

# This Animal Which is Not One: Diasporic Giraffes in the African Puppet Play *Tall Horse* and J.M. Ledgard's Novel *Giraffe*

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*Abstract:* *Tall Horse* is a play with a life-size animal puppet about a giraffe sent as a royal tribute to post-revolutionary France in the 1820s. *Giraffe* is a novel about a herd of giraffes taken from Kenya to a Soviet-defined Czechoslovakia in the 1970s in order to breed a new species for 'the glory of communism'. What pulls these disparate texts into very fruitful engagement is not just the species of animals themselves but why an animal accrues symbolic significance within particular moments in history and culture. Such accruals not only reveal the constructions of human thought but, conversely, may dramatically influence such thought. In their extending of the oft-repeated Claude Levi-Strauss maxim that 'animals are good to think with', Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman point out that such thinking need not necessarily be symbolic but could refer to the human assumption of 'a community of thought and feeling' between ourselves and other animals. Both ways of thinking with animals may be transformative for humans and animals alike, as the primary texts about non-fictional giraffes indicate.

This paper will briefly consider the hybridity of giraffes before connecting diasporic theorising with the lives of these charismatic animals taken unwillingly from Africa to Europe. Historically, the respective discourses of science and politics intertwine in the study of the giraffe in Enlightenment France, and in the breeding and then slaughter of the giraffe herd in Czechoslovakia during the Cold War. Such mediating representations of 'real' giraffes, the paper suggests, open us up, as members of an audience and/or as readers, to embodied responses of 'generosity' and affect in relation to narratives of nonhuman animals.

**Keywords:** giraffes, diaspora, anthropomorphism, science, representation, embodiment, generosity

The title of this essay has not one but many significances. It was inspired partly by Jacques Derrida's comment that '[t]here is no Animal in the general singular, separated from man [sic] by a single, indivisible limit' (47), partly by Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which is Not One* which 'dispute[d] and displace[d] male-centred structures of language and thought' (jacket), just as Animal Studies critiques and seeks to displace anthropocentric structures of language and thought.

More particularly, in relation to giraffes: This Animal Which is not *one*: giraffes are imagined as hybrid beings. Their very scientific classification of *Giraffa camelopardalis* confirms that they could only be accessed imaginatively as a fusion of two other more commonplace animals, the camel, and the leopard. They inhabit the sometimes conflicting realms of myth and reality. In North African belief, the patterns on their coats prophesy their destinies. In Chinese legend a giraffe appeared to Confucius' pregnant mother to announce that she would 'bear a son, "a king without a throne"' (Menzius 58). In 1416 this mythical beast was actually transported to China and deployed as a sign of divine sanction for building the Forbidden City (Menzius 58-59).

Secondly, This Animal Which *isn't* one: giraffes are so 'other' physically that they appear unimaginable. When early nineteenth century scientists in Paris were sent a giraffe skin and bones they could not conceive of how to put the animal back together. In the novel *Giraffe*, the refrain recurs: 'They are impossible. There is no such animal'. Giraffes are creatures of hyperbole with the largest eyes of all terrestrial mammals, their utter silence, and minimal sleep. Physically, they are a scientific anomaly, for their elongated bodies and the circulation of blood within them seem to defy the very principles of gravity.

Thirdly, This *Animal* Which *isn't* one: a giraffe *isn't* necessarily represented as a nonhuman animal. Unexpectedly, given their dimensions, giraffes may be humanised due to their temperament, which refutes dualistic notions of the wild and the tame. The giraffe who walked to Paris in 1827 might have inspired immense curiosity as an exotic animal but for the scientist Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire who knew her more intimately she was a bourgeois subject: 'She has impeccable manners and makes a favourable impression on all', he told the scientific Academy (Allin 266). She was also a beloved familiar, 'the poor little girl' and the 'adopted daughter' of the prefect who hosted her (Allin 145).

How does one write such a charismatic, contradictory animal? What stories beyond mythological ones can represent these giants of the African plains? How can one endeavour to reach the subjective, embodied animal and not merely be awed by its proportions and its figuring? Jonathan Burt specifies this as a central challenge in connection with thinking with animals – how to 'achieve a more integrated view of the effects of the presence of the animal and the power of its imagery in human history' (qtd. in Daston and Mitman 5). Both the texts I will be considering implicitly attempt this 'more integrated view': both locate giraffes figuratively within human history while integrating animal histories; both represent giraffes who actually existed.

