

Human-Animal Relationships and Ecocriticism: A Study of the Representation of Animals in Poetry from Malawi, Zimbabwe, and South Africa

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Abstract

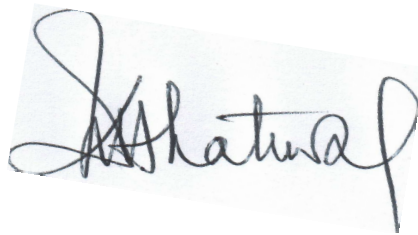
This study analyses the manner in which animals are represented in selected poetry from Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa. It discusses the various modes of animal representation the poets draw on, and the ideological influences on their manner of animal representation. It explores the kinds of poetic forms the poets employ in their representation of animals and examines the manner in which ecological or environmental issues are reflected in the poetry. Further, the study determines the extent to which the values expressed in the poems are consistent with, or different from, current ecological orthodoxies and the ways in which the metaphors generated in relation to animals influence the way we treat them.

The study shows that in the selected poetry animals occupy a significant position in the poets' exploration of social, psychological, political, and cultural issues. As symbols in, and subjects of, the poetry animals, in particular, and nature in general, function as tools for the poets' conceptualisation and construction of a wide range of cultural, political, and philosophical ideas, including among others, issues of justice, identity, compassion, relational selfhood, heritage, and belonging to the cosmos. Hence, the animal figure in the poetry acts as a site for the convergence of a variety of concepts the poets mobilise to grapple with and understand relevant political, social, psychological and ecological ideas. The study advances the argument that studying animal representation in the selected poetry reveals a range of ecological sensibilities, as well as the limits of these, and opens a window through which to view and appreciate the poets' conception, construction and handling of a variety of significant ideas about human to human relationships and human-animal/nature relationships. Further, the study argues that the poets' social vision influences their animal representation and that their failures at times to fully see or address the connection between forms of abuse (nature and human) undercuts their liberationist quests in the poetry.

Key words: ecocriticism, zoocriticism, ecophilosophy, animal, identity, belonging, resistance, ecology, inscription of identity, socio-political change, urban and rural landscapes, predation, compassionate representation, allegorical representation

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.



Name of Candidate: _____
SYNED DALE MAKANI MTHATIWA

____ 16th ____ day of June ____ 2011

Dedication

To
my wife
Emily
and our children
Erakani
Vilhelhani
Nkonani
for stoically enduring
my 'unhusbandly'
and 'unfatherly'
absences.
You gave me courage to soldier on.

To
my parents,
Amina and Makani,
and my siblings.
Niven'nyahu otayi.

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