

**The Relation between
Ecocriticism, Critical Animal Studies and Theater
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Abstract

Theater is an effective cultural and communal institution that should be part of the ecological problem. Both founding an eco-canon and rereading the depiction of nature on stage, are fundamental tasks in order to apply ecocriticism to theater studies. Critical Animal Studies is a field that has been developed during the recent decades to study the role of animals in human societies. It aims at uncovering the ideologies that pervade our cultural practices and presenting a new conception of the relation between species. Engaging theater studies with critical animal studies promises a change by bringing ecological and species issues live to the community. What differentiates the CAS approach from old approaches regarding animals is that we no more focus on the symbolism or the imagery that the animal stands for but on the real animals and their lives.

Keywords:

Animal Studies – ecocriticism – posthumanism – animal representation – speciesism

**العلاقة بين
المسرح والنقد البيئي والدراسات النقدية للحيوان
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الملخص**

شرح النقاد والكتاب في إبراز أهمية تطبيق النقد البيئي في المسرح منذ التسعينيات وهذا عن طريق كتابة أعمال مسرحية تبرز أهمية البيئة والعناصر غير الإنسانية بالإضافة إلى تقديم قراءات جديدة لأعمال مسرحية قديمة تم إغفال أهمية ودلالة الجانب البيئي والعناصر الإنسانية بها. لطالما قام الإنسان بصفة "الأنا" بفرض قوالب على الحيوان باعتباره "الآخر" لذلك فإن استكشاف طرق تمثيل الحيوان في الأعمال المسرحية من شأنه خلق دورا في إبراز الدور المهمش للحيوان ولفت الأنظار لحقوق الحيوان. وبالتالي تبرز أهمية الإشارة إلى العلاقات الحيوانية الإنسانية في النظرية والثقافة والمجتمع بالإضافة إلى العلاقة ما بين النقد البيئي والمسرح وظهور الدراسات النقدية للحيوان وكيفية نشأتها وتطورها من مجرد حركة معنية بحقوق الحيوان إلى حركة نقدية أكثر راديكالية. إن الهدف الرئيسي للنظرية النقدية للحيوان هو إبراز "مسألة الحيوان" و دفعها لصدارة الدراسات النقدية؛ فهي تربط التمييز بين الأنواع بسياسات الهوية كما انها تهدف لبحث ودراسة الايديولوجيات والخطابات المختلفة التي أوجدت الفجوة ما بين الإنسان والحيوان. فكونها معنية بكيفية تمثيل الحيوان أدبيا واجتماعيا فهي تهدف إلى كشف الايديولوجيات التي تتخلل ممارساتنا الإجتماعية المختلفة من خلال تقديم تصور جديد للعلاقة بين الأنواع.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

تمثيل الحيوان - العلاقات الحيوانية البشرية/غير البشرية - الدراسات النقدية للحيوان- النقد البيئي - مابعد الإنسانية

Awareness of the ecological crisis emerged long after the catastrophic disaster of the Dust Bowl in the 30s through people like Aldo Leopold, Leo Marx and Rachel Carson. They started to realize that if people are still engaged in wrong practices towards the environment somewhere, the catastrophic results will not be confined to a certain place or species on the planet.

In the late forties, Aldo Leopold's "Land Ethic," in his *Sand County Almanac*, began to question the fixed notions of human beings who thought of the non-human world as a utility that serves their interests whether economically or psychologically. He drew attention to the fact that humans' relation to nature is governed by their economic interests without any moral or legal commitment that should regulate this relation. He criticized all the values that were laid upon nature in confining its value to either materialistic or visual consumption (Knight 3-5).

Since the sixties, the different social movements have affected the various discourses of the critical theory and equally affected ecocriticism though it was not as popular as studies like feminism and post-colonialism. Although ecocriticism is also concerned with an oppressed "Other", yet the fact that this other is "non-human" and is voiceless deprived it from being given much attention. The flame of the contemporary environmental movement was sparked by Rachel Carson in the early 1960s. In her *Silent Spring*, she highlighted the destructing effects of pesticide and herbicides as "nonselective chemicals that have the power to kill every insect" (8).

A growing awareness to the ecological problems demonstrated that they are not merely social problems, but also political and scientific problematic subjects that need to be investigated from several perspectives. Thus, like other political and social movements, environmental concerns found their way to literary studies during the 70s although this was done through individual efforts under diverse headings like pastoralism, regionalism or American studies. During the 80s and the 90s, scholars' endeavors to make the field of environmental literary studies a powerful branch in the academic institution were successful. Ecocriticism aims at deconstructing the dualism between nature and culture. Unlike other political movements that limit the "world" to the social realm, ecocriticism aims at engaging human

with the greater world that is “the entire ecosphere”(Glotfelty xv-xxi).

Critics differ in attributing the exploitation of nature to different eras or cultural practices. Nevertheless, none could argue about the interrelation between political and ecological issues. Our ill practices and habits towards the natural world are no doubt a collective result of political, religious, theological and economic grand narratives. Gabriel Egan refers to the radical exploitation of nature and earth resources that coincided with the Industrial Revolution and the role it played in transforming the ideology of people towards nature (Egan 22).