*Tall Horse* was performed by the South African Handspring Puppet Company in collaboration with the Malian Sogolon Puppet Troupe. The eponymous female hero is the Ethiopian giraffe who journeyed to Paris in the 1820s and who became a beloved celebrity in post-Napoleonic France. Similarly, the novel *Giraffe* by J.M. Ledgard is based on fact. It tells of a group of giraffes taken by Czechoslovakians from Kenya to the Dvur Kralove Zoo in 1973 and their tragic subsequent slaughter two years later. The novel is framed by the history of the state's silence and denial about the lives and deaths of the giraffes and is based on Ledgard's interviews with many key players in the giraffes' narrative.

What pulls these two texts into a very fruitful engagement is not just the species of animals themselves (although this is a consideration) but how these representations of giraffes who lived in France and Czechoslovakia respectively show *why* it is that an animal accrues symbolic significance within very particular moments in history and culture. Such accruals not only reveal the constructions of human thought but, conversely, may also dramatically influence such thought.

Animals generate prolifically fertile symbols as, Claude Levi-Strauss' oft-repeated maxim 'animals are good to think with' reminds us. But as Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman point out in *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, such thinking with animals could also refer to the human assumption of 'a community of thought and feeling' (2) between themselves and other animals. They critique the designation of anthropomorphism, the belief that animals think and feel like humans, as 'a term of reproach, both intellectual and moral'; instead, they propose a more positive re-evaluation of the term and the imperative to regard thinking with animals as an ethical pursuit. Morphism even suggests transformation, 'shape changing across species' (Daston and Mitman 6), a positive outcome for humans and animals alike (2). This paper will develop this potential for transformation through an embodied empathy – in connection with representation and our responses as readers and members of an audience to the giraffes.

In *Tall Horse* Mehmet Ali, the Ottoman envoy to Egypt, sends a giraffe as a royal tribute to Charles X of France in 1826 in the hope of deterring him from aiding the Greeks in the Greek War of Independence against the Turks (Allin 64, 67). Two young female giraffes are captured in the Ethiopian Highlands, taken down the Blue Nile to Khartoum and thence to Alexandria and France. The more fragile giraffe is sent to the English king (more of her later) while the other walks five hundred and fifty miles to Paris, where she enchants the Parisians (one hundred thousand saw her in her first summer in Paris, one-eighth of the population of the city) and is studied by the illustrious scientist Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. The play is not plot-driven but foregrounds spectacle as it depicts the effect of the giraffe on the French, and on her keeper. The play tells of an African animal in Europe; now, roughly a hundred and seventy years after these events, two African puppet companies entertained international audiences with this story. The play, featuring a life-sized giraffe

puppet and only two human actors alongside many other puppets and puppeteers, was produced in South Africa in 2004 and toured Europe and North America.

The script is based on Michael Allin's history *Zarafa* (an Arabic word for gentleness and the etymological basis for the word giraffe) subtitled *The true story of a giraffe's journey from the plains of Africa to the heart of post-Napoleonic France*. The historical giraffe, subsequently referred to as Sogo Jan, her name in the play, lived in Paris for eighteen years. She was granted a female giraffe companion from 1839 (Allin 185) while Atir, who had accompanied her on much of her journey, remained her keeper for the rest of her life. Even if this *could* suggest a 'happy' story of a kind, or at least one of some stability and longevity for an African animal in Europe, the near-solitary captivity of a herd animal accustomed to unlimited space is a tragic diminishing of her life.

