BRIGID BROPHY'S PRO-ANIMAL FORMS

Abstract

This essay discusses two linked aspects of Brigid Brophy's work as a pro-animal writer of literature. These are her determined usurping of the human hierarchy and prestige that permit violence toward animal life, and her concomitant reliance on the potential of literary-formal creativity to prosecute it. I trace these elements in the text that contains the majority of Brophy's literary-fictional writing about animals, *The Adventures of God in his Search for the Black Girl* (1973), discussing the short novel in the form of a *conte philosophique* which goes by that title and a number of short pro-animal fables that are collected with it. Drawing on archive materials, the discussion situates Brophy's literary practice in the context of her influential journalism, essays, artworks made with Maureen Duffy, her work in support of early animal rights authors and a recently discovered 1972 Open University interview on the topic of animal rights. A broader aim of the essay is thereby to properly recognize Brophy's significance in the literary history of contemporary writing that challenges anthropocentric attitudes to animals. Women's writing is where one must look first for this development, in the work of key figures such as Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, Maureen Duffy, Patricia Highsmith, Ursula Le Guin, and Alice Walker. Yet, on the literary wing of the academic field of animal studies, which has burgeoned over the last fifteen years or so by discussing such figures, Brophy's work has been almost entirely forgotten.

Introduction

It would not be unjust to claim that the contemporary Anglophone animal rights movement properly began with a literary act by Brigid Brophy. On 10 October 1965 the *Sunday Times* published Brophy's essay "The Rights of Animals," heralding its new "Minority View" strand (which, in fact, promptly folded). Some six years later, however, the book *Animals, Men and Morals* (1971) appeared: it collected the work of a loose group of scholars and activists, including Brophy, and emerged from discussions in Oxford around 1970 that were stimulated by her *Sunday Times* essay. Brophy was instrumental in the book's publication: the editors, Stanley Godlovitch, Rosalind Godlovitch and John Harris, had originally planned a historical anthology, with Brophy's "The Rights of Animals" as the starting point. Then, under her auspices, they discussed this project with the publisher Michael Joseph, and in turn Brophy's friend Livia Gollancz and Giles Gordon, an editor at Gollancz, who challenged them to produce new material.[1] The resulting book was reviewed, at his urging, by the philosopher Peter Singer in the *New York Review of Books*, under the title "Animal Liberation," on 5 April 1973. "We are familiar with Black Liberation, Gay Liberation, and a variety of other movements," Singer writes, and "with Women's Liberation we thought we had come to the end of the road"; but "*Animals, Men and Morals* is a manifesto for an Animal Liberation movement" (Singer 17). In 1977 Brophy herself, reflecting on "The Rights of Animals" at a symposium given the same title, reiterates the theme of animals' situation in the history of progressive social reform: "there was both a logical and psychological necessity in basing the claim for other animals' rights on social justice," because "the high barrier we have put up between the human species and all the rest of the animal species … is

essentially a class barrier" (Brophy, "Darwinist's Dilemma" 64, 63). Inspired by the "manifesto" to which Brophy's work had given rise, Singer went on to develop his own arguments for animal liberation; these, in critical conversation over the following decades first with others working in the enlightenment moral tradition, and then with those from feminist, environmentalist, sceptical and continental philosophical standpoints, provide the broad intellectual co-ordinates for pro-animal thought today (see Calarco).

Here is how Brophy's "The Rights of Animals" begins; it is breath-taking in more ways than one.

> Were it announced tomorrow that anyone who fancied it might, without risk of reprisals or recriminations, stand at a fourth-storey window, dangle out of it a length of string with a meal (labelled 'Free') on the end, wait till a chance passer-by took a bite and then, having entangled his cheek or gullet on a hook hidden in the food, haul him up to the fourth floor and there batter him to death with a knobkerrie, I do not think there would be many takers (Brophy, 'Rights' 45).

This one-sentence paragraph is vintage Brophy, full of rhetorical flourish worked to perfectly deliberate and meaningful ends: from the hypotactic style of multiply embedded and parenthetical clauses to the unexpected way with vocabulary causing delicate tonal shifts (from 'dangle' to 'cheek or gullet' to the delightfully disarming exoticism, 'knobkerrie'). The balance of syntactical complexity and bluntly rendered violence is arresting enough; but the sentence's full literary force lies in the way that

it enacts upon its reader a satirical pastiche of the very violent activity it offers to critique. A more or less unexpected reversal of species fortunes is executed at the level of content by way of its ingenious re-description of the reality of angling: fish, riverbank, bait, line and gaff become human, apartment window, meal, string and knobkerrie. But Brophy has yet more stylistic fun with a reversal whereby the reader is caught by her rhetoric. The sentence actually *angles* for us. The actuality of baiting is reworked as ear-catching alliteration and defamiliarizing imagery that is as visually compelling as physically shocking. Angling's characteristic dramatic arc of possibility, waiting, strenuous effort and reward is removed to the subjunctive mood of the sentence and the long delay while Brophy holds us on a grammatical line until the resolution of the last clause. And yet this, ironically enough, tells not of capture but of getting away. It is not, as we might expect, the bait in the sentence—the free meal—for which there are no takers, but the macabre act of intra-species fishing itself (despite her love of puns, Brophy refrains from calling it "humangling"). The notionally murderous sportsmen of Brophy's allegory (or rather, she implies cynically, *most* of them) eventually reveal a capacity to choose ethically and reject violence against their own kind. Perhaps, the literary challenge goes, if the presumably pro-angling readers of the *Sunday Times* do not like being exhaustively played by this sentence, they should not do the same to fish. Thus, a leisurely pursuit has been the victim of Brophy's purely literary blood-sport.