More radical ecocritics call for a change that aims at reforming the actions and processes of the political and economic institutions of the society. They believe that cultural notions and the discourse that reinforces the ideology of anthropocentrism should be deconstructed. Moreover, ecocritics aim at superseding such an anthropocentric attitude with biocentrism that would instead replace the human exploitation of nature with more appreciation of the fundamental importance and worth of nature and the other than *Homo sapiens* species. Thus, ecocriticism aims at examining the environment and the way it is represented in literature from an interdisciplinary perspective that engages literature with science, politics and morality (Clark 2-8).

Ecocriticism has often been trivialized by those who believe that issues that threaten the social and political welfare of human beings are more important. This, of course, is refuted as ecocriticism engages itself in social concerns by means of “developing insights of earlier critical movements, ecofeminists, social ecologists and environmental justice advocates seek a synthesis of environmental and social concerns” (Garrard 3). In fact, the field of humanities seems to have been alienated from science to a large extent for a long time. However, in engaging ecology and humanities, ecocriticism marks a change in this critical attitude (Egan 33). According to Glen Love, ecocriticism “find[s] itself in some new relationship with other relevant disciplines, particularly the life sciences” (37).

This means that ecocriticism is studying literature from an ecopolitical stance. However, ecocriticism is not limited to reading works that are written about nature. Like other kinds of political

criticism, ecocriticism is concerned with “all that happens in literary culture that tends to create or sustain the political, social, and cultural conditions that ecopolitics seeks to change” (Egan 34). Rereading literary works with the aim of uncovering ecological ideologies aims at proving that literary works, social practices and political inclinations are all integral.

Though the field of ecocriticism had been explored since the 70s, much of the attention had been given to the genres of novel and poetry while theater had been ignored to a large extent. Despite remarkable progress in the field of ecocriticism during the past three decades, applying the ecological discourse to theater studies has not been given the same attention. The reason behind this, Theresa May argues, is that the existing definition of ecocriticism as a theory is incomplete since it often disregards the political connotation implied in it. Ecocriticism, like feminism and postcolonialism, is filled with power relations that should be part of its definition. Ecocriticism is “a critical (discursive) perspective” based on the scientific field of ecology and at the same time is connected to various cultural performances, not only those of literary nature, but also ones that form parts of our daily lives (May, “Beyond Bambi” 95-7).

In the 1994 issue of *Theater*, Erika Munk stated that “our playwrights’ silence on the environment as a political issue and our critics’ neglect of the ecological implications of theatrical form are rather astonishing” (5). In the same issue, Una Chaudhuri drew attention to the relation between ecocriticism and theater. Speaking of the 19th century theater, she contends that theater has mainly supported the humanist discourse on the cost of the natural world. As part of the cultural activities of the society, theater tended to ignore nature and the non-human and to focus on the human conflicts within a complicated social and political web. Humanism is mainly founded on the superiority of man and his excellence in inventing complex machines that prove his intelligence and progress. This concept is based on the ability to conquer nature and all that is non-human. Chaudhuri posits that the nineteenth century theater mainly adopted the “anti-ecological” ideology of humanism in theater through naturalism, and later, through realism. The nonhuman world have been always part of drama and theater. Nevertheless, the images of nature existing in modern drama has been functioning as a rhetorical or a literary device. Nature has been concealed by being

regarded as metaphor ("There Must Be a Lot of Fish" 24-5). Una Chaudhuri believes that "ecology as metaphor, is so integral a feature of the aesthetic of modern realist-humanist drama that, paradoxically, its implications for a possible ecological theater are easy to miss. Its very ubiquity renders it invisible" ("There Must Be a Lot of Fish" 24). In order to be able to involve theater studies in ecological issues, both playwrights and critics should take part in the process.

Theater is an effective cultural and communal institution that should be part of the ecological problem. Involving theater in ecological issues cannot just be achieved by focusing on environmental issues or establishing an "eco-canon" in contemporary plays, but also by the re-estimation of the role of nature in modern plays in order to "recognize its presence, acknowledge its radical otherness" ("There Must Be a Lot of Fish" 24). Theresa May also calls on theater scholars to "flesh out the way in which the human imagination participates in, and is integral to, our ecological "situatedness"" ("Beyond Bambi" 95). May believes that stories can act as a powerful ideological force that has the ability to destruct, as much as the ability to protect, ecology in order to achieve its aims. Ecological or environmental disasters were not just the result of action, but the result of certain ideologies embedded in our culture through our stories. Thus, she calls for "a vigorous, unabashedly material-ecological discourse in theater studies, one that recognizes the ecological roots and implications of language, representation, systems of signification, and master narratives" ("Beyond Bambi" 95-96). Similarly, Erika Munk has highlighted the importance of not only working on creating ecological based drama but of presenting an innovative ecocritical reading that offers a reinterpretation of plays that have been allegedly focused on only human issues (5-6).

Critics and historians have to raise the audience's awareness towards the ecological discourse that is being concealed from them due to the deeply fixed humanist ideology that dominates their conscious (May "Earth Matters" 85). Likewise, Downing Cless accuses the American theater of being "stuck mainly in a humanistic antiecological mode" (79) and she refers to the consuming economic system that exploits the natural resources and causes the ecological system to deteriorate. For her, both ecology and economy should be

brought to the theater where the relation between them is exposed and questioned (79-80).