*Tall Horse* is a difficult act to follow, but the novel *Giraffe* is a dramatically effective and extraordinary story. When J.M. Ledgard was stationed in Eastern Europe in the 1980s as correspondent for *The Economist*, he learnt of the censored history of a herd of giraffes brought to Czechoslovakia. Captured in Kenya in 1973, these giraffes were transported by rail to Mombasa, by ship to Hamburg, and then by barge and lorry to the Dvur Kralove zoo. The motivation behind the acquisition of a herd of giraffes (ironically, they did not constitute a natural herd as they consisted of different strains) was to breed a new species for the glorification of communism. But on the night and early morning before Worker's Day on 1 May 1975 the herd was massacred by orders from the Politburo (the most powerful committee of the Soviet political system). The precise reason for this slaughter remains a mystery. As Ledgard puts it in a postscript to *Giraffe*:

The Dvur Kralove Zoo is still awaiting an official acknowledgement and explanation of the liquidation of its forty-nine giraffes...It was the largest captive herd in the world.

Twenty-three of them are thought to have been pregnant. (327)

*Giraffe* is set initially in 1973, just five years after the Soviet Union has quashed any attempts at liberalisation in Czechoslovakia and invaded the country, and is imbued with the stifling rigidities of totalitarian communism and the characters' fears of Soviet surveillance during the Cold War. The narrative itself is polyphonic and begins with the point of view of the giraffe Snehurka (or Snow White, because of her unusually pale chest and underbelly) as she is being born, then her experience of capture and the start of the journey. Emil (rather heavy-handedly surnamed Freymann), who travels with the giraffes from Hamburg to the zoo in the CSSR, is a haemodynamicist, who studies 'the flow of blood in vertical creatures' (Ledgard 27). He provides a sense of history of other diasporic animals, as he reiterates his ideological rejection of 'the communist moment' (19). Once the giraffes reach the zoo, the principal narrative voice is that of Amina, a young orphaned worker. She connects psychically with the giraffes and embodies some calm and love for them as they are

killed. This final, traumatic event is repeated through the novel, told through the points of view of the witnesses and participants.

In the Acknowledgements, Ledgard thanks all his interviewees who remain anonymous – the scientists, the veterinarian, ‘the sharpshooting forester Mr P, who still has nightmares about pulling the trigger’ (327-8) – but he stresses that the truth remains hidden. The records of the professors have disappeared; a giraffe tongue dispatched to the University of Brno has never been located, nor have the containers of giraffe blood ‘collected by a Security Service operative on the night of the shooting’ (328).

### Diasporic Animals: ‘new points of becoming’

Diasporic Studies have not, conventionally, included nonhuman animals, but there are parallels between the enforced journeys of nonhuman animals and people from their countries of origin to slavery and zoos which themselves perpetuate forms of slavery. Theorising about animals in this way is a legitimate pursuit even at the risk of possible offence. Marjorie Spiegel’s study of the parallels between animal and human slavery is entitled *The Dreaded Comparison* for precisely this reason, as Huggan and Tiffin (136) remind us.

Diasporic theory has some applicability as well as limitations for theorising about nonhuman animals. A discussion of identity in Marjorie Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur’s introduction to *Theorizing Diaspora* suggests:

Diasporic traversals question the rigidities of identity itself – religious, ethnic, gendered, national; yet this diasporic movement marks not a postmodern turn from history, but a nomadic turn on which the very parameters of specific historical movements are embodied and – as diaspora itself suggests – are scattered and grouped into new points of becoming. (3)

Quite how far we can take the parallels here between the effects of diasporic movements on human and nonhuman is worth consideration. Giraffes and other animals would not, of course, see themselves in terms of the categories listed above but the writers of the play and the novel represent the giraffes constrained by ‘new points of becoming’ as they are forced to adapt to being zoo animals in Europe after roaming without boundaries in Africa. When Emil sees the giraffes in the zoo two years after escorting them there, he notes that ‘they have become fully zoo animals. Their eyes have changed in aspect’ (252).

The giraffes are depicted, like their putative human counterparts, as engaging in survival strategies which are tantamount to mere ‘weapons of the weak’ (to use James Scott’s notion), yet in their avoidance of confrontation they ensure their survival, at least in the short term. Whether an

animal may be agentive within the cruel practices of capture is scarcely feasible, nor is it even the most sensible tactic if an animal is motivated by self-preservation. Sogo Jan transfers her allegiance from her mother to her feeders (so much so that she was not weaned for years but lived on cows' milk), and Ledgard has Snehurka, the principal giraffe and a narrative focus in the novel, docilely accept being herded into a camp by her captors although she subsequently regrets that she did not emulate the rage of a young male giraffe who is freed.

