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## A Non-Anthropocentric Area of Animals' Memory in *Wake*, a Short Story by Shaun Tan A Conspicuous Example of Developing Pro-Animal Sensitivity among Children

*To Młodzik the Cat*

Nieantropocentryczny obszar pamięci o zwierzętach w opowiadaniu *Czuwanie* Shauna Tana. Bezkompromisowy przykład kształtowania prozwierzęcej wrażliwości wśród dzieci

Неантропоцентрическая область памяти о животных в микрорассказе *Поминки* Шона Тана. Яркий пример развития чувствительности к животным у детей

### Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł jest literaturoznawczą interpretacją opowiadania *Czuwanie* i towarzyszącej mu ilustracji postmodernistycznego australijskiego artysty Shauna Tana, którego dzieła wpisują się w dyskursy posthumanizmu. Wybrany utwór to dzieło wyjątkowe, dalekie od klasycznych realizacji tematów prozwierzęcych w najnowszej literaturze dziecięcej. Utwór analizuję przez pryzmat studiów nad zwierzętami, praw zwierząt oraz ich podmiotowości, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem debaty nad redefiniowaniem śmierci zwierzęcia towarzyszącego w XXI wieku. Opowiadanie Tana jest znakomitym przykładem literatury skierowanej do młodego odbiorcy pozbawionej właściwego dla niej, niebezpiecznego

Abstrakt  
Статья является литературной интерпретацией рассказа *Поминки* и сопровождающей его иллюстрации постмодернистского австралийского художника Шона Тана, чьи работы вписываются в дискурсы постгуманизма. Данный текст – уникальное произведение, далекое от классических рассказов о животном мире в новейшей детской литературе. Автор анализирует произведение с точки зрения исследований о животных, прав животных и их субъективности, уделяя особое внимание дискуссии о новом понимании смерти животного-компаньона в XXI веке. Микрорассказ Тана это отличный пример литературы, адресованной молодому читателю, потому что в ней отсутствует характерный для автора рассказа

chwytu narracyjnego określanego jako „sentymentalna antropomorfizacja zwierząt”, która sprawia, że postrzegamy zwierzę jako bohatera tekstu kultury przez pryzmat doświadczeń i emocji człowieka. Proponuję także wykorzystanie utworu do zaaranżowania projektu edukacyjnego w szkole podstawowej zatytułowanego *Nieantropomorficzny obszar pamięci o zwierzętach*, opatrzonego mottem: „Jak często się zdarza, że nie dostrzegamy zwierząt, choć nieustannie dzielimy z nimi świat?”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *animal studies*, Shaun Tan, posthumanizm, prawa zwierząt, literatura dla dzieci

опасный повествовательный прием, то есть сентиментальная антропоморфизация животных. Именно она заставляет нас воспринимать животное как героя текста культуры сквозь призму человеческого опыта и эмоций. Автор статьи предлагает также использовать данное произведение в начальной школе для образовательного проекта *Неантропоцентрическая область памяти о животных* со следующим девизом: «Как часто бывает, что мы не замечаем животных, хотя постоянно делим с ними мир?».

**Ключевые слова:** *animal studies*, Шон Тан, постгуманизм, права животных, детская литература

## Introduction

Angela Singer, an artist and animal rights activist, who in her art undertakes issues relating to animals' social status as objects, suffering inflicted on them by humans, and a problematic use of living animals in plays, which are then killed in front of the audience, says the following about her artistic work: “It’s not ideological, it’s about real life and real death. [...] Almost everyone knows something about the reality of animal suffering. It doesn’t really matter, if the work [as a text of culture – K. S.] is understood with anything other than the heart, I would prefer it to be felt, for the view to be vulnerable and open up to compassion.”<sup>1</sup> Kari Weil, one of the leading representatives of Animal Studies, says something similar:

True, for centuries nonhuman animals have been locked in representations authored by humans, representations that, moreover, have justified their use and abuse by humans. But unlike in women’s studies or ethnic studies, those who constitute the objects of animal studies cannot speak for themselves, or at least they cannot speak the languages that the academy recognises as necessary for such self-representation. Must they then be forever condemned to the status of objects?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Steve Baker, “Contemporary Art and Animal Rights” [Sztuka współczesna i prawa zwierząt]. Polish trans. Edyta Ulińska, in *Zwierzęta i ich ludzie. Zmierzch antropocentrycznego paradygmatu* [Animals and Their People. A Decline of the Anthropocentric Paradigm], ed. Anna Barcz and Dorota Łagodzka (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2015), 77.

<sup>2</sup> Kari Weil, “A Report on the Animal Turn” [Zwrot ku zwierzętom. Sprawozdanie]. Polish trans. Piotr Sadzik, in *Zwierzęta, gender, kultura. Perspektywa ekologiczna, etyczna i krytyczna*

As raised by the artist and researcher, the issue of a subjective and anthropomorphic perception and treatment of animals constitutes one of the key themes of post-humanist discourses in the 21st century pursued in literature, arts, philosophy, and social sciences and humanities.<sup>3</sup> Such discourses cover cultural studies on animals, the purpose of which is to mark and appreciate a separate perspective of animals.<sup>4</sup> They include interdisciplinary Human-Animal Studies (HAS) employing the findings of biological sciences which are most strongly related to social sciences and humanities.<sup>5</sup> A sub-division of HAS is referred to as Critical Animal Studies, which is devoted to the discourses of animal rights, their subjectivity, identity, psyche, and emotional sphere.<sup>6</sup> All types of Animal Studies provide a fresh insight into the animal issue and negate culturally conditioned stereotypical ways of thinking about animals, situating them in the categories of objects, servant beings, or products.<sup>7</sup>

As an academic field, Animal Studies are compared to Women's Studies and also to Ethnic Studies.<sup>8</sup> These fields cover the struggle of discriminated groups against their persecution, social stereotypes, and also psychic and physical suffering inflicted on them.<sup>9</sup> Animal Studies thinking is aimed at making people more sensitive to the social and cultural identity of animals, encouraging discussions on their emancipation from human power, on the rights to which they are entitled, their natural need of freedom, and the necessity of providing protection to many species.<sup>10</sup> In the Polish humanities, Animal Studies have long been thriving; nonetheless, we can see they are missing in the field of school and university education. Although animal rights belong to the topics that are "anthropologically sensitive," ones that concern critical social issues and should be discussed at all stages of education, in Polish schools the posthumanist pro-

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[Animals, Gender, Culture. An Ecological, Ethical, and Critical Perspective], ed. Anna Barcz and Magdalena Dąbrowska (Lublin: E-naukowiec, 2014), 16.