The necessity of performing the two tasks, founding an eco-canon together with the rereading of the depiction of nature on stage, are fundamental to linking or applying ecocriticism to theater studies. Chaudhuri believes that “the ecological crisis is a crisis of values. Ecological victory will require a transvaluation so profound as to be nearly unimaginable at present. And in this the arts and humanities-including the theater- must play a role” (“There Must Be a Lot of Fish” 25). Approaching theater studies from an ecological perspective will not only contribute to raising awareness to ecological issues, but it will also highlight the intersection of different forms of discrimination like that of gender, race and even class. Any attempt to separate ecology from its political aspects means constraining it, May believes that:

All constructions of “nature” are ideological.... Ecocriticism should not be limited to literature, and indeed, the inclusion of theatre and performance within its discourse will bring new and important issues to light. Precisely because theatre is both a living art form and a site wherein bodies, communities, politics, commerce, and imaginative possibilities intersect in a material way, ecocriticism in theatre will engage the debates occurring around us. (“Beyond Bambi” 97)

Modern plays that usually focus on man and his problems and social life, enforced the gap between human and nature. Playwrights together with critics regarded nature as merely tropes and natural landscapes as only settings that serve the human characters of the play. Theater is one of the forms of cultural representation in the community and therefore it should be subject to the critical review from an ecological perspective (May “Beyond Bambi” 95). If re-evaluated from an ecological point of view, this will contribute to raising the ecological consciousness. Drama is an exceptional genre; it joins text to performance, links words to action, and transforms the place and directions to a living place within a certain space. Theresa May notes that “Theatre studies is positioned opportunistically between the literary and the performative, and as such can function as a bridge between discourses” (“Beyond Bambi” 96). As a cultural institution, theater has for a long time reinforced anthropocentrism, where every image or depiction of nature whether

of a landscape or a nonhuman being has been reduced to serve the human who is set in the center of the dramatic world. The role of theater that once sustained this breach between nature and culture can be altered to serve the ecological cause by giving a voice to the nonhuman and by looking at the representation of nature in theater from a new perspective as “an independent existence and an autonomous power”(Chaudhuri "There Must Be a Lot of Fish" 30).

Una Chaudhuri not only has opened the door for applying ecocriticism to theater studies, but she has also drawn attention to the ecocritical significance of elements such as the landscape and animal bodies on stage (Chaudhuri 1994, 2002, 2005). In *Land / Scape / Theater* Fuchs and Chaudhuri explore the concept of landscape not only as an aesthetic element but as a socially constructed concept in drama and how the term transformed from being used to refer to the paintings depicting the natural scenery to “a “a way of seeing,” an ideologically and psychologically revealing statement about our relation to the world around us, to a way of *not seeing*, of masking and occluding the unsavory truths about our relations to each other and to the land we supposedly share” (Fuchs & Chaudhuri 1).

Critics should start unraveling the links between performances including theater and the material-ecological influences with all its implied political significance. Theater, among other cultural institutions, often plays a part in consolidating power relations in political and social contexts. Just as some theatrical performances have consolidated racist and sexist policies against people, some theatrical performances have also justified the exploitation of land and nonhumans. Ecocriticism should expose the kind of discourse that justify human’s exploitation of the nonhuman in various performances including theater. It should uncover the predominant values that pervades our master narratives that embody certain notions about nature and what it represents to human beings (May “Beyond Bambi” 101). For May, “[a] dangerous ecocriticism will participate in the discourse of environmental justice by foregrounding the body as medium between material and metaphoric worlds, and mapping the connections between social injustice, human and other bodies, and environmental exploitation” (“Beyond Bambi” 101).

The experience of attending theater is a three dimensional experience that combines the performer, the audience and the place.

This tripartite relation is in itself ecological since ecology is basically about studying the relation between human and place. Observing theater as a cultural institution that sets off against nature is a concept that should be deconstructed since both nature and culture are mutually constructed. Ecology and theater have common grounds where both are about the human and the nonhuman beings and about where they both live. Therefore, a focus on the martial rather than the metaphorical aspects allows a new kind of ecocritical reinterpretation as well as a capacity for producing an ecodramatic genre (May "The Greening of American Theatre" 85-6).

When urban communities are questioned from an ecological perspective, this leads to the deconstruction of all the binary oppositions that separate human from the natural world. Moreover, it links all forms of oppression including environmental exploitation to each other. Theater, which creates a communal experience, will thus be capable of disclosing the common notions and the politics of domination upon which different forms of discriminations are based. Theater cannot just be concerned with human issues, since both the human and the nonhuman issues intertwine within the same web. It can be a site of cultural transformation towards ecology either by creating a new eco-canon, in an attempt to bring the nonhuman world to the stage by presenting "stories that tell the human story within the ecological story" (May "The Greening of American Theatre" 93), or rereading and reinterpreting canonized works from an ecocritical perspective, a process which May calls "greening the canon" ("The Greening of American Theatre" 87).

The impending ecological crisis awaiting humankind is not just the result of the exploitation of the land and water animals. This form of exploitation started to be recognized with the extinction of some species which threatened the balance of the whole ecological system. Egan states that "[i]n the midst of the ecological crisis, a rapidly growing number of people have changed their attitudes towards animals and now see an assumption of human superiority to be as irrational and oppressive as assumed male superiority and assumed white superiority" (3).