The trajectory of Sogo Jan as a diasporic animal is framed specifically by the horror of human slavery. Mehmet Ali who masterminded sending her as a royal tribute had 'monopolised the slave trade for fifty years' (Allin 36). Atir, her principal keeper in Paris, had been a slave of Bernadino Drovetti, the adept plunderer and marketeer of Egyptian antiquities. When it becomes clear that Atir will not return home, partly because he fears that his Sudanese village has been obliterated by the slave trade and partly because Sogo Jan has become exclusively dependent on him, he taunts the giraffe that he has become a 'slave of a slave' and reproaches her repeatedly 'I am not your slave' (Millar 262, 263, 276). He is the only character to have any traditional African appreciation of a giraffe. For Atir, the pattern of Sogo Jan's markings, her taamaki, reveals her destiny that she will go on a long journey from which she will never return. Reciprocally, the giraffe has changed Atir's destiny; he, too, has become a diasporic being who chooses to remain an African in Paris because of her.

The actual journeys of the giraffes are a major focus of both texts. In *Tall Horse* the narration of the giraffe's marathon trip and the human business around it occupies most of the play; in *Giraffe* the interminable and highly planned journey is ideologically reconfigured within communist discourse. The Czechoslovakian zoo director refuses the label 'shipment' of the giraffes insisting, rather, on the term 'migration'. In this way, he contributes to yet another national fiction: that these 'red-starred giraffes' (67) have chosen to travel instinctively to Czechoslovakia, so committed are they to the grandiose scheme of being part of a breeding programme 'for the glory of Communism'.

Diasporic subjects who leave their countries of origin have to rethink the notion of home and whether it is always nostalgically elsewhere, as Ledgard's narrative so poignantly shows in relation to the giraffes themselves. The 'comrade captain' of the Eisfeld which has transported the giraffes from Kenya to Hamburg tells Emil of their distress on the voyage especially after rounding the Cape of Good Hope when they irrevocably 'no longer have a home, but are instead delivered into captivity' (Ledgard 65). Both men 'allow' the possibility that the giraffes might dream of home, but Emil in particular imagines the giraffes' loss of all places African as they are transferred from the ship onto a Czechoslovakian barge:

The giraffes look desperately across the harbour as they swing, across and back, ... searching for certain trees and animals, but finding no acacias and no hippos moving along the poisonous mud-banks ... A sailor stands beside me and also looks up at the swinging crates.

'Let them walk on air,' he says sadly, 'for they will never again walk on Africa'. (68)

Once the giraffes reach Czechoslovakian soil and are being transported through the countryside they are offered beer in soup plates, this act of generosity confirming their reduced status: 'They are migrants, learning where they have arrived' (143).

The Ethiopian giraffe becomes incorporated in much more creative and expansive ways in France from the late 1820s. In her Africanity, her grace and beauty, her femininity, Sogo Jan fit right into the orientalising of Parisian culture in the early nineteenth century. Deborah Root in *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference* notes how this orientalising derived historical inspiration from Napoleon's ill-fated invasion of Egypt (1798-1801) and more victoriously from the French conquest of Algiers (1830-1845). The play *Tall Horse* satirises the ways that human bodies transformed themselves as they attempted to 'morph' into becoming giraffe. The women's necks are stretched by high hairstyles and lowered by décolletage, a fashion which results in a 'bosom boon' to the delight of the Newspaperman in the play (Millar 259).

Root is critical of the 'West's will to aestheticize and consume cultural difference' (xii) and certainly there exists, as she maintains, a 'self-referentiality [to this] exoticism' (45). Still, it cannot be denied that the French felt positively about Sogo Jan, for all their effusive appropriation of her image with its emphasis on animality, exoticism, and even eroticism, and the fashions even point to some kind of thinking with the animal in the Levi-Straussian sense.