I have begun by reading this moment in such close detail—foundational as it is for contemporary critical moral thought about animals—because it encapsulates the two linked aspects of Brophy's work as a pro-animal writer of literature that it is the principal purpose of this essay to illustrate and discuss. These are her determined

usurping of the human hierarchy and prestige that permit violence toward animal life, and her concomitant reliance on the potential of literary-formal creativity to prosecute it. In what follows, then, I trace these elements in the collection that contains the majority of Brophy's literary-fictional writing about animals, *The Adventures of God in his Search for the Black Girl* (1973); I will discuss the short novel in the form of a *conte philosophique* that has the same title and a number of short pro-animal fables that are collected with it. My discussion situates these pieces in the context of Brophy's journalism, essays, artworks exhibited with Maureen Duffy, and a recently discovered 1972 interview on the topic of animal rights.

A larger aim of this essay, however, is to go some way towards properly recognizing Brophy's significance in the literary history of contemporary writing that challenges anthropocentric attitudes to animals. The field of women's writing is where one must look first for this development, particularly in the work of a variety of authors—some major and some less well-known figures—such as Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, Barbara Gowdy, Patricia Highsmith, Ursula Le Guin, Deborah Levy, Ruth Ozeki, and Alice Walker. Indeed, even amongst those male writers whose work is significant in this regard—including, in the postwar period, J. R. Ackerley, James Agee and Arthur Miller, and after them Timothy Findley, Michel Faber and, principally, J. M. Coetzee—it is remarkable to observe how consistently the imagination turns to female protagonists to explore the ethical valences of human encounters with animals. And yet, on the literary wing of the academic field of animal studies, which has burgeoned over the last fifteen years or so by discussing some of these figures, Brophy's work has been almost entirely forgotten. Of the key works of criticism that focus on the figure of the animal in contemporary literature, all of which

situate themselves in relation to pro-animal thought, only Philip Armstrong and Randy Malamud pay any attention to Brophy, and even then only in the briefest discussions of her first novel *Hackenfeller's Ape* (1953).[2] My intent here, then, is to rectify this dearth of attention by moving now from her moral journalism to a fuller account of her pro-animal thought and aesthetics, before analysing how these develop and take their fullest form in her short stories of the 1970s.

2. Brophy's Pro-animal Thought and Aesthetics

Underpinning the deeply ambivalent attitudes that circulate in contemporary society about animals and their use for human ends is a widespread and profound sense of species identity. This characteristically takes two forms: an ideologically schematic one—we are humans and not animals—and a biologically descriptive one—we are human *rather than* x, y or z other species of animal. The first of these is only apparently more dubious than the latter. The wholesale rejection of embodiment implied by the former has too many pernicious consequences to be tenable; and we have learned—from evolutionary biology as much as from Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966)—that the discrete categorisation of species is unstable at best. One impact of a strong sense of human species identity, however, is the assumption that the most basic or homiletic of moral propositions, howsoever universally they are phrased, need not hold across the supposed barrier between humans and other species of animal: the principle of access to justice, for example, or the golden rule. If we hear this idiomatically as 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you' it is possible that the 'others' might very well be nonhuman, but Luke 6:31 in the King James Version makes the species aspect clear: 'as ye would that men should do to you,

do ye also to them likewise'. For almost everyone, it is (and this word is apposite here) *natural* to assume that the human species is a kind of club of which we cannot but be members. Yet this is also an exclusive club: animals certainly are not included and so it stands to reason that there are member benefits that they just do not receive.

This sense of species as so straightforwardly limited and delimited—a notion which has been termed as "human exceptionalism", and in its specifically moral form "speciesism"—is something that Brigid Brophy quite determinedly rejects.[3] She does so precisely *because* of her avowed humanism—complicated though this is by her great enthusiasm for the Freudian theory of the unconscious—and her unwavering insistence on the particular duties of humans, in contrast to other animals, in the exercise of reason in revealing morality.[4] Just as did Richard Ryder in the opening paragraph of the eponymous 1970 leaflet which coined the term "speciesism," Brophy attacks human exceptionalism broadly on the basis of the necessary biological continuity which she follows Darwin in finding between humans and animals, and which undermines the supposed discreteness of biological species (Ryder).

Brophy develops this point in her contribution to a radio programme about vivisection, one of the earliest broadcast discussions on the topic of animal rights, which was produced by the BBC for the second year students of "The Biological Basis of Behaviour" at the Open University in 1972.[5] Perhaps surprisingly prejudging the pedagogic outcome of a debate aimed at students, Steven Rose introduces the programme with his no-nonsense take on the matter of the species club and the privileges that come with it: "I have a very straightforward species loyalty, to the

human species, and I set every human above any animal." Nevertheless, Brophy argues, beginning with a monastic allusion that is quite deliberate:

> The habit of mind which permits vivisection seems to me to rest on superstition, not on science. It is the book of Genesis which gives man dominion over the animals, and modern biology is founded on not taking the book of Genesis as a biology text-book. As I understand it, modern biology does not present a picture in which there is man on one side, and then a huge gap, and then all the other animals; it presents man as himself an animal, one of a large number of (sometimes more closely related to him, sometimes less) animal species.