The term speciesism was introduced by Richard Ryder in 1970. However, the use of the term became widespread with the publication of Peter Singer's book *Animal Liberation* in 1975. "Speciesism," writes Singer, "is a prejudice or attitude of bias

toward the interests of one's own species and against those of members of another species" (6). He argues that speciesism is analogous to racism and sexism since the three practices involve discrimination based on concepts and notions that are morally irrelevant. Speciesism like racism and sexism, tends to deprive certain groups of their basic sets of rights. A speciesist regards that membership in the species *Homo sapiens* grants a being more value and privileges that enable him to exploit and manipulate members of other species.

Some critics tend to claim that the analogy between speciesism, racism and sexism is not based on proper assumptions since the moral considerations in the relation between animals and humans differ from those regulating the relations between human beings. However, others suggest that the way human beings deal with animals should be critically questioned in the light of the same critical political theories that are used to oppose racism and sexism because dealing with speciesism using different moral standards means that we apply double standards. Although animals and humans belong to different biological classes, yet this does not justify exploiting them or signaling a difference in "*morally relevant respects*" (LaFollette 41-42). LaFollette and Shanks believe that like sexism and racism, there are two different forms of speciesism. Accordingly, there are two different kinds of speciesists: "[t]he *bare* speciesist claims that the bare difference in species is morally relevant. The *indirect* speciesist claims that although bare species differences are not morally relevant, there are morally relevant differences typically associated with differences in species" (42-3). Ryder also refers to the attitude of those who validate discrimination against another being solely for belonging to another species as strict speciesism (Bekoff & Meaney 320). Carol J. Adams contends that "the oppression of women and other animals as interdependent" since both are being abused in a society where the meat-eating male is in control (29). The lives and bodies of animals and women are marginalized to serve the interests of the dominant group. Moreover she adds that, "[t]he hierarchy of meat protein reinforces a hierarchy of race, class, and sex" (Adams 53).

Val Plumwood in his essay "Decolonizing Relationships with Nature" shows how the Eurocentric power relations that govern the relation between the colonized and the colonizer are similar to the

anthropocentric ones governing the relation between the human and the nonhuman worlds. Colonizers claim they are more civilized than what they consider primitive underdeveloped groups. Similarly, the relation between nature and some human groups can be described using the term colonization. Nature which Plumwood refers to as “the more-than-human world” (56) is subsumed and falls under the power of the centric thought system. This lack of rationality requires the intervention of the rational human white male in order to control and contain the recalcitrance of such groups and to reclaim the land that the irrational primitive could not make use of (Plumwood 51- 3). Plumwood states that “[t]he colonization of nature thus relies upon a range of conceptual strategies that are also employed also within the human sphere to support supremacism of nation, gender and race” (53).

Racism and speciesism are deeply connected. People of color have always been associated with nature and the nonhuman world in a way that is meant to degrade them. This means that the whole natural world is looked down upon as an Other. In fact, the ideologies of discrimination is primarily based on the Other world. Tiffian and Huggan explore how the institutionalized ideology of speciesism has been naturalized in order to serve the interests of the imperialistic projects. This hierarchical attitude shows how environmental issues are based on the same ideologies upon which imperialism and racism are constructed (2-6). Tiffian and Huggan believe that:

The history of western racism and its imbrication with discourses of speciesism; the use of animals as a basis for human social division; and, above all perhaps, the metaphorisation and deployment of ‘animal’ as a derogatory term in genocidal and marginalising discourses – all of these make it difficult even to discuss animals without generating a profound unease, even a rancorous antagonism, in many postcolonial contexts today. (135)

In questioning speciesism, animal is the central category of analysis, however questioning other forms of domination and the historic position of animals in relation to these forms of oppression is essential. Hence, activists’ efforts should be united in order to confront all forms of oppression. The term speciesism is more complex than it appears. It is not just a matter of prejudices or biological differences that leads to this sort of discrimination. The

perception and treatment of animals as beings of little worth is also based on their lack of language and on their appearance. Una Chaudhuri shows one side of this complexity that comes with using the word “animal” as a scornful abusive remark. She states that “[i]ronically, resistance to this practice often winds up positioning even the well-meaning in an anti-animal (the official term is “speciesist”) position. If we say that it isn't right to treat human beings ... like animals, we may be tacitly agreeing that it is all right to treat animals in that way” (“Animal Acts” 37).

As a start point one must consider that “[l]ife on earth is an interconnected web, not a hierarchy. There is no natural hierarchy; human hierarchy is projected onto nature and then used to justify social domination” (Gaard & Murphy 3-4). Denying animals their right of ethical treatment for any reason is unfair. Animals can no more serve as mere means for human beings to reach their ends. They deserve equal ethical consideration as human beings. Speciesism links being an autonomous being to being morally independent that is to say with a capacity for moral agency and an ability to fulfill duties in order to deserve rights. However, it should be obvious that whereas some people consider their “companion animals” worth of certain rights, they look down upon other animals or species and deprive them of the same rights. Donna Landry believes that “to have zoological explanatory power, it must bear some relation to the actual qualities and requirements of the species in question, beyond mere prejudice” (Cole 88). This means that speciesism is a sort of discrimination that requires being conversant with knowledge that enables those who exercise this sort of discrimination to be familiar with the distinctions upon which they construct their biased attitude.