<sup>3</sup> It is worth to mention a 1975 book entitled *Animal Liberation* [Wyzwolenie zwierząt] written by philosopher Peter Singer, in which the following notions appeared: *species chauvinism*, *speciesism*, or *antispeciesism*. Cf. Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*. Polish trans. Anna Alichniewicz and Anna Szczęśna (Warszawa: Marginesy, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Margo DeMello, *Animals and Society. An Introduction to Human-Animals Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 45–50.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies. The Question of Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 34.

<sup>7</sup> Samantha Hurn, *Humans and Other Animals. Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Human-Animal Interactions* (New York: Pluto Press, 2012), 9–10.

<sup>8</sup> Hurn, *Humans and Other Animals*, 66.

<sup>9</sup> Marzena Kotyczka, "Słowo wstępne" [Foreword], in *Śmierć zwierzęcia. Współczesne zootanalogie* [Animal's Death. Contemporary Zootanalogies], ed. Marzena Kotyczka (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2014), 7–15.

<sup>10</sup> Kotyczka, "Słowo wstępne."

jects aimed at departing from anthropocentrism and building new narratives of the world are rejected and tabooed. It would be extremely valuable to introduce Animal Studies thinking as early as at the stage of pre-school and early school education, especially so that younger children show a deep empathy with animals, naturally perceiving them as beings equal to humans which can feel, think, and suffer, and with which they can develop strong bonds, sometimes stronger than with the representatives of their own species. By making younger children more sensitive to animal issues and aware of the harmful treatment of animals as objects, it is hoped that they will develop a growing sense of responsibility for the social situation of animals and openly manifest their disapproval of their multi-dimensional exploitation.<sup>11</sup>

### Non-anthropocentric Area of Memory

One of the ways of making children more sensitive to the social situation of animals is offered by contemporary literature for non-adults, especially works that have been written in the last decade, mainly in the West, though recent years have witnessed the rising popularity of such works in Poland. Their function has been to arouse children's interests in animals, highlighting the identity of non-human subjects,<sup>12</sup> outlining a history of animals, and challenging their object-like treatment. It is worth noting that appearance of animals in certain specific thematic areas and presenting a selected group of recent, highly artistic works of literature addressed to the youngest readers:

- a) the Holocaust-related motifs in contemporary children's literature: (*Schlemiel* [2010] by Ryszard Marek Groński, *XY* [2012], *Brygida's She-Cat* [2007] by Joanna Rudniańska);
- b) contemporary wars in modern children's literature: (*Karim's Cat and Pictures* [2016] by Roksana Jędrzejewska-Wróbel, *The Cat Who Lost His Home* [2016] by Ewa Nowak);
- c) animals' identity, their history, and relations with humans: (*Lolek* [2017] by Adam Wajrak, *The Wandering Dog* [2018] by Agnieszka Taborska, *Hey, Sprat!* [2017] by Agnieszka Kowalska, *Notros* [2017] by Małgorzata Urszula, *Way with an Elf* [2012] by Marcin Pałasz, *String* [2017] by Adam Lang);

<sup>11</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, "Animals Pets: Cruelty and Affection," in *The Animals Reader. The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, ed. Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald (New York: Berg Publishers, 2007), 147–152.

<sup>12</sup> Monika Bakke, *Bio-transfiguracje. Sztuka i estetyka posthumanizmu* [Bio-Transfigurations. Art and Aesthetics of Posthumanism] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2012), 8.

- d) depriving animals of their natural space: (*Forests Here and There* [2017] by Magdalena Tulli, *Ambaras* [2018] by Tomasz Samojlik, *Undead Forest* [2017] by Tomasz Samojlik and Adam Wajrak, *Dogopharnage* [2015] by Agata Widzowska);
- e) companion animals and their uniqueness: (*Auntie Jadzia in the Country*, [2017] by Eliza Piotrowska, *Cactus, the Good Dog* [2004], *Jock. The Story of Dog Fidelity* [2007], *Baltic: The Dog that Floated on an Ice Floe* [2012] by Barbara Gawryluk, *Greater Burdock Field* [2017], *Złociejowo* [2018] by Katarzyna Ryrych, *Goodnight Stories of a Little Apple Tree*, [2017] by Ludwig Hellmann, *A Little Mouse* [2016] by Dorota Gellner, *Old Noah* [2015] by Zuzanna Orlińska, *The Practical Gentleman* [2015] by Rokšana Jędrzejewska-Wróbel, *Counting Dogs* [2017], *I, Bobik. A True Story About a Cat Who Thought Himself a King* [2015] by Ewa Kozyra-Pawlak);
- f) animal death: (*Seven Owls' Feathers* [2008], *Bright Days, Dark Nights* [2017] by Katarzyna Ryrych, *The Eyelids* [2012] by Aleksandra Cieślak and Michał Rusinek, *A Girl from the Park* [2012] by Barbara Kosmowska, *Queen of the Birds* [2015] by Zofia Beszczyńska, *Eveline and the Dark Bird* [2013], *The Town of Last Sighs* [2014] by Grzegorz Gortat);
- g) postmodernist themes: (*Ark of Time* [2013], *The Heart of Nephthys* [2018] by Marcin Szczygielski);
- h) non-fiction: (*The Zoo* [2018] by Maciej Byliniak and Ewa Stiasny, *Bees* [2015], *Trees* [2018] by Wojciech Grajkowski, *The Little Bird Atlas* [2017] by Ewa Kozyra-Pawlak and Paweł Pawlak, *Animalcracy* [2018] by Aleksandra Woldańska-Płocińska, *Animals That Have Disappeared. An Atlas of Extinct Species* [2018], *How Does It Work? Animals* [2017], *Mom, Let Me Tell You, What Cats Do* [2016] by Nikola Kucharska, *A Year in the Forest* [2015], *Amazing Friendships. The World of Plants and Animals* [2018] by Emilia Dziubak), and many more.