Kobena Mercer in his consideration of diaspora is less dualistic than Root and more apposite to my argument: he proposes that a 'critical dialogism' emerges which challenges 'the monologic exclusivity on which dominant versions of national identity and collective belonging are based' (qtd. in Braziel and Mannur 5). While Sogo Jan is in no position to engage intellectually in such critical dialogism (although I would like to imagine that she could in some embodied way) Mercer's notion of a 'syncretic dynamic' is dramatically evident in French culture which celebrated and even emulated the embodiment of the African addition to the first municipal zoo, an exclusive royal menagerie being no longer politically acceptable.

The giraffe sent to England was, however, located within an entirely different set of discourses of human and nature from those framing Sogo Jan in France. That the English responded, predominantly, without affection for or even acceptance of the giraffe Mehmet Ali sent to them attests to the imperative to take into account the particularities of national history and culture. A portrait of the Nubian Giraffe pictures her with her keepers and one Mr Cross who was her

champion, but the more general response was to lampoon her, to mock her in her person (Allin), and it could not only have been because she was sickly, becoming misshapen and immobilised within a few years, unlike Sogo Jan who thrived. The British, via their extensive empire, judged African animals according to their worthiness as hunting targets. As Harriet Ritvo notes, wild animals were thus ‘simultaneous emblems of human mastery over the natural world and of English dominion over remote territories’ (205). Giraffes, consequently, were not impressively savage and dangerous enough and were ‘dismissed as simply inoffensive’ (23).

If the British were not culturally primed to anthropomorphise a gentle giraffe in a positive way, nor even to transform themselves in relation to her, the French love for the exotic could also be venal and destructive. Sogo Jan’s arrival in Paris was preceded in 1814 by that of a Khoisan woman from the Cape Colony, Sara Baartman, another diasporic subject, who, like Sogo Jan, was displayed for her body and apparently with less regard for her subjectivity. In her perceived ‘radical bodily difference’, to borrow a phrase from Jane Desmond (144), she was zoomorphised. Tellingly, her final ‘owner’ in Paris before her death was ‘a showman of animals’ (Crais and Scully 127). As Crais and Scully maintain in their biography of Baartman:

Many believed the Hottentot Venus was more ape than human, or that she represented a fifth category of human, a *Homo sapiens monstrous*, a kind of Frankenstein’s monster scarcely capable of emotion and intelligence... (2)

Both the Khoisan woman and the giraffe fitted into Saint-Hilaire’s notion of teratology, or a ‘science’ of the monstrous (Allin 135). Sogo Jan can still be seen, stuffed, in La Rochelle’s museum (Allin) but Sara Baartman’s body was more important, and was ineluctably connected to the ‘rise of scientific racism’ (Crais and Scully 136). Saint-Hilaire’s colleague, Georges Cuvier, sketched Baartman when she was alive and dissected her in death, preserving her skeleton, her brain and genitals in jars, and making a plaster cast of her body which remained on display until 2002 when her bones were returned for burial in South Africa (Crais and Scully 133-143). Constructed essentially as primitive, her differences from ‘civilised’ Europeans were deemed to be of far greater scientific substance and of far more exoticism than those of a giraffe.

### Scientific Animals: souls in jars

Similarities exist between the scientific constructions of Sogo Jan and the giraffes in Czechoslovakia. Both sets of scientists were motivated by romantic or idealistic beliefs in the powers of scientific discovery; both sets of giraffes were displayed to the people even as they were scientifically studied in post-Napoleonic France and a ‘normalised’ Czechoslovakia after the Russian clampdown during the Prague Spring in 1968. If Sogo Jan embodied another apotheosis (post-Baartman) of Saint-



Hilaire's notion of the monstrous, the giraffes destined for the Dvur Kralove zoo embodied the potential for a scientific triumph of human over nature in a hubristic desire for political credibility within the Soviet bloc during the Cold War.

In Philip Armstrong's *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* he usefully differentiates, via Latour, between Science and the sciences. The sciences (lower case) are dynamic, creative, and multi-faceted whereas Science, 'capitalised and singular, represents a reified and unified "myth" that conceals how partial, provisional and contested the sciences actually are: "Science" therefore gains social authority by claiming unique access to a unified Nature' (Armstrong 182). Certainly, in both France and Czechoslovakia, Science has mythical ramifications; in addition, Scientists are imbued with a 'quasi-religious authority' (Armstrong 182), which is exemplified in the personages of Emil and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. Moreover, Science, as Ledgard's novel has it, is inextricably politically motivated.