Speciesism has been part of the Western history embedded in various discourses. In philosophy, Aristotle for example prioritized the human interests over those of other animals. Where in theology, holy books have made it clear that animals and plants are like inanimate objects which exist for the sake of humanity. Such discourses justify the use of animals on the basis that they have neither moral agency nor rationality. Speciesism and exploitation of animals developed to involving animals and using them in many unnecessary human activities. Hence, speciesism reveals that the relation between humans and animals consists of different

interrelated discourses and ideologies.

Environmental history can help us uncover the reason behind the collective conscious that led to the overhunting and the extinction of some species or the reason why many people choose to categorize some animals like cats and dogs as domestic animals and treat them as companions and even like family members whereas they tend to reject other species. It reveals how the relation between human “self” and animal “other” is culturally constructed and the role that theater and certain public performances including the zoo and the circus and even the slaughterhouse play in constructing it. It questions how such performances could participate in making social changes that affect this culturally constructed image of the non-human world as an “other”.

Humans and animals share not only the space or the place of existence, but also the very core of existence. In order to understand the relationship between humans and animals we have to consider the multiplicity of this relation within many phases in history and in many cultures. We also have to consider Tim Ingold’s observation that “[o]nly humans...construct *narratives* of this history” (Manning1). Such narratives reveal the way human beings have constructed the relationship between humans and animals and how they defined their own humanity as well as their own animality.

In the ancient Old World civilizations, the relation between humans and animals was integral on the levels of both species and individual animals. Humans observed an interconnection between themselves and animals. They attributed some of the animals' characteristics which they either feared or greatly admired to themselves. Nevertheless, this fusion between humans, animals and cosmology later began to fade in different civilizations until the relation has completely transformed into a completely economical relation based on utilitarian functions (Manning 50-1).

In the Medieval community, people usually used the animal symbolism to refer to human characters or traits not just in literature but in various daily situations and events like public rituals, trials and pageants. However, the medieval society perception of animals was of course affected by the story of creation which implied that nature was created before man. This perception fitted well with the concept of the hierarchical structure of the chain of being that derived from Plato and Aristotle. Animals were thought of as lacking

spiritual and mental attributes such as immortal souls and the ability to use logic and language. Consequently, humans were obliged not to let their animal appetites overrule their divine reason. One of the most prominent traditions during the medieval age was that of Bestiaries. Bestiaries is a compendium of beasts in illustrated volumes that described various animals where each beast was usually accompanied by a moral lesson. This kind of literary images got mixed with the learned popular notions about animals and influenced the representation of animals for centuries to come (Manning 59-66). Animals were also part of most of the medieval public rituals, cultural practices and processions.

Starting from the seventeenth century, some thinkers started to call for a more merciful attitude towards animals. Although they did not deny the permission of subduing animals but were against the cruelty that accompanied the making use of this right. One of the most influential writings that discussed that matter during the time was that of Rene Descartes. Descartes maintained that both animals and humans bodies functioned like machines. According to him, only human beings were rational beings capable of thinking. However, the eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of some views that went against the Cartesian thought and the Roman Catholic thoughts. Some philosophers and clergymen's writings started to denounce the previous views. These writings acted as a fundamental basis for the concept of animals' rights. Nevertheless, the notions of human superiority and God-given rights bestowed on man to dominate animals that was at the heart of the anthropocentric chain of being as well as religious doctrines remained unquestioned (Manning 86-9).

The claim that animals lack rationality and the power of speech deprived animals from any social code that regulates the relation between human beings and animals. However oppositions advocated that human beings should consider an ethical obligation when treating animals. No natural right was ever given to any creature to torture or act cruelly or violently towards another creature (Manning 93-5).

This argument paved the way for a more powerful one that of the English theoretical jurist and philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). In the *Introduction to Principles of Morals and Legislation*, published in 1780 Bentham proclaimed his famous

statement ‘the question is not, Can they *reason?* nor Can they *talk?* but, Can they *suffer?*’. Similar to the laws that were enacted to protect the slaves, he called for other laws to protect animals. It was due to the writings of thinkers such as Bentham that many bloody sports and horrible vivisectional activities were later prohibited and even criminalized.

In fact, it is difficult to make a final judgment about the prevailing attitude towards animals in a certain society or a certain era. However, a historical background may give us an idea about how the relation between human and nonhuman animals have been constructed and why they have been culturally represented in certain ways. It also reveals how different kinds of oppression have always been related. A deeper look into the history of zoos, domestication, hunting and pets among other things is very important in telling us how the animal other has always taken part in constructing the human identity.