The point here draws directly on her essay in *Animals, Men and Morals*, which offers a startling cultural-psychoanalytic argument about humanity's "unrealistic fantasy relationships to the other animals," which, in the case of vivisection, involve a fantasy of aggression (Brophy, "In Pursuit" 136-40). Brophy is here applying to human-animal relations an analysis she extends with exceeding ambition to the whole of Western civilisation in her magnum opus *Black Ship to Hell* (1963). This work argues, following late Freud, that the achievements of human culture are best understood as a product of the sublimation of a fundamental drive towards aggression.[6] For Brophy, the persistence of divinely-sanctioned speciesism amongst an avowedly rationalist and post-Darwinian scientific establishment is evidence that the systematic reliance on vivisection in experimental science is based on tradition rather than necessity. She sees this dogmatism as irrational and of a piece with the self-contradiction implicit in the widespread moral hand-wringing about the experimental use of animals that coincides with a persistent justification that it is necessary to save human lives. For

Brophy, it is on the contrary quite straightforward that "the moral thing to do about a moral dilemma is circumvent it" and not just bemoan it (Brophy, "In Pursuit" 124). Therefore, when public moral concern about vivisection is taken together with the self-evident fact that society makes almost no effort to seek, fund, or disseminate information about alternatives to it, Brophy interprets such ineffectual moral qualms about animal suffering as a cover for continuing to pursue an unconscious fantasy of cruelty towards animals. This is a good example of how Brophy's psychoanalytic thinking renders her humanism complex. For all that humanity is supposedly separated from the animal world by its rationality, even the most apparently refined expression of that feature, which is experimental science, reveals deep unconscious cross-species entanglements.

These matters are taken up in a particularly sharp exchange in the novel Brophy was writing around this time, *The Adventures of God in his Search for the Black Girl* (1973).[7] The work takes the metafictional form of a series of peripatetic quasi-philosophical dialogues, established between a self-consciously fictional "God" and various literary-historical luminaries (Voltaire, Edward Gibbon, Bernard Shaw himself) together with a "humble Christian." Amongst these dialogues is a particularly good example of the way Brophy holds scientific inquiry to account for its implicitly non-rational biases, and to its own principles as a discipline of enlightenment. Taking up Rose's word "loyalty" from the Open University interview, Brophy has God critique the Christian's axiomatic anthropocentrism:

"Of course," the humble Christian replied. "Humans matter more."

> "To whom?" God asked. "To me? I assure you, science knows nothing of me or of my scale of values. I'm not a scientific concept. Nowhere in the fossil record can you read my authorisation of man's dominion over animals. If you mean humans matter more to humans, yes of course they do. But it is the scientific duty of science to make corrections, so far as it can, for the anthropocentric bias that results from the fact that scientists are humans." …
>
> "You can hardly blame biologists," the humble Christian said, "if they shew loyalty to their own species. Personally I think loyalty is a commendable quality."
>
> "Do you commend the Nazis," God asked, "for the fact that their loyalty to their German nationality led them to feel justified in torturing and, indeed, experimenting on Jews and Gypsies?" (Brophy, *Adventures* 167-68)

The stakes are high, of course, in using this example, which is Brophy's own entry into what is by now a (decidedly ignominious) sub-genre of pro-animal critique—the appeal to the history of Nazism to rebuke animal abuse.[8] But Brophy certainly should not be taken to be pressing this analogy as far as equating the two realms (Jews and nonhuman animals). She is without doubt sanguine about causing offence by referring to the Holocaust in this analogical way, but her purpose is to illuminate a specific ground of comparison: the use of group loyalty to licence systematic violence. More precisely, though, the collocation of anthropocentrism and ethnocentric nationalism here nods to something crucial in Brophy's pro-animal thinking: its consonance with her internationalism, which tends towards faith in a supra-national political order (Brophy, *Black Ship* 39-44). It is only in her adult lifetime that political discourse came to avoid the dogmatic preference for one's own ethnos, something we find in

loud international political appeals for generic "human rights" after the Second World War. And yet, in the light cast by Brophy's expansive post-Darwinian sense of living in a more-than-human community, the notion of "the human race" itself can only offer a tendentious and fantasmatic kind of solidarity, just like "nationhood" or race itself. And consequently, a dogmatic preference for humans, like patriotism, seems to promote a similar kind of ethnocentrism.

Of course, it is one thing to make this argument (or, indeed, to have God make it) but it is another entirely to confront, as a writer who no longer shares it, a world that holds to the "habit of mind" that humans are radically different from the rest of the animal kingdom, and for which the sense of being human that is shaped by that "habit" is perhaps the most elementary co-ordinate of identity. Here, it is helpful to come back to the word I used earlier to describe the force of that elementary sense, which might be thought "natural." On this point, here is Brophy's fictional Voltaire:

> I long ago saw through Rousseau's and many other people's fallacious belief that there is, for human beings, some "natural" state, to which they only have to revert for all to go well. For humans the only natural state is to be endlessly, inventively and variably artificial. Man is not a bower-bird, whose instinct will instruct him how to build nests, all to the same pattern. His instinct is to devise original patterns. Man is man only insofar as he is hundreds of individual architects (Brophy, *Adventures* 178).