It is also worth pointing out here that there is an outstanding and unparalleled foreign picture book addressed to the youngest readers entitled *Animal Rescue* by Patrick George (originally published in 2016; Polish edition in 2017, Bajka Publishers), which has become a global bestseller and is an excellent example of providing children with knowledge about animals and their emotional states without using the language as a key communicator. The book has transparent acetate pages, after the flipping of which a child sees two simple pictures: one of them shows the enslavement of animals and their reduction to mere objects, while the other one shows their lives in natural conditions where they become autotelic subjects. The book shows the enslavement and liberation of animals at various levels: battery cage, hunting of endangered species, hunting, fur farms, circuses, and zoological gardens, thoughtless adoption of animals, massive fishing, leather products, and many other, equally important ones. While browsing through the book, the child becomes its narrator: as he/she

flips the transparencies, he/she sees the difference between treating animals as objects and subjects. A major, subliminal message for the children based on a simple illustration is to make them more sensitive about the protection of animal rights and to object to their marginalisation and abuse. The book draws on Animal Studies thinking; however, it is the youngest ones who take their stand on the animal cause, as they may think over their own choices and knowingly decide about viable actions to be pursued for the benefit of animals. Children may show the book to their parents, offering their own narrative for each illustration, thus being able of instilling in adults an idea of going deeper into the topic, naturally together with the child, which marks the beginning of a real change in human behaviour towards animals and a community-like desire to shape the posthumanist reality. The book has been published in Poland by Bajka Publishers, one of the leading Polish houses, where lovers of children's literature popularise highly artistic texts of the non-adult culture. Other pro-animal books published by Bajka Publishers include: *Mother Crow's Fables* [2010], *The Green and Nobody* [2014] by Małgorzata Strzałkowska, *What Bird Does That?* [2017] by Maria Szajer, a series of books on Florka the Shrew by Roksana Jędrzejewska-Wróbel, *My Friend Bear* [2018] by Katarzyna Minasowicz, *Seashell* [2013], *Blue She Bear* [2012] by Joanna M. Chmielewska, *Chick* [2017] by Dorota Gellner, and many other.



Photo 1. The cover of the picturebook *Animal Rescue* by Patrick George

Source: Bajka Publishers, Warsaw 2017.



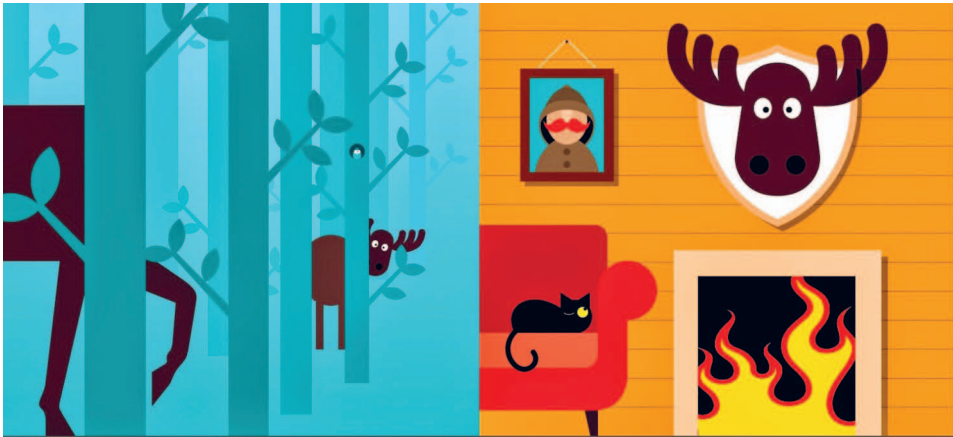


Photo 2. Illustration from the *Animal Rescue* picture book by Patrick George  
Source: Bajka Publishers, Warsaw 2017.



Photo 3. Illustration from the *Animal Rescue* picture book by Patrick George  
Source: Bajka Publishers, Warsaw 2017.

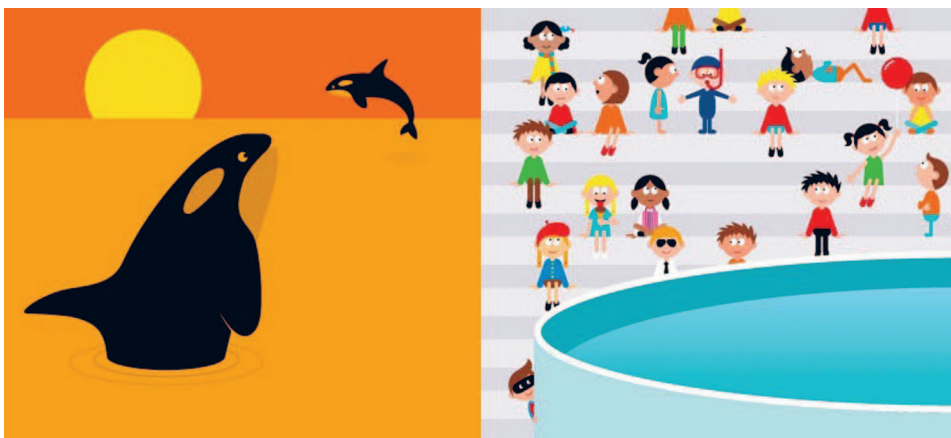


Photo 4. Illustration from the *Animal Rescue* picture book by Patrick George  
Source: Bajka Publishers, Warsaw 2017.