The problem of the animal has been subject to many debates. Under the umbrella of ecocriticism, animal studies connects the issue of speciesism to identity politics. Critical, philosophical and theoretical discussions have differed on the perspective from which the issue of the animals should be approached. The inequality towards animals is linked to the emergence of the field of Critical Animal Studies; a field that has been developed during the recent decades to study the role of animals in human societies. It seeks to question, examine, and develop new ways of perceiving and thinking about animals and their relationship with human beings. It questions the discourses and examines the ideologies that constructed the boundary between humans and animals. It also examines the ways animals are represented and depicted and how these representations play a role in constructing the human identity. Critical animals studies is a comprehensive field that involves the exploration of the intersection between “a vast cultural territory” (Chaudhuri “(De)Facing the Animals” 8), it aims at finding new perspectives and identifying innovated means “for seeing, showing, and knowing the animals” in arts and humanities (Chaudhuri “(De)Facing the Animals” 10). In short, Critical Animal Studies is not merely a critical trend that shakes the cultural studies and the field of humanities but is a totally new stance that enables us to question the human centered culture politically, ethically and socially and to

include animals as part of the culture. CAS aspires to achieve the goals that Gaard, Greta, and Patrick Murphy believe is fundamental to ecofeminism that is a “decentralized global movement that is founded on common interest yet celebrate diversity and opposes all forms of domination and violence” (4).

Critical Animal Studies prompts people to “think about what it means to be a human being; about how that being human has been constructed in history; about how that construction of the human that we live with now might impact upon the world we live in, the people we live alongside, and so on” (Cole 95). Animal studies helps us figure out how the human as a “Self” is constructed in relation to nature in general and animals in particular as an “Other”, a notion that Derrida provoked in *The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)*. Derrida argues that the Western philosophy relies on the animal other to construct the human self. Fudge believes that animals are others to human beings but in their own world they are selves. Reading animals in literary works even if these animals are silent tell us many things about their world. She adds that “[i]f we don’t read these animals we miss out on crucial aspects of the period, of its construction of itself and its construction of all of us animals (human and nonhuman) now” (Cole 96).

The field of Critical Animal Studies helps people to understand that the fate of both species is connected and that animals permeate our lives in such ways that are unlikely to be thought of as possible. It provides new ways for the realization and recognition of animals and animality and how they are depicted in different works of art. The new field grants animals a new possibility that will enable them “to be “speaking back” to human culture, rejecting the rhetorical exploitation they have endured for so long”. It proposes that animals are not the creations of our imaginations, but are real autonomous entities whose lives are worthy of rights and respect (Chaudhuri “Animal Acts” 37-8).

As mentioned earlier, our various discourses including the religious and scientific ones consolidated the idea that our relation with animals should be based on separation and a prejudice in favor of the human as being superior. Critical Animals Studies aims at uncovering the ideologies that pervade our cultural practices and presenting a new conception of the relation between species. In order for this process to take place, Chaudhuri proposes that “the most

important move is in the focus on animals as and for themselves, and, correspondingly, on us (human beings), who have lived with them, used them, loved them, or simply taken them for granted” (Chaudhuri “Animal Acts” 39). Revealing the ideologies embedded in various works of arts enables us to comprehend how our identities as human beings are culturally forged in relation to other species.

Zooësis, zontologies, zoopolis are all newly coined terms and expressions that animal critics created in order to define what the field is about, an urge that according to Chaudhuri is motivated by a “desire to intervene radically in established discourses and their terms of art” (“(De)Facing the Animals” 8). Chaudhuri, for example, coined the term “zooësis” (“Animal Geographies”) by which she refers not only to the literary representation of animals that constitutes a great part of Western literary tradition, but also to cultural and social practices that involve animals. The underestimation of animals and the dangers they are exposed to is a kind of discrimination that should be taken seriously. Chaudhuri says she wishes the term zooësis would “contribute to the valorization of animals and teach us that they are “intrinsic to new and necessary modes of thinking, writing and speaking”” (*Animal Acts* 6).

Critical animal studies aims at highlighting the idea that our understanding of animals and the way they live is constantly changing. The rigid binary oppositions that always separate “human” and “animals”, “culture” and “nature” are deconstructed. Even the fixed ideas about the definition of what is “human” is shaken. Steven Best in his article, “The Rise of Critical Animal Studies” believes that animal studies as an academic field can become a powerful tool for achieving change in the society by “domesticating the threatening nature of the critique of human supremacism, Western dualism, and the human exploitation of nonhuman animals” (10). He adds that animal studies cannot be emptied from its political, ethical and social content to be reduced to a mere theoretical field.

Animal studies is a field that is meant to make a change in the way people treat animal. It is thus politically charged and needs practical intervention to achieve its aims of resistance. This could be achieved through various approaches and methodologies; some of which are empirical while others intervene with already existing theories or emerging fields like posthumanism. We cannot continue to segregate nonhuman animals from the human domain because we

cannot separate the histories and identities of both species from each other. According to Best “[a]nimal studies examines how our lives, identities, and histories are inseparably tied to other sentient, intelligent, communicative, and cultured beings in ways that human animals (in Western cultures above all) have systematically denied”(14).

Like feminists, postmodernists, postcolonialists, ecocritics who seek to dismantle the various binary oppositions and deconstruct the misleading assumptions of racism, sexism and other notions ingrained with discrimination policies, animal theorists also try to deconstruct the division that was made between human and animal. CAS is concerned with questioning the discourse of the “human” that was primarily constructed on a separation of the human from the nonhuman; a separation that brought the human relations under the control of other dualistic concepts in order for the human to define his identity on several levels.