Notwithstanding the underestimation of the aesthetic creativity and artifice of bower-birds here (see Lingis), I believe that this point about human "nature" would also be

Brophy's. The assertion that it is human nature to be artificial seems neatly to encapsulate so much of her critical and aesthetic sensibility: both in the form itself, the wry wit of its paradox, and in its insistence on the pre-ëminence of form—of design, pattern, madeness—in human life. This all goes to insist that it is illusory to make appeals to an untouchable foundation for moral belief that is not designed and built by human consciousness, and as such open to change.

There is an important point to make here, which may be understood as the root explanation why Brophy does not, in response to the speciesist "habit of mind," offer literary representations of animal life that have any semblance of realism. Her aesthetic purpose is quite different from nineteenth century models of pro-animal writing. The most famous of these is the development of animal autobiography in the form of a series of works culminating famously with Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877) and Margaret Marshall Saunders's *Beautiful Joe* (1893) (see DeMello). This notwithstanding, Brophy gives a perfectly succinct explanation and endorsement of the rationale behind the cultivation of sympathetic imagination that drove those developments. She considers that the "class barrier" already mentioned between humans and animals is no more than an extension of "the original class distinction … between Me and all the rest of You." She continues, however, that

> there arises in most of us (perhaps not in psychopaths) a faculty of imagination (I can only label, not describe it), which informs Me that to you, You are a Me. It is this faculty, with its ability to inhabit the other side of the barrier, that knocks the class barrier ["between Me and All the Rest of You"] down (Brophy, "Darwinist's Dilemma" 64).

Nevertheless, Brophy's fiction offers very little by way of rich narratives of animal life, sympathetically imagined or otherwise; and she certainly is very reticent to present animal consciousness at all, let alone realistically. This is because such moves, by whole-heartedly gambling on the power of imagination to inhabit the animal other, can both forego the sense of their own artifice. Moreover, by cultivating sentiment for and emotional affinity with animals, they establish the ground of ethical consideration not in rigorous argument but an inchoate human feeling like love. This is something which, for Brophy, is "capricious and quite involuntary," (Brophy, "Darwinist's Dilemma" 65) which is to say dangerously close to a dogmatic or conventional preference and so too shaky a ground for ethical action when compared to rationally argued duty.

When Brophy does represent animals, she avoids this problem with a literary method at the very furthest extreme of anthropomorphism, which ensures that emotional identification with the animal is redirected into something necessarily more cerebral. Brophy's only fully-fledged animal characters appear in the early short-story "Late Afternoon of a Faun," (1952) in which two young deer debate the civilizational benefits of Roman classicism; in *Pussy Owl* (1976), a children's book which is a hilarious and self-consciously nonsensical exploration of narcissistic egotism; and in *Hackenfeller's Ape*. This text is also far from straightforwardly "about" animals, although it does betray some of Brophy's later and more radical interests. It is clearly concerned with the moral implications of human-animal relations, such as zoo-keeping; the use of animals in state-controlled technoscience; humans' evolutionary history, and the connections between instinct, education and other biological and

cultural influences on human behavior (see McCorry on this). But Brophy's fictional simians, Percy and Edwina, are primarily imaginative tropes that serve a philosophical purpose: their proto-humanity offers a limit-case that acts as a fictional strategy for thinking through unresolved questions about human existence (albeit understood in continuity with animal life) and not for imagining animal lives *per se*. At the fullest level, *Hackenfeller's Ape*, which predates Brophy's adoption of anti-vivisectionism and vegetarianism, which she dates to 1954, is a novel about the correspondence of scientific inquiry and artistic creativity (Brophy, *Reads* 131). It considers how these twin forms of human understanding—which Brophy persists in holding in relation throughout her work—implicate self-knowledge, observation and control in *human* sexual and personal freedom. That is to say, it is a novel that is intellectually most committed to her developing interest in psychoanalysis, which flourishes in *Black Ship to Hell*.

If not to exercise, or promote, sympathetic imagination on behalf of animals, what is the critical logic offered up by Brophy's insistence on artifice and form, in the context of her writing about animals? I will highlight three elements. First, appeals to "nature"—any essentialist claims about humanity—are ruled out of court when discussing human attitudes; second, as we have already seen, appeals to tradition are also unacceptable; and finally, she rejects appeals based on dogma of whatever sort. These three bugbears lead Brophy to privilege aesthetic strategies that countermand them and the speciesist hegemony they support. By way of the characteristically postmodern practices of pastiche, *détournement*, and the parodic inhabiting of other forms, Brophy draws reflexive attention onto the way that ideologically-loaded attitudes about animals are naturalized.