The Czechoslovakians who capture Snehurka and other giraffes in Kenya congratulate themselves:

'There is socialism in our method', [Snehurka] hear[s] them say. 'Capitalists capture one or two giraffes, while we take an entire herd; because our intention is political, to issue forth a new subspecies'. (Ledgard 11)

Emil's knowledge of haemodynamicism, which appears to be one of the sciences, is only partially useful in his studying of the giraffes during their European journey, but, as the underpinning of even more grandiose plans of conquering space and the State's science fiction future of space-colonies, it is grafted into the service of Science. In studying 'blood flow in vertical creatures, in men and giraffes', his research 'has application for cosmonauts and high-altitude fliers' (22); giraffe hides, in their texture, can be used as prototypes for anti-gravity space suits. In an echo of Saint-Hilaire, Emil may not construct humanity as an exclusive category, yet it is Czechoslovakian as well as Russian Science, with its wilful ignorance of African diseases and its disrespect for the indigeneity of giraffes in Kenya, that directly causes the death of the herd in Dvur Kralove.

For Alois Hus, the ambitious Czech zoo director, communism and Science merge: '[t]he purpose of the zoo is to breed animals and to entertain the worker', he claims (Ledgard 87). He regards his attempt to create a new species of giraffe as more significant partly because it is acknowledged by the State, partly because 'our socialist mind' (87), as he boasts, is well-disposed to the necessary logistical minutiae of treating animals like breeding machines. Emil critiques Hus' proposals, comparing them, but only *sotto voce*, to practices of the Komsomol (the Communist League of Youth). Hus is an inspired ideologue, with his political beliefs overshadowing any

possibility of scientific rationality: communism will force nature to shift, the giraffes will acclimatise to the Czech winters and will learn to move on ice.

Ledgard has other characters critique the official views. Amina, the young sleepwalking woman who spends hours observing the giraffes, speaks to their keeper about animals, their emotions, and the responses of visitors to the zoo. The keeper is pragmatic, however:

The zoo is nothing more than a contrivance ... to make workers forgetful of the monotony of their lives. They arrive here from industrial towns. They move from cage to cage. What do they want? Not to contemplate ... but to make strange animals see them.  
(191)

The keeper echoes Berger's analysis of zoos as a 'public institution ... [which] had to claim an independent and civic function' (Berger 19). Ironically, however, if Berger elided the establishment of zoos with the imperial and capitalist project, Ledgard demonstrates that any possibility of a mutual gaze between human and nonhuman is also occluded in a zoo established by communist authorities. The visitors to this zoo are not peasants deeply connected to animals, but workers who inhabit Berger's 'modern totalitarianism', which elides the 'marginalisation and disposal' of both the peasant class and nonhuman animals (24, 26).

Donna Haraway asks 'who "we" will become when species meet' (5), implying not only that human subjectivity is contingent on meeting individuals from other species but that our subjectivities are constituted as a constant process (recalling the 'morph' in anthropomorphism). The workers, however, seem uninterested in any cross-species connection which could transform their anthropocentric rigidity, preferring, instead, to attempt to control the gaze of the animal. Amina is sure, however, that some visitors have been awakened by the extraordinary sight of the giraffes. This 'awakening' is highly symbolic and Ledgard's novel implies that it involves a distancing from the oft-reiterated 'Communist moment', through attaining a sense of embodiment, an ecological sensibility (no matter how polluted nature may be), the ability to dream beyond the present moment, and even a spiritual dimension. Amina herself is a somnambulist who is awakened by the giraffes, perhaps because their captivity metonymises her circumscribed life, yet the possibility exists for her to live vertiginously, as the giraffes do. Emil, too, initially nurtures such visions of heights, but, whereas Amina attains these heights both figuratively and literally (in her caring for the giraffes as they are killed she climbs onto a high fence to hold the sharpshooter's feet), he is, in the denouement of the novel, ultimately incapacitated by a failure of nerve, the imperative 'to make the safe choice' in the Communist state (Ledgard 40).

