors. One of the poets says somewhere that animals are a different people. I killed them by the ten, by the hundred, thousand, not even knowing what they were called. I destroyed their houses, their secrets. And buried them. Buried them.<sup>41</sup>

## ARKS: EARTH AND LITERATURE

On the planet swallowed up by the waters, Noah's ark was a refuge that constituted the world: there are innumerable commentaries on the concrete aspects of life—organic, alimentary, sexual, between prey and predators, etc.—led by the animals and the people. The biblical ark held the promise of another world, relying on a new ethic, related to language. *Tevah*/תבה in Hebrew means “box” and “basket” (as in Moses's cradle), “ark” (in the sense of a floating “safe,” a refuge for the survivors), and “word.” “To enter into the *tevah* / into the ark,” as Noah was ordered, is thus to enter into the world of the symbolic and the mot juste. In *Shnei luhot ha-brit* (The two tablets of the covenant), Isaiah Horowitz, a commentator on the Flood episode, relates the ark's measurements (30 cubits high, 300 cubits long, and 50 cubits wide) to the numerical values of the letters lamed (ל = 30), shin (ש = 300), and nun (ן = 50). These letters form the word *lashon*/לשן,

no. 102 (December 2014): 23–42, [https://f-origin.hypotheses.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/313/files/2018/10/Biopower-and-the-Contemporary-Novel\\_first-proofs\\_Inmunkwahak\\_SIMON2014.pdf](https://f-origin.hypotheses.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/313/files/2018/10/Biopower-and-the-Contemporary-Novel_first-proofs_Inmunkwahak_SIMON2014.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Günther Anders, “Le délai” [The wait time] (1960), in *La menace nucléaire* [The nuclear threat], trans. Christophe David (Paris: Éditions le Rocher / Le serpent à plumes, 2006), 252.

<sup>40</sup> Vasily Grossman, *The Road: Stories, Journalism, and Essays*, ed. Robert Chandler (New York: New York Review of Books, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Svetlana Alexievich, *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster*, trans. Keith Gessen (New York: Picador, 2005), 89.

which refers to the organ of language (the tongue) and the language, or tongue, of a country in all its meanings, including poetic. The term *tevah*, as interpreted by Marc-Alain Ouaknin with the Baal Shem Tov, is therefore a word that makes us enter into the structures of a language.<sup>42</sup>

It is understandable that today writers return to this ark in danger: poetic language is a precarious, unstable, and threatened refuge that describes or decrypts disaster. The inhabitants of the biblical ark ended up finding a mountain on which to disembark. Nowadays, the planet itself is both the ark and the mountain: the very site of the possible future is therefore the casualty of tension, since it is the base on which to moor new life and its permanently damaged soil. Is Amos Oz really addressing the children, in *Suddenly in the Depths of the Forest*, when he evokes the silence and the denial which envelops the “winter’s night when it poured down,” a diluvian moment when all the familiar, domestic, and wild animals have disappeared?<sup>43</sup> The village inhabitants tended “not to talk about that. . . . Sometimes they even forgot why. In fact, they prefer to forget.”<sup>44</sup> The planetary village is emptying out, leaving lonely and amnesic humans to themselves in an ark<sup>45</sup> desperately emptied of its animals; but the new Eden that the curious children discovered in the forest cannot be a positive vision of the future. The primordial Eden contained within it all the creatures. Conversely, the separation between humans and animals at the origin of the hidden garden in “the depths of the forest,” as well as the voluntary exile of Nehi who had created it and could not be satisfied with the language of animals, engenders nostalgia, sadness, and jealousy.<sup>46</sup> There cannot be one side for the humans and another for the animals. Indeed, in chapter 1 of Genesis, the humans are certainly granted specific prerogatives; significantly, however, humans are created on the same day as the other Earthlings, and the phrase “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:22, 28) is used equally for all living things. The profusion on Earth is intended to be both animal and human.

If the diversion of the ark—transformed into preserves, laboratories, zoos—is found in many contemporary writers, Amos Oz has the distinction of suggesting that this diversion is related both to a false word and to a stranded memory. Danir the Roofer thus believes he is able to repopulate the village by going with his two helpers “to the distant valleys” to look for “a hundred different kinds of birds, animals, fish, and insects. They’d go from house to house and scatter the animals in every yard and release the fish into the waters of our river. So, the village would be just the way it had been before that cursed night. The young men and women were stunned into silence by those words: instead of making them laugh, Danir’s words suddenly cast a shadow over the square.”<sup>47</sup>

Danir also pretends that the animals are replaceable. However, the villagers regret, not simply animality as such, but specifically this or that animal, often endowed with a name or a particular character.

The function of the initial Flood (Gen. 6–7) was to propose another way of life, not to turn the future into the double amnesia of a repressed past: as an object of a narrative, the Flood led

<sup>42</sup> *Baal Chem Tov ‘al ha-Tora, parashat Noah* [Baal Shem Tov on the Torah, section Noah], commentary by Marc-Alain Ouaknin, in *Zeugma: Mémoire biblique et déluges contemporains* [Zeugma: Biblical memory and contemporary floods] (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 263.

<sup>43</sup> Oz, *Suddenly*, 23.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 42–43: all of the living are “passengers” “in the same boat.”

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 106, 114–15.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

to a transmission oriented toward a renewed vision of the future, not toward silence (“we will not talk about it anymore”) that folds the dimensions of time on themselves. The problem raised by contemporary writers and artists is therefore whether Noah’s animals and later those of Proust, evoked in the incipit of this contribution, have embarked on an ark still able to float in this day and age: “For you are dimming, whales! Like enormous lamps. And if you are not going to be there, you and the other beasts, do you think we will be able to find our way in the dark?”<sup>48</sup> A

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<sup>48</sup> Chris Marker and Mario Ruspoli, *Vive la baleine!* [Long live the whale!] (Paris: Argos Films, 1972), 1:45–55.