In the paper, I wish to discuss an outstanding piece of literature which is far from being a classical embodiment of pro-animal topics in the recent children's literature. It is a short story called *Wake* from the anthology of *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (originally published in 2008; Polish edition 2013) by Australian artist Shaun Tan. This essay should be treated as a case study – as I focus here on a story that has been selected from numerous Polish and foreign contemporary works for children that deal with the issue of the rights of animals and their treatment as subjects. I view it as an excellent example of literature addressed to the young reader which is devoid of a narrative ploy so characteristic of it and referred to as “sentimental anthropomorphisation of animals.”<sup>13</sup> The ploy is omnipresent in pro-animal children's literature (except for works labelled as non-fiction), which has been noted by Anita Jarzyna, who, in the paper on the physical and psychic condition of animals in the works on Holocaust for the youngest children (here: a known illustrated book called *Schlemiel* by Ryszard Marek Groński), writes:

It would not be groundless to assume that it is just the reason why *Schlemiel* speaks, when being imprisoned in a cage of human distinctions, divisions, perspectives; there are doubts, though, whether the language, which, by its nature is anthropomorphic, has been sufficiently disrupted in the novel, since,

<sup>13</sup> Krzysztof Konecki, *Ludzie i ich zwierzęta. Interakcjonistyczno-symboliczna analiza społecznego świata właścicieli zwierząt domowych* [People and Their Animals. Symbolic Interactionism Analysis of the Social World of Pet Owners] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2005), 78.



actually, the dog reports on the fate of its subsequent carers, and their affairs and experience of war completely determine the story it tells.<sup>14</sup>

Tan's book deprives the reader of the possibility of projecting an anthropocentric perspective on the non-human subject to explain an animal's emotions. Tan makes the reader of any age more sensitive about the issue of treating animals as subjects by introducing an animal perspective. Thus, we are offered an in-depth insight into a non-anthropocentric sphere of gestures, sounds, and behaviour of the animal protagonists, with which we may identify ourselves outside the language that defines us as humans. The author makes an attempt at departing from falsifying animals' emotions through the network of the human psyche, perception, and a human verbalising communicator. What may be useful in the analysis of the work is the assumption made by Dominique Lestel "[...] in which the animal is perceived as presence that must be presented as a *first person subject from the point of view of the first person* [...]"<sup>15</sup> We are able to understand the point of view of a non-human subject by attempting to decode an animal's perspective of us. In *Wake* the exclusion of animals from the hermetic "cage of languages"<sup>16</sup> is replaced by a set of non-verbal "tropes" which reveal the personality and identity of a non-human protagonist of the story. As stressed by animal mind researchers, those figures, which include gestures and sounds, are not "empty" signs, since they differ not only in the expression of intensively shown emotions, but, as simple instruction-messages, are also loaded with semantic meaning.<sup>17</sup> Reading the short story also offers an in-depth insight into the notion of humanity, or a redefinition of the term, since "humanity is constituted [in it – K. S.] through the experience of animality."<sup>18</sup>

### *wake*

On a cold night last winter there was a fire at the house of a man who only days before had beaten his dog to death.

Being a strong man, he was able to rescue all his belongings singlehandedly, carrying them out of the burning building and onto the front lawn. As soon as he had finished, a hundred dogs of every shape and size trotted into the flickering light from the surrounding shadows and promptly sat on top of every appliance and piece of furniture as if it were their own. They would

<sup>14</sup> Anita Jarzyna, "Szlemiele. Zwierzęta wobec Zagłady w literaturze dla dzieci" [Schlemiels. Animals and the Holocaust in Children's Literature], *Narracje o Zagładzie 2* (2016): 235–256.

<sup>15</sup> Dominique Lestel, "Myśleć sierścią. Zwierzęcość w perspektywie drugosobowej" [To Think Hairy. Animality from the Point of View of the Second Person]. Polish trans. Anastazja Dwulit, in *Zwierzęta i ich ludzie. Zmierzch antropocentrycznego paradygmatu*, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Dariusz Czaja, *Lekcje ciemności* [Lessons of Darkness] (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2009), 12.

<sup>17</sup> Maciej Trojan, *Na tropie zwierzęcego umysłu* [In Search of the Animal Mind] (Warszawa: Scholar, 2013), 34.

<sup>18</sup> Lestel, "Myśleć sierścią," 25.

not let the man come close and snapped at him viciously when he tried to hit them, but otherwise remained still, staring impassively at the flames.

The fire burned with astonishing intensity, the house collapsed within minutes, and the enraged man stormed away in search of a weapon. As if on cue, the dogs leapt to the ground and circled quietly in the smoky darkness, taking turns to urinate on every rescued object. They howled once, not very loud or long, but with such melancholy that even those who could not hear it turned restlessly in their sleep.

And then they were gone, scattering to the streets and alleys, heads hanging at the sound of their own paws scuffing on the concrete footpaths, ground that had once been wild black earth.

They did not look back at the final small fires on the lawn, or the man who returned with a useless crowbar to stand in the ash, alone and weeping. The dogs thought only of home: the smell of warm kennels, of safe laundry blankets and the beds of sleeping humans, the ones who had given them peculiar names.<sup>19</sup>

The short story may be read by employing both the thinking based on Animal Studies and Trauma Studies, since suffering and death of the animal is its starting and ending point.<sup>20</sup> One could refer here to the fundamental question asked by Kari Weil: “How one can give testimony to an experience [of the animal’s suffering and death – K. S.] that cannot be spoken or that maybe distorted by speaking it?”<sup>21</sup> Interpreting Weil’s way of thinking, Marzena Kotyczka writes: “[...] before it reaches the human language, the evidence of animals’ suffering must pass through a number of filters; nonetheless, the awareness of those filters is the first step towards the non-anthropocentric view of posthumanism.”<sup>22</sup> Tan’s short story implements the “animal turn” as proposed by Weil, since it does not only provide the readers with an observation of animal emotions and behaviour outside the “prison of language”<sup>23</sup> always mediating the view of animals, which is hermetic because it is centred around human experiences and beliefs.<sup>24</sup> It also confronts them with a special set of texts called zootanatologies, which are “stories of animals, [...], in which narrators have tried to give voice to their protagonists, place them in the centre of the story, not as a symbol, allegory, or another figure, but as an objective of its own.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Shaun Tan, *Wake* [Czuwanie], in *Tales from Outer Suburbia* [Opowieści z najdalszych przedmieść]. Polish trans. Magdalena Koziej (Warszawa: Kultura Gniewu, 2013), 80.

<sup>20</sup> Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals. Why Animals Studies Now?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 40.

<sup>21</sup> Weil, “A Report on the Animal Turn,” 17.

<sup>22</sup> Kotyczka, “Słowo wstępne,” 10.

<sup>23</sup> Weil, “A Report on the Animal Turn,” 23.

<sup>24</sup> Kotyczka, “Słowo wstępne,” 11.

<sup>25</sup> Kotyczka, “Słowo wstępne,” 11.