In fact, the aspect of ideological commentary that is involved here is first explored not in fiction or critical journalism, but via a collaborative foray into art-making, in the form of an almost completely forgotten exhibition of works made with Maureen Duffy, exhibited as *Heads and Boxes*: *Items of Prop Art* at the Mason's Yard Gallery, London, in May 1969. The exhibition included twenty-five "heads," crafted from polystyrene wigstands in the form of busts, made by attaching or appending various texts and other items, and twenty nine "boxes," which are small dioramas or three dimensional collages constructed inside the clear plastic boxes that held the wigstands. According to criticism of these works, they offer "visual puns, parodies, and set pieces of humour" (Russell). Clearly conceptual in intent—they were on show in a locale that is now synonymous with early conceptual art in Britain—these works combine disparate artistic media in an exercise of the trans-liminal imagination that characterizes Brophy's novel of the same year, *In Transit*. As the artists' manifesto puts it, punning on the words image and readymade (the general medium of the pieces), the works are "readymages": "equivalents, in another medium, to poems: lyrics, epigrams (slightly in the ancient world sense), satires, squibs, marseillaises or metaphysical extravaganzas" (Brophy and Duffy).[9] A particularly relevant piece, here, is the counter-Romantic *Little Lamb, Who Flayed Thee?*, a pastiche of the opening line of William Blake's "The Lamb": "Little lamb, who made thee?" (see Russell). Blake's reflection on divine creation is punned into a darker reflection on and indictment of human destruction of animal life. Indeed, animals appear in several of the works of which images survive: *Treesons*, punning on "treasons", which can be read as both a pacifist statement and a parody of anthropocentric notions of evolution, includes a gorilla on all fours, a standing gorilla, a crusader, a Roman centurion, and a parachutist, all beside the words "Genialogy" and "Apocalypse".[10] Others include

Bipolarity in which two polar bears face off, and "Aunt-Eater" (figure 1). Speaking of this piece in an interview, Brophy explained that she and Duffy "saw this ant-eater in a toyshop window. We are both vegetarians. This is a simple revenge reversal. One is on the animal's side. One sympathises with the animal. Well, who would you like to eat?" (Carter).

[INSERT Figure 1, Brigid Brophy and Maureen Duffy, *Aunt Eater*]

Brophy goes on to develop the sharp humor and meta-stylistic method developed in the *Prop Art* exhibition, using it in her fiction satirically to attack received wisdom about animals and human-animal relations. She does so by turning towards metafictional forms in her writing: the staged philosophical dialogue, as we have seen, and the fable. Brophian fables reimagine a canonical literary form that conventionally holds together animal representation and moral thought. Hers are quite different from the brief, anthropomorphic and maxim-carrying vignettes of the Aesopic tradition. However, even whilst they share elements of the humorous tone and satirical force that can be found in its twentieth century exponents—such as Ambrose Bierce's *Fantastic Fables* (1899), William March's *99 Fables* (1960), Suniti Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* (1981) and David Sedaris's *Squirrel Seeks Chipmunk* (2010)—Brophy's fables retain an interest in human foibles where beasts are absent as textual voices. The satire is embedded in linguistic and textual ironies rather than embodied in animal characters. These texts' main effect is to parody the conventions, both intellectual and stylistic, that shape the various ways humans have of telling stories about animals. The remainder of the essay will focus on explaining these

strategies in action by way of brief close readings of three pro-animal fables collected in *The Adventures of God in his Search for the Black Girl* (1973): "Documentary," "Homo Sapiens" and "Classic Detective Story."

3. Reading Brophy's Pro-Animal Fables

"Documentary" is a two-page pastiche of the "and finally…" format of light-hearted stories which appear at the close of television news reports, or perhaps of "human interest" stories in other magazine formats (part of the wit of Brophy's pastiche is that its tone is broad enough to hit several targets). Here is how the story opens; the prose is a masterpiece patchwork of cliché:

> Do you ever take time out to reflect, before you fall asleep in the warmth and safety which we call "home," that there are those for whom the coming of night spells not the end but the beginning of toil?
>
> Year in year out, storm or calm, at just about the time you are kissing your loved ones goodnight, the little fleet assembles and, leaving home and loved ones far behind, heads out into the deep waters to face the perils of the unknown, often in conditions of indescribable hardship (Brophy, *Adventures* 48).

The butt of the satire here is the hokey, platitudinous and cockle-warming portrayal of the fishing industry, which is an essential component of twentieth-century pastoral genres. This attitude spreads from mass-market texts to the filmic documentary form that gives the story its title, for example John Grierson's famous *Drifters* of 1929—which William Empson discusses in *Some Versions of Pastoral*, a book we can

assume Brophy would have known—and in a number of films that were released around the time of writing—such as *Trawler Town* (1960), *The Disappearing Island* (1964) and *In Great Waters* (1974). The story spins almost too many conventional tropes to count: the contrast between the toil of the trawler-worker and the comfort of the urban consumer; the netherworld of fishing as a night activity; the melancholy of the trawlerman's exile from home; the masculine strength and sacrifice of trawlermen; the picturesque quality of their work; the diversity of the fleet as a little nation; and the functional excellence of the boat as a fully working factory in itself.

Offering an even more fantastical variation on the theme set out in the opening sentence of "The Rights of Animals," the story's satire is shaped by a relatively straightforward if macabre reversal in which humans become food and fish are their captors. Clichés usually attached to representations of the trawler fleet are instead offered as descriptions of sea-creatures that feast on the humans lost at sea: "a motley crew […] in all shapes and sizes, from the majestic armoured might of the killer shark […] to the brave little shoals of mackerel" (48). By the end of the story, Brophy's love of puns takes hold and we are told of "picturesque manning villages" and religious ceremonies remembering the "Miracle of Loaves and Men." This is a good example of punning as defamiliarisation, designed to critically distance the reader from the implied authority of the "human" interests that underpin the human interest story: humans *should* eat fish; fish *should not* eat humans. The larger satirical logic of the story finds this tendentious. Here, we encounter the key principle of Brophy's morality with respect to animals: evolutionary continuity leads to an emptying out of the absolute value of the human whose values with respect to life and death are

necessarily relative to others'; fish prefer not to be eaten just as humans do, and so there is no solid justification for eating them.