Two years earlier, however, Emil experiences not only a 'vertiginous sense of possibility' at defecting to the West (Ledgard 61), but also a strong empathy with suffering diasporic animals in

Europe. What he calls the ‘Dresden feeling’ recurs, like an epiphany, when he is overwhelmed ‘by an understanding that we are all of us [human and nonhuman animals] bound together by suffering, even more than joy’ (140). Emil’s pessimism – or realism – is symbolically endorsed by an illicit cutting he keeps from a Polish magazine of the Salvador Dali painting *Burning Giraffes and Telephones*, which so cruelly foreshadows the fate of the giraffes he accompanies. That he thinks of the ‘faceless woman’ as having arms ‘stretched up somnambulistically’ suggests that she might symbolise Amina, but he sees the giraffes as being ‘untroubled by the flames bursting from their backs and legs’ (85).

In the earlier part of the story set in 1973 he cares about the giraffes and we trust him as a narrator. Yet as a scientist in the final scenes of the novel, he has become a slave to a Science of censorship, exclusion, and power politics. In the secret laboratory which tests for ‘plagues and contagion’ in animals, he bypasses all security and hygienic controls merely by using a Russian password (Ledgard 234). With the weight of the Politburo behind him, he breaks the international law that contagion should be reported across borders; ‘National Security is above the law’ he tells the scientist who has found evidence of contagion in some giraffe blood (239). Emil has arrived in order to ‘enforce the directives of Soviet laboratories’ (241) and takes 50 jars for blood samples. Like the mythical *vodnik*, a creature in Czech rivers who keeps the souls of the drowned in jars methodically arranged on shelves, Emil has trapped the lifeblood of the giraffes within scientific containers for no consequence at all. The jars, Ledgard notes, disappeared without trace, thus irrevocably obliterating any potential for scientific integrity within a monolithic, reified Science.

When Amina questions Emil about the absolute necessity of the giraffes’ execution he replies, like a bureaucrat: ‘the State cannot afford the risk’ (Ledgard 290). Even Alois Hus, the zoo director so committed to communist Science, is convinced that the slaughter is not scientific: “‘They didn’t have to kill them”, he says. “They could have done something else. It’s political. They don’t want animals running free”” (281). Hus is adamant that the giraffes could have been dipped in a solution and thus cleansed of contagion. If the Czechs’ Russian masters were seriously worried about the ‘unit[s] of production’ in dairies nearby being contaminated (240), would the bodies of the giraffes have been rendered into food pellets for them?

### Embodied Animals: representation and generosity

In this last section I would like to consider how it is that we extend our thinking with giraffes to include them in a ‘community of thought and feeling’ and how it is that a novel and a puppet play can persuade us to do so. The symbolic significance of the historical giraffes and their representations coalesce in this process, implicitly addressing Jonathan Burt’s elucidation of the difficulty of attaining a more ‘integrated view’ of the actual animal presence and its potency as an

image. In *Giraffe*, Ledgard connects a sense of awakening in relation to the giraffes with a strong sense of a common embodiment shared by human and animal. This is not the kind of othering embodiment which animals are constrained to perform, in Desmond's analysis, but an acknowledgement of what we, as humans, share with animals: a 'finitude' of the body, and 'the radical passivity and vulnerability' of suffering (Wolfe xxviii). The animal is not one, then, in its posthuman ethical indivisibility from the human, as we readers and members of the audience 'awaken' to an empathic corporeality.

Rosalyn Diprose's theorising in this regard is useful. She develops her thinking about 'corporeal generosity' partly through Merleau-Ponty, who suggests that because the body is not closed in on itself and alienated from the stuff of the world, life has its affective dimension (Diprose 100). Diprose regards generosity not as an individual act but as an openness to others (4) that undermines the ego and 'happens at a pre-reflective level, at the level of corporeality and sensibility' (4-5). Her notion of a 'field of intercorporeality' in which the self is affective and affected (5) can be generated in us as readers and audience members by representations of the giraffes in both the play and the novel, which elicit emotional responses in us.