In his *Wake*, the Australian author shows that a symbolic message exists outside the verbalised sphere, and thus the reader is given a chance to reach out to experiences that are precedent, or internal ones, relative to the language, which have been lost or repressed, and which may lead to a fuller and more multi-dimensional understanding of the reality.<sup>26</sup> What is interesting is that

the recent interactionist and phenomenological research into the intentionality and subjectivity of animals shows that human communication with animals occurs in “kinaesthetic empathy.” A human observes movements and gestures of animals to understand their intentions and meaning of animal behaviour, whereas animals, while observing movements of humans, try to sense and understand their intentions and purposes.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, references to autobiographic recollections and spontaneous references to past events may be observed in many species, and also their ability to plan, which evidences that they “have some form of personal memory,” and are even capable of “mental trips in time.”<sup>28</sup> Being aware of such dependencies, Tan offers his readers some guidelines on challenging the anthropocentric ways of thinking about animals, a shortcoming of which is the failure to see their personality and emotions and a culturally accepted oblivion of them, despite their obvious physiological and psychological similarity to our species. Krzysztof Konecki notes that an anthropocentric perspective is not present in human life only before a stage of primary socialisation when “culture has not yet managed to erect an insurmountable boundary between the two worlds.”<sup>29</sup>

That distinction between the world of animals and humans is already present at the stage of pre-school education, which involves socialisation of cultural permission by children for social marginalisation of animals, and which Peter Singer persuasively calls species chauvinism.<sup>30</sup> The story reviewed here denounces the hypocrisy of anthropocentric pseudo-humanitarianism, which is internalised since early childhood and discloses a ritual of oblivion of the identity and psyche of the animal that dominates culture, and of its anonymous life and death. Free of euphemisation, Tan's short story uncompromisingly presents the suffering and loneliness of the animal which, once noticed by the reader, cease to be emotional and physiological conditions that are reserved for humans only. Tan's story thus undertakes an excellent mission that Angela Singer refers to as follows: “The artist's role is to shock the viewer [reader – K. S.] into a new way of seeing and thinking about the animal.”<sup>31</sup> An empathic reader will perceive

<sup>26</sup> Weil, “A Report on the Animal Turn,” 24.

<sup>27</sup> Konecki, *Ludzie i ich zwierzęta*, 174–175.

<sup>28</sup> Trojan, *Na tropie zwierzęcego umysłu*, 111.

<sup>29</sup> Konecki, *Ludzie i ich zwierzęta*, 118.

<sup>30</sup> Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 34.

<sup>31</sup> Baker, “Contemporary Art and Animal Rights,” 77.

the animal as a victim of human cruelty, or may also share Peter Singer's belief that the ability of animals to suffer is a key argument why the ethical principle requires us to extend equal consideration also to animals.<sup>32</sup>

Since it has hidden depths, the story stirs up some moral discomfort in the reader. The memory of the killed, nameless dog is a symbolic reminder of human crimes against animals in general, which, in the culture of the Anthropocene, are perceived as unimportant. The dogs assemble to commemorate the death of a representative of their own species, which highlights the man's guilt as a perpetrator of animal misery. The dogs do not take their revenge, their silent wake and howling may be interpreted as a funeral ceremony and an expression of despair towards human dominance, indifference, and pushing animal subjects away into the area of oblivion. There is no decree in society to remember about animals, and a prohibition of their killing is not ethically charged. The presented way of thinking about animals includes a belief that an animal performs certain functions as an element of the entertainment industry and business, existing outside metaphysics, Holocaust, identity, memory, and outside death, since it just "croaks," and a majority of religions do not recognise an immortal soul in animals.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Tan's short story allows the reader to see the animal's personality, identifying it with the victim, and man as the crime perpetrator. Not only that single one, since dogs' howling reminds our species about mass crimes committed daily on animals that are not governed by law. Another battered dog, another exterminated animal, a dying out species, slaughterhouses resembling concentration camps. These phrases raise social objections on the basis of powerful faith in the intellectual and ethical superiority of humans over other animals, though committed Animal Studies researchers emphasise that these types of convictions stem from chauvinist social stereotypes sustained by groups that have their particular interests in exploiting animals, for example, fur animal breeders or owners of slaughterhouses or parks for wild animals bred for paid or arranged hunting. It is worth recalling that part of the conversation of Zbigniew Podgórzec with Jerzy Nowosielski, quoted by Anita Jarzyna:

Our attitude towards animals is appalling, just appalling. Beings that resemble us – which have similar emotional reflexes, similar habits, similar ways of communicating, not only among themselves, but also with us – since they establish a real emotional relation with humans – are doomed to confinements of concentration camps and are mass killed there. [...]. A difference between a man's and an animal's emotional being is tiny. That we consider ourselves different than animals are just speculations, purely intellectual, mental ones

<sup>32</sup> Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Dariusz Czaja, "Zwierzęta w klatce (języków)" [Animals in the Cage (of Languages)]. *Konteksty*, 4 (287) (2009): 104–109.

only. We are forgetting that we are related to animals in terms of love and hate, fear and trust. In point of fact, we are the same as animals. [...] <sup>34</sup>

Animal Studies researchers observe that subjectivity of an animal in the literary text may be presented, among others, by means of expressiveness of the animal's sight. In *Wake*, we internalise emotions of the dogs through their behaviour, reactions, produced sounds, in other words, by means of emphasising their individuality/individualism. A point of view of the dogs is self-sufficient, and the reader needs no anthropocentric formula to understand their despair. Non-verbal animal messages are universal among all species. The minimalism of anthropomorphic associations in the story builds up a specific image of the identity of animals. They are able to grieve and commemorate their loss, showing particular sensitivity that becomes a basis for talking about animals' memory of their relatives and of them having memories, which is evidenced by the actual behaviour of animals, as described by Barbara J. King in her book called *How Animals Grieve*. <sup>35</sup>

The man's despair is disturbing when he weeps after the burned house, but his tears are also an expression of his helplessness, which does not result from remembering about his wasted humanity, suddenly rekindled sensitivity, but rather from impossibility of using force, taking a revenge, showing his power and dominance. In the end, the dogs return to their humans, those who gave them their names, those who remember them and provide them with a sense of safety. What is important, the dogs' paws trot along the pavements that have been laid in the place of old wild grounds that used to belong to all living creatures, which are now dominated and deprived of their freedom and autonomy by humans, being appropriated just like those wild grounds. A note should be made here of a critical interpretational context which refers to the disappearance of animals from social areas, their closure in culturally-ideologised segments of space, forcing them to move from place to place, creating artificial habitats for them, brutal appropriation of areas that used to belong to them, all of which has been observed since the 19th century. <sup>36</sup> In Tan's short story, the dogs' manifesto – urinating on every object belonging to the owner of the burned house, or territorial marking of ashes – breaks down the physical-symbolic boundaries that are used to control animals, creating a substitute of their autonomy towards the mean man whose dominance has been stigmatised. The reader may show

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<sup>34</sup> Zbigniew Podgórzec, *Rozmowy z Jerzym Nowosielskim* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2009), 262.

