

Abstract

Growing concern about animals and the environment has brought with it an increase in the number of texts that represent and explore ecologically oriented issues. By examining selected texts by Margaret Atwood, J.M. Coetzee, Yann Martel, Cormac McCarthy, Zakes Mda and Ruth Ozeki that present animals as individual beings, and/or the impact that human activity is having on the nonhuman world, this thesis discusses the importance of literature in advocating compassionate and biocentric worldviews and lifestyles.

With the advent of the environmental crisis, it has become necessary to critique the validity of the human/animal divide particularly at this point in our collective global history when the negative impact of human activity is becoming increasingly visible everywhere. With this in mind, animal presences in the selected texts have been read and understood as being representative of animals themselves, and not as indirect commentary and/or representations of anthropocentric issues, with the aim of drawing attention to the plight of nonhuman life in the age of the Anthropocene. The discussion explores literature's usefulness as a tool for imagining, representing, and disseminating knowledge about human-animal relationships, and how it offers a space for us to reconfigure these relationships in ways that challenge the human/animal binary. In so doing, I argue for literature's positive contribution towards our ethical and moral evolution as a species, specifically where the nonhuman is concerned, and how a change in global ethics that is more inclusive of other species is inextricably connected to how we understand and view human-animal relationships, and situate ourselves in the world.