In *Giraffe*, the representation of the traumatic deaths of the giraffes, which spirals through different viewpoints in a nightmarishly repetitive way, is felt very strongly by the reader who has already been attuned to the embodiment of the giraffes. Jiri, the sharpshooter, and Amina are forced into the position of caring for the giraffes while killing them. The former gets drunk to cope with being the instrument of bringing these huge beasts down. He shoots from a high vantage point, having to aim precisely at the back of their necks to be more accurate. Amina, to ease the process, shines a light in their eyes to blind them; when they will no longer be herded past him, the giraffes have burning newspapers affixed to their tails to spur them on, in a macabre echo of the Dali painting. The apocalypse for the giraffes culminates in Snehurka's death when, as matriarch of the herd, she runs in exquisite terror on broken legs through blood and excrement in an attempt to elude death. The giraffes' bodies are brutally crushed to fit into slaughterhouse trucks and all evidence has to be urgently removed before the imminent May Day parades.

Yet Emil's imagining of the death of Snehurka is framed by his memory of her as a vibrantly alive being who looked back at him through a narrow window on a lorry before she became a zoo animal lacking a responsive gaze:

There was a coldness, a sinking. She felt no pain, she was aware only of memory slipping from her, as dreams slip from the waking. She died. She could see a zebra, and then only stripes of a zebra, and then only a space, where the shape of the zebra was. She remembered she was single, then her thoughts became mingled.

*Death is a confirmed habit into which we have fallen.* (317)

To read the embodied accounts, both human and animal, of the massacre of the giraffes is to be made to feel what Diprose describes as ‘corporeal generosity’ for these charismatic African animals violently brought down to an earth that is so foreign to them. At the same time, the text ensures that we do not seamlessly identify with them, for the giraffes’ experiences of the trauma are filtered through their differences from us – their height and vision. Our response is not a Brechtian ‘crude empathy’ which colonises their experiences to the self (see Bennett 10). Instead, we are affected by their trauma in an empathy which Jill Bennett describes in relation to trauma and contemporary art: we do not imagine *being* them even as we feel *for* them in ‘an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible’ (10).

Such morphism across species is not a sentimentalised union of human and animal. Thinking with animals has to acknowledge difference even as it respects and celebrates the continuities between human and nonhuman animals in a ‘community of thought and feeling’. Daston and Mitman acknowledge this irreducibility – ‘complete empathy’ is a ‘virtuoso but doomed act’ (7) – as they emphasise the authenticity and assertiveness of an animal’s agency, which insists on being present in the performances we ‘cast’ them in. By performance they do not mean a show or a circus or a cartoon, but ‘outward spectacle, a way of making something abstract, hidden or conjectural visible and concrete’ (12).

What better example of this ‘outward spectacle’ than the life-size giraffe puppet of *Tall Horse* which mediates between the real animal and the symbolic one, dislodging anthropocentric ‘structures of language and thought’ to deploy Irigaray’s phrase. Gerhard Marx in his essay on the Handspring Puppet Company suggests that ‘anthropomorphism and human identification are simultaneous in the coming to life of any single puppet’ (242). In relation to animal puppets in particular, Basil Jones, a founder of Handspring Puppet Company, feels that ‘the audience hungers to interpret’ animal communicativeness:

The audience...feel themselves to be in a new interpretive territory concerning the meaning of animals within the context of a theatrical event. There are no rules for such forms of interpretation and thus the puppeteers give to the audience an *interpretive authority* that is not often imparted in more conventional forms of theatre. (261)

Such ‘interpretive authority’ facilitates a thinking with the animal in both meanings of the phrase. Through the puppet, then, the inanimate yet animated representation of the giraffe, the audience is made to think with the animal, not just the persuasive puppet on the stage but with the historical, embodied animal, the giraffe who walked to Paris, in ways which recall the Derridean notion of the lack of separation between human and a singular Animal.

Not all animals are easy to think with, and one would not imagine that giraffes – so charismatic, so apparently entirely other – would fulfil this role. But these two texts which dramatise and perform animal histories reveal otherwise – from the fascination of early nineteenth century Parisians with Sogo Jan, the ‘beautiful African’, to the involvement of ‘awakened’ humans at the Dvur Kralove zoo with Snehurka’s herd. Both texts demonstrate the power of art: to transform us as readers and members of the audience and allow us to shape-shift across species, while remaining aware that the animal is irreducible, enigmatic, and never *one*.

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