<sup>35</sup> Barbara J. King, *How Animals Grieve* [Jak zwierzęta przeżywają żałobę]. Polish trans. Krzysztof Kozłowski (Lutynia: Purana, 2018), 12.

<sup>36</sup> John Berger, *About Looking* [O patrzeniu]. Polish trans. Sławomir Sikora (Warszawa: Aletheia, 1999), 69–79.

contempt for him, explicitly identifying themselves with non-human animals, since they display their dignity.

Angela Singer, who has been referred to above, says that as concerns texts of culture or works of art that expose animal suffering she would prefer the viewer to be vulnerable and open up to compassion. Such an assumption seems to manifest itself in the short story by Tan, who presents an issue of human dominance over animals in the context of man's relationship with the so-called "companion species,"<sup>37</sup> which are the dogs. Donna Haraway, who has coined the term, claims that we perceive "companion species" subjectively and in their case, we can reject anthropomorphic terminology in favour of going deeper into the realm of animal psyche.<sup>38</sup> In her *Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness*, the researcher begins a discussion on the ethics and politics towards significant otherness, which is aimed at re-evaluating the central position of man in the world.<sup>39</sup> Tan's short story discloses in full the animal's individual personhood, as it is the animal subject that is commemorated and memorised. This is of much significance since in the daily discourse, animal death is often anonymous, as there is apparently no victim of violence, accident, cataclysm, or catastrophe recognised in the animal. For example, we often hear about the sinking of ships that have transported tens of thousands of cows, sheep, horses to be slaughtered, and which have drowned. There is no mention of the death of tens of thousands of victims, only of a few drowned humans who have transported the animals. While reading reports on crimes against animals, judgements issued are hair-raising. For maltreatment, starving, beating, or burying alive a dog or other animals, the courts pass appallingly low sentences. In Poland, pro-animal foundations and organisations have started their fight with ignorance, unawareness, and cruelty, and, owing to the persistency of their activists and volunteers, it is increasingly harder for those mindful to apply a conformist criterion of oblivion towards animals, since, as Marzena Kotyczka explains, after Jacques Derrida,

No one can deny the suffering of animals, and what is more – we are aware of it, as there is no possibility of escaping from it, and Derrida calls upon man to be a witness to confirm the existence of such suffering, since we are witnesses of the suffering of animals. What a witness should be equipped with is compassion, or actually: co-mpassion. Co-mpassion should create a co-mmunity. It is a starting point for co-passion to arise, as it is a primeval feeling that is common to all members of the community – human and non-

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<sup>37</sup> Donna Haraway, "The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness" [Manifest gatunków stowarzyszonych]. Polish trans. Joanna Bednarek, in *Teorie wywrotowe. Antologia przekładów* [Subversive Theories. An Anthology of Translations], ed. Agnieszka Gajewska (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2012), 245.

<sup>38</sup> Haraway, "The Companion Species Manifesto," 247.

<sup>39</sup> Haraway, "The Companion Species Manifesto," 249.



human animals, alike. The initial “feeling,” the impulse, a mere reaction to a stimulus, when it is felt by all community members, changes into a feeling, a complex psychic state providing not only for the interpretation of emotions, but also for developing ethical principles.<sup>40</sup>

That is the kind of message that stems from Tan’s short story. The gathered dogs return to their homes, because they are members of communities – families. There are deep bonds between them and humans. They are bound to humans through love. Everyday life with a companion animal is a usual state of co-being with a loved person, which is full of attention. The experience of sharing a private life with animals is an explicit affirmation of the bond between humans and non-human animals, a statement about their understanding, mutual unconditional love which makes us use animal names to talk about our loved pets, appreciate them, mention their self-awareness, devotion, and selflessness.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps in our relations with an animal we become fully empathic and patient, looking at what is most important – a deep understanding that makes us forget about the most conflict-generating species, which are obviously humans. It may seem that a bond with an animal makes us appreciate nature’s beauty, non-linguistic messages, the importance of gestures and looks, silence, peace, a sense of safety when we are willing to escape from an avalanche of events and thoughts in favour of human-animal intimate moments, when we feel our humanity and wish to show evidence of that.

Furthermore, the end of the short story allows us to talk about the animal’s death as an event that leaves emotional scars and a sense of loss. That provokes a cultural re-interpretation of animal death that makes an increasing number of people see the animal as a social subject whose death is worth noticing and commemorating. This especially applies to companion animals that die surrounded by a family, and their death causes an emotional void and mourning.<sup>42</sup> Animal cemeteries are becoming popular, and despair after a loss of a friend or a family member may be a reason for depression. Extreme cases include taxidermy, freezing, or cloning of the deceased animals.<sup>43</sup> There are also cases when persons are more emotionally related to animals than to representatives of their own species such as elder or lonely persons for whom an animal is the only relative.<sup>44</sup> Thus, a new role of pets forces us to reflect on the dying and death of animals and forms of cherishing memories of them. Human memory

<sup>40</sup> Kotyczka, “Cierpienie gatunku” [Suffering of Species]. In *Śmierć zwierzęcia*, 52.

<sup>41</sup> Tom Regan, “The Rights of Humans and Other Animals”, in *The Animals Reader. The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, 23–30.

<sup>42</sup> Magdalena Dąbrowska, “Między ‘zoofrenią’ a ‘strefami kontaktu’”. *Twórczość Arayi Rasdjarmrearnsook*” [Between Zoophrenia and Contact Spheres. Works of Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook], in *Zwierzęta, gender, kultura*, 81.

