

https://dspace.org/

# Human-animal relationships and ecocriticism: a study of the representation of animals in poetry from Malawi, Zimbabwe, and South Africa

**Mthatiwa, Syned Dale Makani**

**2011-11-21**
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/10813

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

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

**Syned Dale Makani Mthatiwa**
Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER),
University of the Witwatersrand

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**Johannesburg,**

June 2011

## 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.

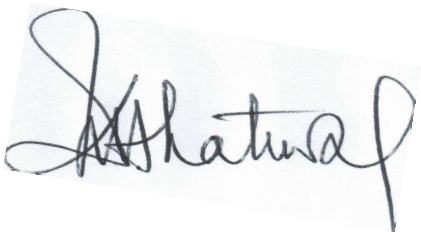
The study shows that in the selected poetry animals occupy a significant position in the poets' exploration of social, psychological, political, and cultural issues. As symbols in, and subjects of, the poetry animals, in particular, and nature in general, function as tools for the poets' conceptualisation 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.*

**Acknowledgements**

I am deeply thankful to Professor Sarah Nuttall whose faith in me never faltered throughout my PhD study at Wits. This thesis would not have been what it is without her invaluable supervisory interventions. Her encouragement and support and her insightful and expert critical observations and comments have helped me to tailor my thesis into its present shape. I am sincerely and deeply grateful to her. My sincere and heartfelt gratitude also goes to Professor "Elder" Robert Muponde, co-supervisor, for his unwavering support, guidance, and insightful comments throughout the writing process. He allowed me to "stumble" into his office with structural and analytical conundrums surrounding my thesis weighing heavily on my scowling face. On leaving that office an hour or so later, I invariably did so with well shaped ideas and a beaming smile on my face. The humorous tall and wild tales that only he seems to have the ability to tell also helped a lot to cheer my research-exhausted spirits. May both of you accept my empty calabash of words of gratitude. Were it in Muwawa, a "chicken" would have been an appropriate symbol of my indebtedness to you.

The writing of this thesis was made possible by the support and financial assistance I got from several institutions. The Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) made my study at Wits and my stay in South Africa possible through the award of a WISER Doctoral Fellowship (funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies), without which my quest for a PhD would probably have still remained a fractured dream. WISER provided me with office space, a living allowance, research equipment, and research funds that enabled me to travel and present parts of my thesis at conferences both locally and internationally. WISER gave me the research experience I probably would never have had anywhere in the region. The Postgraduate Merit Award awarded to me by the University of the Witwatersrand for three consecutive years also helped with research and living expenses. The Wits University Travel Grant and the African Literature Association (ALA) Travel Grant helped me meet some costs for attending conferences abroad. My mother institution, the University of Malawi, granted me a four year study leave that allowed me to concentrate on my research for, and writing of, this thesis. Many colleagues at that institution also helped in different ways to make my research experience enjoyable. *Zikomo*.

Thanks to all WISER Staff members, former and present (Jon Hyslop, Deborah Posel, Achille Mbembe, Irma du Plessis, Julia Hornberger, Michael Titlestad, Ashlee Neser, Abebe Zegeye, Lara Allen, Elizabeth Gunner, Pamila Gupta, Samadia Sadouni and Sampie Terreblanche), for reference materials and for the critical observations and stimulating questions about the "animal." Many thanks to my fellow strugglers on the otherwise lonesome journey of a PhD for the collegial camaraderie, research materials and encouragement when the going got tough: Nicole Ulrich, Annie Leatt, Euclides Gonçalves, Cobi Labuscagne, Zethu Matebeni, Peter Phiri, Reason Beremauro, Jennifer Musangi, and Jendele Hungbo. I also remember Natalie Ridgard. Adila Deshmukh and Najibha Deshmukh! They were incredible. With patience and understanding, they at times went out of their way to give me whatever assistance I required with a smile. I will sing of the joys at WISER that their competence and selfless assistance brought for me in distant lands. Josephine Mashaba took the form of my elder sister in my mind and made me feel at home at WISER. *Ngiyabonga*.

I am also grateful to Pascal Mwale, my mentor, who dreamt of the possibility of my "sitting" at WISER. That dream became a reality. Damazio "Rhino" Mfune-Mwanjakwa's friendship, timely intervention when patience and perseverance turned sour in my mouth, and assistance to my young family back home, gave me courage to soldier on. Last but not least, Nick Mdika Tembo's friendship and encouragement inspired me to believe in the wisdom of old Wadi Ndogo. To you all I say: *Mukoneke otayi ni moro.*

Parts of Chapter Two of this thesis appeared as "Bird Metaphors in Jack Mapanje's *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* and *Skipping Without Ropes*" in Alter*nation: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa*, volume 16, number 2 (2009), pages 13-34.