To conclude this reading, it is important to note that the word documentary means both a textual record and something pertaining to instruction or teaching. The documentary offered by the story, then, is a record not about fishing, but about the various narrative tropes that are offered in place of accurately and truthfully documenting fishing activity, tropes which populate the story with unwarranted sentiment. The conventional nature of human interests is replicated in the conventionality of the textual form of the human interest news story itself. "Documentary" draws critical attention to the aesthetically and ethically loaded style of the apparently neutral stories about human-animal relations that surround us in everyday life; that is on their *formed* (as opposed to necessary) nature. Indeed, this is how Brophy attacks all her fundamental targets—artificiality presented as authenticity; ideology presented as common sense; tendentiousness presented as honesty; received wisdom and habit presented as profundity; and the complex politics of human hegemony celebrated as simplicity with a naïve charm. Her technique of parodic mimicry draws attention to the fallen world of ethics beyond the story, in which no appeal to an outside authority can finally justify human behavior. It's only *through* the "made" nature of texts that we come to see the interested (as opposed to disinterested) and self-serving nature of the conventional thematics of fishing.

The fable "Homo Sapiens" takes up a similar technique of inhabiting an ostensibly positive story and a particular textual mode only to undermine the human priorities that are apparent in them. However, compared to "Documentary," it offers a

considerably stranger and more insidious kind of satire. This comes about because of a radical shift in the scale of the textual world, from the relatively minor and domestic to the expansive and the environmental. The fable begins in a starkly elegiac mode, almost mythic, which mimics the pervasive apocalyptic tone of green critique at the time of its writing: "The great lake is dead." From the limited, recognisable and realistic society of trawler fishing communities, the focus shifts here to a generic and more-or-less abstract world so that the existential stakes may be significantly raised. Concomitant with this, as the fable unfolds there is a shift from the emotionally bathetic homilies of the TV news and magazine report to the grand and disembodied political-speak of the state-sponsored, public-information message. This tone is blended with the commanding imperatives and social cohesion-enforcing third-person plurals of apocalyptic campaigning propaganda, as in the following example.

> We need an enormous effort, and it must be a corporate effort.
>
> Everyone, from the picnicking family careless with its litter to the giant factories that discharge their effluent … must be alerted to the responsibility they bear to the common good. …
>
> Against the killers, individual greed and mass inertia, we must utilise every weapon at our command… Ordinary citizens must make a tremendous affirmation in favour of Life (Brophy, *Adventures* 27).

Some context is useful here, to explain how this technique relates to the story's pro-animal purpose. *Adventures* was published in 1973, the year which also saw the BBC broadcast the historian of science Jacob Bronowski's anxious but finally optimistic story of evolutionary progress for humanity, *The Ascent of Man*. This reiterates a

quite conventional anthropocentric idealizing of evolution as an apparently unmotivated unfolding of life as a natural force but which is supposed to reach its telos with the flourishing of knowledge in Homo sapiens. The story "Homo Sapiens," however, offers an entirely different and more cynical development: from ecological self-awareness about anthropogenic environmental damage based on greed, to political will in pressing for a change of behavior towards conservation and preservation of habitat, to instrumentalizing the resulting natural resources by using them up for pleasure, to redeveloping this utilisation of nature into the kind of industrialized practice that initially caused the damage. The story's unusual form—one and a half pages long with three short, fragmentary and imagistic sections, each a little longer than the preceding—thus has an important effect. It pastiches the progressively developing movement of evolution, a favourite notion of humanism, with a kind of ironic and self-defeating political convolution in which history does nothing more than compulsively repeat the destructiveness of human self-interest.

"Homo Sapiens" ends by capturing one of the deepest ironies of human-animal relations, seen across practices such as meat-eating, indigenous species conservation, and public health management: this is the ease with which the systematic killing of nonhumans is incorporated into a positive ideal of healthy or enhanced life.[11]

> Along the paths run children in bright sunsuits waving butterfly nets.
>
> On the banks, beside the gay canvas chairs of the weekend anglers, hundreds of fish choke their lives out. …

> Proof that ecological death is reversible is afforded by the fact that the great lake now supports a thriving commercial fishing industry. In the factory by the lakeside thousands of fish lie belly-up, decapitated, being packed by automation.
>
> Man has achieved a great triumph on the side of Life (Brophy, *Adventures* 28).

The style here offers the events of the story as only obliquely instructive. Largely because it withholds the humorous satirical bite of "Documentary," the reader is offered a much less comfortable position from which to be critical of the ideas that are parodied. We are asked, instead, to ponder on events, not quite as riddles, but as evidence of some obscure or paradoxical truth about human self-interest. Rather than being understood and resisted this can at best only be vaguely divined, and perhaps no more than endured. The story's pessimism, in keeping with its implicit critique of the optimistic notion of evolutionary humanism, reveals a deep cynicism about moral progress. As Brophy puts it elsewhere:

> to the impulse towards egalitarianism and social justice I ascribe no historical or political coherency, and still less any historical inevitability. If there is anything so coherent as a movement, it has made such huge detours that you could often think it was moving backwards (Brophy, "Darwinist's Dilemma" 63).