<sup>43</sup> Dąbrowska, “Między ‘zoofrenią’ a ‘strefami kontaktu,’” 88.

<sup>44</sup> Dąbrowska, “Między ‘zoofrenią’ a ‘strefami kontaktu,’” 88.

of animals and animal memory of humans is thus a sign and result of their mutual love. We love animals for their personality, individualism, for how they communicate with us (by looking, with gestures, and sounds), for how they function within a family, what their degree of sensitivity is. We know them, befriend them, recognise intimacy and a specific nature of a given relation, therefore, we do not have, but simply wish to have moral obligations towards animals, and want to remember them.

The illustration below that is part of Tan's short story shows the dogs sitting on the belongings of the murderer of a nameless protagonist of the work.

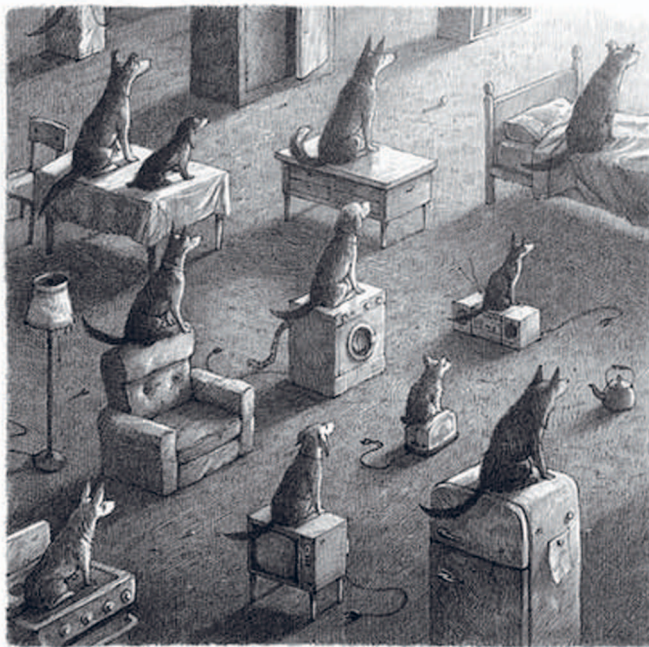


Photo 5. An illustration authored by Shaun Tan in a short story called *Wake* from an anthology of *Tales from Outer Suburbia*

Source: Polish edition by Kultura Gniewu, Warsaw 2013.

With their backs turned on the reader, being motionless, they are sitting on the urine-marked belongings of the murderer, staring at the flames. They are holding a wake. Their commemorating gesture is of symbolic importance, being a message to humans that is to make them more sensitive about the harm done to the nameless dog. This evokes pictures of dogs, frequently published in the press and the media, who keep a vigil in streets, howling over a friend that has been knocked down or killed. Many a time, they are desperately trying to move the body away. Tan's illustration is a mortuary metaphor emphasising a drastic

message of the text. The short story and the illustration are an “open work” in Umberto Eco’s understanding of the term, since the relationship between them and the reader is a dynamic one, as the reader has the interpretational freedom<sup>45</sup> to evoke a series of emotional images, embedded in a landscape of mourning. Perhaps such images have been taken from life, sometimes evoked knowingly, sometimes subliminally, as situations and events that have been pushed into oblivion. The illustration demonstrates what has been left unsaid in the story, and what constitutes an invitation to search for images inside one by referring to a personal experience. Perhaps they may be images of dogs left in forests, cats abandoned in streets and railway or bus stations, dead foxes on the side of the road, pigs buried alive, cows killed in slaughterhouses, injured circus lions and bears, ensnared wolves, bags of wild boars, a shelter that has been closed, experiments on animals, species that have been killed off – those images are in the head of an empathic defender/lover of animals and he/she does not wish to discard them, since they are a reminder of what needs to be changed in modern societies. In the case of other people, who have less knowledge of the tragic situation of animals on Earth, the images make them forget about their own ego for a while and focus on the key needs of non-human animals. Though violence of the evoked images may increase, being accompanied by pangs of conscience, there is nothing wrong or dangerous in it, since every one of us has ambivalent memories of animals, of good or evil caused to them, of animals’ hopes put on humans – of offered help or indifference. Reading *Wake* may thus be cathartic, since it mobilises humans to restore the proper meaning to the word humanity.

This is so through a confrontation of an attitude of the animal torturer and the people to whom the dogs return. One is tempted to ask a question about the reasons for human cruelty towards animals (ignorance?, a culturally ingrained conviction of an animal as an item?, willingness to inflict pain on beings that are not protected by law?), or to pass a moral judgement of the drastic act.

The pictures and photographs of animals that serve as memorabilia of them or are just ways of showing their family lives are a reverse of the illustration. Krzysztof Konecki writes that many people wish to commemorate, keep in memory, and recollect animals.<sup>46</sup> Photographs serve as a tool of remembering, but are also evidence of the existing bond with an animal, treated as a family member, a Person that is to be remembered. Memory of an animal expressed through taking pictures constitutes an important way of developing a biography of the animal subject. Pictures, photographs are traces, too, since

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<sup>45</sup> Marta Kotkowska, “To, co pomiędzy słowem a obrazem – znaki, symbole i metafory wizualne w autorskich książkach Iwony Chmielewskiej” [What Is Between the Word and the Image – Signs, Symbols, and Visual Metaphors in Books by Iwona Chmielewska], *Studia Poetica*, 6 (2018): 115.