Erica Fudge in her book *Perceiving Animals* is concerned with “the ways in which humans define themselves as human in the face of the animal” (1). Fudge contends that the animal cannot be studied in isolation from the human since “animals do not speak my language, and they do not write, leave textual traces, other than the traces – vellum, leather, glue – which speak of their objectification” (2). Besides the differences in the biological features and functional abilities; the definition of what is a human animal and what is a nonhuman animal is a matter of social constructions. Paradoxically, humans have always employed anthropomorphic elements in their depiction of animals. The relation between animals and humans representations is rather of a circular and not an oppositional nature (Fudge 7-8). Animal studies is not just used to deconstruct the binary opposition between human and animal that permeates the humanist discourse but to reveal how it intervenes with other forms of oppression.

For CAS, the animal is not just a sentient being that should be granted its right, it is a politically charged other that should be examined within social, ethical and political contexts that moves beyond the human bias. In this sense, CAS must combine being a critical approach to being a powerful and a radical discourse in order to expose the power systems that promulgated the different ideological constructed policies behind the abuse of animals as well

as different forms of abuse against human beings.

In the past few years, all the activities that involve “interspecies performances” have contributed to making a change. This change is not limited to improving the way we treat animals, but a change in our codes of morals and values towards animals. Rather than focusing on the differences between the human and the nonhuman animals, CAS encouraged humans to focus on the connections and the similarities between species, and thus to deliberately avoid the binary oppositions that once divided nature from culture and animal from human and led to devastating results.

Theater promises CAS a step forward by taking animals from the dramatic text to onstage representation. It complicates the written animal character especially when a human body becomes the medium for depicting the animal character in action. The relation between performance in general and theater in particular and animal studies can be approached in many ways. Alan Read’s in a special issue “On Animals” poses the question “[w]hat might it mean to practice, think, and write theatre beyond the human?” (iii), in order to make it clear that performance is not just limited to human beings. Una Chaudhuri proposes that animal studies “offers a new perspective on that overlap of cultural and performance space that we call mimesis” (“Animal Geographies” 646). In her attempts to explore the ideologies behind the human representation of animals and the animal discourse in modern drama she introduced the term zooësis. She defines the term as:

consists of the myriad performance and semiotic elements involved in and around the vast field of cultural animal practices. These include not only literary representations of animals..., not only animal performances in circuses and on stage, but also such ubiquitous or isolated social practices Comprising both our actual and our imaginative interactions with non-human animals, zooësis is the discourse of animality in human life, and its effects permeate our social, psychological, and material existence. (“Animal Geographies” 647)

Thus, it is a comprehensive term that is concerned with various forms of representations of animals, practices and performances that depend on the existence of animals with all those who are involved from performers and spectators in an ordinary performance to a pet keeper or a scientist, a hunter or maybe someone who is involved in

a religious ritual involving animal sacrifice. Zooësis persuades people to recognize and realize how animals constitute a great part of our lives and performances.

Animals are everywhere around us, they are present in various modes of discourse, yet this presence is mainly an anthropocentric presence. Their presence in literary works is transformed into a mere figurative or metaphorical use. Anthropomorphism or attributing human characteristics and behavior to them reduces their existence to mere tropes. The roles animals play in literary works resemble those they play in real life where human beings inflict their hegemony on them. According to Una Chaudhuri “[a]s pets, as performers, and as literary symbols, animals are forced to perform us ... Refusing the animal its radical otherness by ceaselessly troping it and rendering it a metaphor for humanity, modernity erases the animal even as it makes it discursively ubiquitous” (“Animal Geographies” 648).

Theater has always been concerned with the human and the issues that revolve around him, whether social or political. For this reason, nonhuman animals, when represented on stage, are mostly doomed to an anthropomorphic depiction. Playwrights who have made use of animals on stage have often seen them through a narrow scope that confined animals in theater to metaphorical roles. As Chaudhuri puts it “[a]s one of the many ways and places in which we obsessively contemplate ourselves, theatre has, like the other arts, relegated animals to its metaphorical margins. By and large, in the theatre as elsewhere, human animals have been interested in their non-human cousins chiefly as mirrors for themselves” (“Animal Acts” 37).

On one hand, the field of Critical Animal Studies contributes to raising public consciousness towards animals by showing that animals are not mere objects created for the human’s welfare but as beings who share this world with humans. Theater, on the other hand, has always played an important role in changing the existing social structures and values. It can thus offer CAS new possibilities not only through presenting a new vision and approach towards dealing with animals and animality, but also through the rereading of dramatic texts that involve the presence of animals whether physically or verbally. Theater emphasizes animal presence and their physical existence as well as our shared experience in the same space

and at the same time.. Jean-Marie Pradier foregrounds the advantage that theater grants animal studies when he states that “[t]he fundamental value of live performance perhaps resides in the fact that it can restore the organicity of the spectator by bringing into perception our bios, the vital flux that connects us to other species and to the cosmos” (21). Engaging theater studies with animal studies contributes in making a change by bringing the ecological and species issues live to the community. Sometimes responding to the performance scripts and commenting on it from a CAS perspective would seem difficult since it means focusing solely on the written text without considering its performative element still it is considered a fruitful attempt since the CAS is an interdisciplinary perspective that is open for various approaches (Chaudhuri *Animal Acts* 4). However, we should always remember that no matter what images or ideas these animals signify, we must deal with them as actual beings “as members of a biological species with a specific morphology, geography, and history. “ (Chaudhuri *Animal Acts* 5) What differentiates the CAS approach from old approaches regarding animals is that we no more focus on the symbolism or the imagery that the animal stands for but on the real animals and their lives. Playwrights have always resorted to using animals as strong metaphors. They have reflected on all the details that are involved in the lives of animals; their physical appearance as well as their practices. Animal studies is concerned with the very actuality of these details as well as the human meaning they generate (Chaudhuri *Animal Acts* 5).