As she surveys the various violent commodifications of animal bodies that she wants to critique, a basic challenge for Brophy as a pro-animal writer is that society at

large—and with it the force of law—does not perceive such activities to be morally wrong. This simple fact necessarily renders unworkable many literary-fictional forms, such as suspense, that rely on shared expectations about rights and wrongs, and about what is irreproachable and what will be punished. It also a reason why Brophy eschews writing animal fiction in the sentimental tradition, which draws the reader towards emotional reproaches of animal abuse that pretend to exceed the hard politico-legal reality, and which risk reinforcing the psychoanalytically ambivalent dynamic of human-animal relations which was previously explained in her diagnosis of vivisection. This is seen in the fact that many of the social aspects of treating animal bodies as commodities—such as the reliance on euphemism and the general preference for the deathly reality of meat to be kept out of sight—seem to smack of a kind of cultural bad-conscience, a point Brophy makes more than once (Brophy, *Black Ship* 133 and *Adventures* 190). The irony, then, is that the use of animal body parts by humans, depending on the context, might be so utterly unquestioned as to be made visible with some delight—for example elegantly tanned leather or gastronomically prepared meat—while so troubling to the conscience that the process of production needs shamefully to be secreted.

In recent years, the most significant literary-theoretical account of the specifically rhetorical qualities of this set of attitudes has been Carol J. Adams's idea, which she repurposes from the work of Margaret Homans on nineteenth century women's writing, of the living animal as the "absent referent" of speciesist culture. Whereas the animal's life is destroyed by commoditizing it, the animal itself, as the inherently valuable subject of that life, is occluded by linguistic and cultural tropes

(such as using the word “mutton” instead of “cooked dead sheep”). Adams recommends a strategy of “restoring the absent referent” and wonders:

> could it be that literary consciousness is paradigmatic for vegetarian consciousness? A phenomenology of vegetarianism recapitulates the phenomenology of writing: of seizing language, of identifying gaps and silences (Adams 184).

The idea, here, is that the exemplary vegetarian-cum-writer delivers the linguistic honesty that fills those ideological gaps and silences. It is a consoling possibility, and one that approaches Brophy’s defamiliarising fictions, but these, I think, in the end offer something different, more exacting and perhaps more pessimistic.

A case in point here is “Classic Detective Story”. This begins in a very unusual way, with a chapter which takes the form of a diagram detailing the layout of a library, with desk, French doors and a book-lined wall: we do not yet know that this is a crime scene. Chapter two begins with a second diagram, this time of a breakfast table, with seating arrangement and food-lain sideboard. The rest of the story unfolds in the shape of an elaborate pastiche of the very pulpiest of Golden Age detective fictions.[12] It apes many effects of the genre, from the country house setting and stereotyped cast of upper-class characters, to the clunky exposition of plot detail by having one character bluntly tell it to another. The twist, however, is that the detective says nothing, reveals nothing, and indicts no-one before quietly leaving the room. Instead, the characters work out for themselves—with the help the cliché based on a naïve young woman who recognizes what no-one else can—that the solution to the

locked-room "mystery" is that the seemingly missing body is to be found in the calf-skin books, the tooled leather on the desktop and the meats laid out on the sideboard because the invisible murderers are the butcher and the tanner.

On the one hand, the subversive drama of this story might seem to offer a good example of "restoring the absent referent," but it is subtly and significantly different. By displacing the detection of the crime on to the characters, who promptly laugh it off as "too trivial," "Classic Detective Story" suggests that detecting, or having the simple knowledge-power to reveal the truth about violence towards animals, is not enough to stop it. When compared to the ethical authority of the campaigner who insists that animals have rights, or that meat is murder—and of course outside her fiction, this is Brophy too—the detective's silence speaks eloquently to a more disquieting truth which it is the purpose of Brophy's pro-animal literary experimentation to reveal. There may well be no higher authority than human intelligence to refer to when divining how to behave ethically; but the essentialist, traditional and dogmatic preference of humans for humans means that appealing to an earthly legislating or policing authority is, also, beside the point. This is ironically personified at the end of "Classic Detective Story" when Lady Artemisia Chase insists, fully of moral probity, that she "wouldn't hurt a fly" but then insouciantly does precisely that when it comes near her food (87-88). For Brophy, a new morality of human-animal relations will emerge not simply by seeking any kind of truth, but by re-reading and re-imagining the world with care; a process that can have no definitive prosecution. As Brophy's Voltaire ironically puts it: "Humans are such inveterate *mammals* […]. They are never happy until they have put a construction on the universe that makes it a mirror of their own infancy, with a parental hand always in

the offing to protect or chastise" (156). The astonishing insight of Brophy's pro-animal writing, then, is that to make good ethical sense of the story of animals' rights, we must learn how to tell without the help of an author, just as we must learn how to read, entirely new stories of who we are.