**Contents**


| | Page |
|---|---|
| *Abstract* | ii |
| *Declaration* | iii |
| *Dedication* | iv |
| *Acknowledgement* | v |
| **Chapter 1: Literary Animals, Ecocriticism and Zoocriticism** | **1** |
| 1.0 Preamble | 1 |
| 2.0 Contextual Background to the Study | 3 |
| 3.0 Aim of the Study | 12 |
| 4.0 Rationale | 13 |
| 5.0 Literature Review | 17 |
| 6.0 This Study | 39 |
| 7.0 Scope of the Study | 45 |
| **Chapter 2: The "Rhetoric of Animality" and Animal Imagery in the Resistance Poetry of Jack Mapanje** | **52** |
| 1.0 Introduction | 52 |
| 2.0 Jack Mapanje's Poetry and Resistance | 53 |
| 3.0 Animals in Malawian Society, Literature and Criticism | 59 |
| 4.0 Animals, Banda and MCP's Brutality | 63 |
| 5.0 Animals as Weapons of Satire, Ridicule and Scorn | 83 |
| 6.0 Harmlessness, Victimhood and Suffering | 87 |
| 6.1 "Song of Chickens": Bird Metaphors and Harmlessness | 88 |
| 7.0 Conclusion | 93 |
| **Chapter 3: Mythical, Cultic and Fabulous Animals and Socio-Political Change in the Epic Poetry of Steve Chimombo** | **96** |
| 1.0 Introduction | 96 |
| 2.0 Steve Chimombo's Poetry | 98 |
| 3.0 Cataclysm, Death, and Destruction | 109 |
| 4.0 Moral Decay, Oppression and Exploitation | 121 |
| 5.0 Recurrence, Rebirth and Regeneration | 124 |
| 6.0 Selfishness, Greed and Stupidity | 132 |
| 7.0 Conclusion | 138 |
| **Chapter 4: Animals and Rural /City Landscapes in the Poetry of Chenjerai Hove and Musaemura Zimunya** | **140** |
| 1.0 Introduction | 140 |
| 2.0 Chenjerai Hove and Musa Zimunya's Poetry | 143 |
| 3.0 Rural Zimbabwe: Sweet Home That Was | 146 |
| 4.0 Rural Poverty and Suffering | 158 |
| 5.0 The Dog and the City: Victims of Ambivalence | 168 |

6.0 The City as Wasteland in Hove and Zimunya 178
6.1 Existential Struggle in the City 181
6.2 The City and Moral Decay 185
7.0 Conclusion 193

**Chapter 5: Natural Heritage, Stewardship, and Identity: Zimbabwe's Wildlife in the Poetry of Bart Wolffe 196**
1.0 Introduction 196
2.0 The Nature Poetry of Bart Wolffe 197
3.0 Nature, Landscape and Identity in Wolffe's Poetry 208
4.0 Celebration of Life and Retreat into Nature: Tranquillity, Beauty, Diversity 223
5.0 Nature as Heritage: Ecological Vision in Wolffe's poetry 228
6.0 Nature as a Threat and Spectacle: Limits of Wolffe's Ecological Vision 235
7.0 Conclusion 245

**Chapter 6: Predation, Animal Suffering and Death in the Poetry of Douglas Livingstone 248**
1.0 Introduction 248
2.0 Douglas Livingstone's Poetry 250
3.0 Humour, Dualism and Hierarchy 256
4.0 Existential Struggle, Suffering and Death 266
5.0 Ecological Protest, Compassion and Respect 278
6.0 Conclusion: A Critique of Douglas Livingstone's Ecological Views 288

**Chapter 7: Chromosome Cousins and Familiar Strangers: Relational Selfhood and Sense of Belonging to the Cosmos in Chris Mann's Ecopoetry 295**
1.0 Introduction 295
2.0 Chris Mann's Poetry 297
3.0 Some Themes in *Lifelines* 306
3.1 Animals: Kin and "Another" 308
3.2 Space-Consciousness and Admiration 320
3.3 Benefactors and Foes: Interdependence and Conflict in Nature 333
3.4 Human Predation and Abuse of Animals 342
4.0 Animals as Moral Subjects: Some Reflections 347
5.0 Conclusion 350

**Conclusion 354**

**Bibliography 362**