<sup>46</sup> Konecki, *Ludzie i ich zwierzęta*, 174–175.

in them, we may look into the eyes of someone who is long gone. They allow us seeking items that are not used any longer. They offer an insight into forgotten customs. They, too, help us to move to places that do not exist any longer or have changed beyond recognition. [...]. Pictures suggest various traces. An award is offered for following them attentively: a key to many stories. [...]. Because of all these reasons, pictures are a good starting point for a conversation [like Tan's illustration – K. S.]<sup>47</sup>



Photo 6. Młodzik the Cat, a friend and a family member

## In Place of the Ending A Proposal of a School Project

A tentative proposal of a deeper analysis of the work discussed with children will be to develop a five-stage educational project. In general, it may be entitled: “Non-Anthropomorphic Area of Memory of Animals” with the following motto: “How often does it happen that we fail to perceive animals, though we have been constantly sharing the world with them?”<sup>48</sup> It may be implemented not earlier than for the third graders of the primary school, and not later than for the fifth graders. A decision is up to the teacher who is capable of assessing the level of sensitivity and maturity of the pupils and knows which group to select to have Tan's story perceived as “anthropologically sensitive.” In the first stage, the pupils should read the story on their own, next they should “read”

<sup>47</sup> Ewelina Lasota and Dorota Majkowska-Szajer, *Ślady, tropy, znaki* [Traces, Figures, Signs]. Illustrated by Marianna Sztyma (Kraków: Muzeum Etnograficzne w Krakowie, 2017), 7.

<sup>48</sup> Lasota and Majkowska-Szajer, *Ślady, tropy, znaki*, 7.

the illustration and present their own thoughts of this “open work.” During the second stage, children should note down their “post-reading” thoughts and observations, which they will use while working with the text reading it out loud.

A review of the events shown in the illustration, as seen by all children, will be an integral part in the context of clarifying the verbal layer and exploring what is hidden or omitted in it to reach together a conclusion on the mutual dependence of the verbal and iconic layers, and their further detailing.

In the third stage, after reading the story out loud, a discussion may start on the role that animals play in our lives. At this point, questions should be asked whether they are characterised by originality, why we become so strongly attached to them, why it is worthwhile to tell animal stories, give them names, and describe their biographies. How altruistic social actions done for animals, such as volunteering or feeding homeless cats or dogs, collecting foods and activities aimed at helping animal shelters or becoming vegan make us aware of the key values for society? How to understand the term of an animal adoption and why collecting animals from streets and shelters is more ethical than buying them directly from breeders and pseudo-breeders? Teachers' attitude is of importance here, since they ask children questions in the spirit of Animal Studies, allowing them to share stories in the cathartic way about animals, about the private ones, and those they have observed or about which they have heard, for example, in the media, and which serves the purpose of raising their awareness of the need of ethical perception of animals and existential pain that links humans and animals. Micro-narratives written by children about their relations with animals will turn out to be helpful, as well as encouraging them to directly name their feelings towards animals and to recollect exceptional situations concerning animals. Micro-narratives should not be artificially idyllic, as they are based on Tan's short story. Therefore, short histories written down by children are to be used for building a coherent picture of the harms inflicted on animals. Nonetheless, as they may appear as stories and biographies of loved animals, they must be sincere. It is necessary for children to look inside themselves and give a testimony of how they have treated and perceived animals so far. I must say that as a former Polish language teacher, I would opt for including a teacher's micro-narrative among the stories written/told by children, too, or sharing my own relations with animals with them, since only a teacher who is committed to activities in favour of animals, who is well-read in Animal Studies, may be authentic while conducting such classes. It is important not to fall into artificial discourses on animals as *fluffy children*, which is a common feature in pop culture.<sup>49</sup> Instead, it is better to talk about a real perception of animals as being equal to humans. Because of such equality, animals are worthy

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<sup>49</sup> Magdalena Dąbrowska, “Miłość, śmierć i klonowanie” [Love, Death, and Cloning], in *Śmierć zwierzęcia. Współczesne Zootanologie* [Animal's Death. Contemporary Zootanologies], ed. Marzena Kotyczka (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2014), 118.



of our feelings, caring, which, in turn leads us to discussions about stereotypes about culturally-conditioned hierarchical human-animal relations, and also to new ethical models of human-animal relations, which will be put into practice.

The fourth stage involves a detailed analysis of the illustration with special consideration given to a series of images of animals evoked by reading Tan's short story and illustrations. Since such a series of classes may be emotionally difficult for children, it would be advisable to create a modern album with animal photographs, in which children could capture a 21st century situation of rural, urban, their own, or other owners' animals or homeless animals, the subjectivity of which they wish to present. Prior to pursuing such activities, children should become prepared for going outside, or should set themselves a task of observing animals from a non-anthropocentric perspective, trying to capture the fate of animals as social subjects equal to them.

The fifth, and the most difficult stage involves a discussion on re-defining the notion of being human and pondering over death and dying of animals within philosophical contexts, which ends with new axiology of accompanying dying animals and ways of commemorating them. There is an urgent need for such a debate in Polish schools to make children come to terms with death in general, and to include bidding farewell to and the departure of animals in a mortuary discourse (looking after them, while they are ill, or when they are departing, commemorating deceased animals, using an appropriate death-related language, such as "died," "passed away," or "was dying," instead of a pejoratively-loaded term "croaked").<sup>50</sup> Perhaps with older children, it is worthwhile to stage a court hearing of the dog murderer, during which they could face legal regulations concerning the protection of maltreated animals, set up specific bodies and teams to prepare documentation on animal cruelty and issue a fair judgement.

The discussed activities may be presented in schools as a special educational project in which micro-narratives on animals and the accompanying photographs build up a new ethical model of looking at animals and making of children citizens, who are socially engaged in the knowledgeable dissemination of Animal Studies thinking among their teachers, parents, colleagues, and friends. The project may end with an outing to a shelter and listening to talks given by animal activists and volunteers and may also involve taking homeless dogs for a walk. Such an activity may form a perfect end to the entire project, and a good conclusion of talking with children about the situation of animals in the 21st-century Poland. Though it is not just an idyllic proposal, nonetheless, its implementation requires reflective, "anthropologically sensitive" teach-

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<sup>50</sup> Katarzyna Slany, "Śmierć we współczesnej literaturze dla dzieci – łamanie tabu?" [Death in Contemporary Children's Literature – Breaking the Taboo?], in *Śmierć w literaturze dziecięcej i młodzieżowej* [Death in Literature for Children and Young Adults], ed. Katarzyna Slany (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenia Bibliotekarzy Polskich, 2018), 35–59.



ers, who are aware of modern issues; teachers, who are not afraid of breaking the taboo, and who perceive their pupils as committed participants of social life. How to prepare students from teaching faculties for such tasks, and how to instil in them Animal Studies thinking is a difficult subject, which deserves a discussion in a separate paper.

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