4. Conclusion

It has been my purpose here to offer a synoptic analysis of the full range of Brophy's moral, aesthetic and psycho-social thought about human-animal relations, and how these inform and are bodied forth in her journalistic and social commentary and her artistic and literary practice. Doing so reveals her great significance for the development of late twentieth century cultural reflection on, and social action to indict, humanity's derelict treatment of animal life.

Her importance in terms of literary influence is somewhat harder to pinpoint, a challenge made more difficult by critical neglect. That said, it is certainly possible to find isolated examples that seem to follow in Brophy's footsteps, such as Deborah Levy's *Diary of a Steak* or the recent BBC film *Carnage* by Simon Amstell. Each of these shares Brophy's interest, which I have traced in depth here, in connecting intensive formal experiment, psycho-social thought and pointed critique in the realm of animal ethics.[13] Perhaps Brophy's most surprising and significant (although as yet unremarked) influence, however, appears on the work of J. M. Coetzee, and in particular his metafictional novella *The Lives of Animals* (1999). This is a text which is near ubiquitous in critical discussion of contemporary fiction about animals, as it is in the academic field of animal studies in general (McKay 2010). Such discussions

draw heavily on the pro-animal and literary-aesthetic arguments of its central character and presiding voice, the fictional novelist Elizabeth Costello. Costello is a witty if sometimes cantankerous writer, known for her metafictional strategies, who is given to offering risky analogies (such as between animal use and the Holocaust) and is most outspoken in her commitment to animal rights. This commitment is developed in critical analysis of the prejudices and hypocrisies of anthropocentric morality and rooted fundamentally in heeding the ethical claim of the sympathetic imagination. Such a description of the fictional Costello, without doubt the predominant literary influence on thought about animals today, is also a perfect portrait of her critically neglected real-life precursor, Brigid Brophy.[14]

My claim here, though, has not quite been that critics have overlooked a direct influence that Brophy has had on contemporary fiction about animals, whether in the example of her personality or of her work. As I have argued, rather, Brophy's writing is interested in the representation of animals less in the aesthetic than in the political sense. Indeed, her style of writing about animals and its literary-formal innovations are closely tied to a quite particular aesthetic, which encompasses stylistic, psychoanalytic and moral thought in a very specific way. In finally assessing her influence, then, the significant point is surely that it is difficult to properly read any fictional representation of animals now without some understanding of the raised ethical stakes of human-animal relations in the contemporary west, an understanding that Brophy's work continues to inspire.

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[1] I am grateful to Stanley Godlovitch, John Harris and David Wood for correspondence confirming the details of Brophy’s influence.

[2] See Armstrong 187, 196-7; Malamud; see also Herman, McHugh, Pick, Simons, and Wolfe, *Animal Rites*.

[3] For explanatory discussion of speciesism and human exceptionalism see Boddice.

[4] Indeed, given the intellectual allegiance of work in literary animal studies with various critiques of humanism and with posthumanism, this is a likely to be a significant factor in Brophy's absence from consideration in the field (see Wolfe *Posthumanism*).

[5] I am grateful to Richard Ryder and staff at the Open University archive for helping me to discover a recording of this programme in 2015; it was held uncatalogued in the Open University archive. The views expressed on the programme are not those of the Open University.

[6] See Freud. *Black Ship to Hell* also addresses the subject of vivisection (174-77). Another example of the way Brophy's thought has been overlooked in the development of animal studies is the fact that she extends her argument to include a cultural psychoanalysis of the concepts of sacrificial scapegoating and of meat-eating which is remarkably close to the important and widely-cited analysis of "carno-phallogocentrism" offered by Jacques Derrida (Brophy, "In Pursuit" 141-42, Derrida 280-81).

[7] The title plays on George Bernard Shaw's *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* (1932), whose eponymous heroine, incidentally, carries a knobkerrie.

[8] See Patterson for a textual history and analysis of this comparison, which is found in the work of writers from Isaac Bashevis Singer and Theodor Adorno to J.M. Coetzee as well as pro-animal polemic.

[9] I am grateful to Kate Levey for allowing me access to the unpublished manifesto and catalogue made by the artists, which are in her private collection; thanks also to

Maureen Duffy for permission to reproduce material here. Given the lack of published evidence of this show, it is understandable that Brophy's work with Duffy (another overlooked contemporary writer about animals) should be missing from the best contemporary histories of art that focus on animals; this is despite its significance and comparability to more well-known (male) conceptualists such as Joseph Beuys, Hans Haake or Marcel Broodthaers (see Baker, Broglio).

[10] A somewhat inaccurate report of this piece, incorrectly titled, is offered in Barbara Wright's review (Wright); I am grateful to Kate Levey for providing an illumination of an undeveloped negative photograph of this piece.

[11] Brophy is offering here an early version of what has recently emerged in animal studies, alongside a broader critique of discourses of "life," as a biopolitical analysis of human animal relations (see Wolfe, Hunt and Youngblood).

[12] See Horsley 35-52.

[13] See Levy, Amstell, McKay 2006 and Leszkiewicz.

[14] Although it is very likely, there is no evidence to my knowledge that Coetzee knows of Brophy's life or writing. There are some surprisingly close similarities between their works, though: for instance both Brophy's *Hackenfeller's Ape* and Coetzee's *Disgrace* feature alienated academics, both condemned for sexual improprieties, who after reflecting on animal ethics seek some form of solace by attempting to communicate with an animal by badly performing operatic music to it.