Interspecies performance does not necessarily mean the performances where real animals play a role with human performers such as in the circus. These performances are about an imagined animal-human relation, yet they are reflections of actual interactions between both species. This use of the term “interspecies”, according to Chaudhuri, “derives from [the] keen interest in the lives and meanings of the other animals” (*Animal Acts* 6). With an animal, the experience becomes deeper and more complicated. Animals have always been mysterious to the humans who did their best in order to categorize and define them. While trying to do so, humans were always affected by their own stories about animals. For this reason, animals are loaded with different meanings that are sometimes even conflicting (Chaudhuri *Animal Acts* 9).

The phrase ‘animal liberation’ written by Singer in 1973 and his revival of Bentham’s question “Can they suffer?” signaled a new phase in dealing with animals. Singer’s argument is based on the utilitarian ethics, he is concerned with the capacity of the animal to suffer. The amount of good or harm that resulted from the interaction with other humans or animals was the measurement upon which Singer based his argument: “[t]he capacity for suffering and enjoyment is, however, not only necessary, but also sufficient for us to say that a being has interests—at an absolute minimum, an interest in not suffering” (Singer 7–8).

Thus, Singer has defied the discourse of speciesism that was rooted in the Western thought since Descartes. However, Cary Wolfe believes that the philosophical frame of animal rights “remains an essentially humanist one in its most important philosophers (utilitarianism in Peter Singer, neo-Kantianism in Tom Regan), thus effacing the very difference from the animal other that animal rights sought to respect in the first place” (*Zoontologies* xii).

In distinguishing between ecocriticism and animal studies, Landry distinguishes between the view of an animal as an “individual-subject” from the point of view of animal rights activists and the position of the animal as a “species” from the ecological perspective. Ecologists are more concerned with the welfare of the species as a whole, but they disregard the welfare of the individual animal (Cole 89). Erica Fudge agrees with Landry and maintains that ecocriticism focuses on the species as a whole instead of the individual animal. She argues that ecocriticism gives prominence to the landscape and regards animals as part of it, whereas the center of interest of animal studies is the individual animal “whether real or ideal” (Cole 93-4). A posthumanist approach that questions the beliefs and foundations upon which humanism is based is required in order to decenter the human. In decentering the notion of the human as a primary subject, posthumanism helps us realize the role that the posthumanist animal plays in forming our identity as human beings. According to Wolfe:

The effective power of the discourse of species when applied to social others of whatever sort relies, then, on a prior taking for granted of the institution of speciesism— that is, of the ethical acceptability of the systematic “noncriminal putting to death” of animals based solely on their species. And because the discourse

of speciesism, once anchored in this material, institutional base, can be used to mark any social other, we need to understand that the ethical and philosophical urgency of confronting the institution of speciesism and crafting a posthumanist theory of the subject has nothing to do with whether you like animals. (*Animal Rites* 7)

The question of the animal according to Wolfe has been given much attention during the last three decades by prominent theorists like Derrida, Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari and many others. The question of the animal can no more be approached through the notions of liberal humanism which regard human as “constitutive figure” since such notions had been already deconstructed by philosophers like Derrida, Althusser and Foucault, in addition to the appearance of new theoretical concepts that have made little or no use of the human figure like cybernetics and system theory, chaos theory and others (*Zoontologies* ix-xi). Moreover, Wolfe points to the new position of the animal that is taking place outside the field of humanities.

It is true that connecting animal rights to liberal humanism had some advantages, as it associated the question of the animal with questions of identity and subjectivity. It sought to move beyond the notions that had always linked subjectivity and granted freedom to certain groups, races, classes, ethnicities and genders. It argued that this should not be confined only to human groups, but should be expanded and applied in term of species as well. Nevertheless, Wolfe believes that “while the category of the subject was formally empty in the liberal tradition, it remained materially full of asymmetries and inequalities in the social sphere” (*Zoontologies* xii). Freedom and subjectivity thus remained in exclusive possession and under the influence of those who are in power, of those who control the institutions and the discourse. Most animal studies critics believe that a posthumanist approach in a special sense of the word will be more effective in approaching the question of the animal. It would decenter and disrupt the fundamental dogmas which are usually trapped in anthropocentric principles and notions that fail critics to deal with the issue of the animal as an Other. Thinkers like Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari and Foucault have tackled issues on humans, animals and animality with regard to the posthumanist theory as they freed themselves from the anthropocentric heritage

that dominated the culture.

A genuine posthumanist approach would push the debate away from the pitfalls of the dogmatic anthropocentric humanist's ethics. Moreover, a postmodern ethical pluralism will enable us to rediscover the political and institutional agendas behind speciesism and unsettle the otherness of the animal. According to Wolfe the question of the animal should be approached from "an interdisciplinary crossing between philosophy and the sciences with the aim of crafting a posthumanist theory of the relations between subjectivity, species, and signification in the broadest sense" (*Zoontologies* 34).

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