



## BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Richards, Anna (2018) 'Ob Mädchen oder Hunde': women and animals in Karen Duve's "Regenroman". *German Life and Letters* 71 (4), pp. 495-510. ISSN 0016-8777.

Downloaded from: <http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/21593/>

*Usage Guidelines:*

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>  
contact [lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk).

or alternatively

## ‘OB MÄDCHEN ODER HUNDE’:

WOMEN AND ANIMALS IN KAREN DUVE’S *REGENROMAN*

Anna Richards

Karen Duve’s *Regenroman* (1999) begins with a dead woman floating in a river; it ends with a dead dog washed up on a beach. The dead woman has been discussed in secondary literature on the novel, interpreted as both a reiteration of,<sup>1</sup> and part of a feminist correction to, the long-standing patriarchal association between women and death. The dead dog has attracted no critical attention. For Elizabeth Boa, the important pairing of corpses in the novel is that of the ‘Wasserleiche’ of the beginning with the ‘Schlammleiche’ of Leon, one of the main human characters, who suffocates in a swamp towards the end, thereby succeeding the traditional female death with a male one and making a feminist point.<sup>2</sup> But it is surely the book’s final image of the beaten, tied-up body of the bull terrier Rocky, washed up on the beach, so swollen and rotted that is hard to make out what kind of creature he is, poked at with a plank of wood by a man in spite of his wife’s entreaties not to, which most strongly recalls that of the female murder victim of the opening scene, her body bloated, her flesh decomposing, her eyes rotted away, which Leon pokes with a stick before his wife Martina catches him at it. Duve even uses the same words: both Leon and the man at the end

---

<sup>1</sup> Teresa Ludden, ‘Nature, Bodies and Breakdown in Anne Duden’s ‘Das Landhaus’ and Karen Duve’s *Regenroman*’ in *Pushing at Boundaries: Approaches to Contemporary German Women Writers from Karen Duve to Jenny Erpenbeck*, ed. Heike Bartel and Elizabeth Boa, Amsterdam 2006, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Boa, ‘Lust or Disgust? The Blurring of Boundaries in Karen Duve’s *Regenroman*’ in *Pushing at Boundaries: Approaches to Contemporary German Women Writers from Karen Duve to Jenny Erpenbeck*, p. 64.

of the novel feel compelled to find out, ‘ob die Haut reißen würde’.<sup>3</sup> By placing these dead bodies in such narratively significant positions—the beginning and end of the novel—and by means of the similarities between them, Duve is highlighting an association between male violence towards women and male violence towards non-human animals. In this article I suggest that in doing so she is making a contribution to debates on intersectionality between feminism and animal studies, also known as human-animal studies or, in its more radical form, as critical animal studies, a multidisciplinary field of research which has been growing in the Anglo-American world from the late decades of the twentieth century<sup>4</sup> but which has only begun to find resonance in Germany more recently.

Women writers and activists have long drawn parallels between the abuse of animals and that of women. Many first-wave feminists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe and the US supported vegetarianism, opposed vivisection, and/or compared the fate of animals to that of women.<sup>5</sup> More recently, animal studies has drawn on feminist theory, including on the feminist care tradition and on ecofeminism, to argue for the decentering of the male human subject, to critique rights-based theories of ethics and to emphasise the

---

<sup>3</sup> Karen Duve, *Regenroman* [1999], Frankfurt 2001, p. 28, p. 299.

<sup>4</sup> Animal studies grew out of the Animal Liberation Movement of the 1970s. The term ‘Critical Animal Studies’ was first coined in 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Josephine Donovan, ‘Animal rights and feminist theory’, *Signs*, 15: 2, 1990, 350-375, (359, 366). In Germany women writers around 1900 who compared women’s oppression with that of animals included Helene Böhlau and Hedwig Dohm. See my article, “‘Halb Tier, halb Engel’: Women, Animals and Vegetarianism in the Fiction of Hedwig Dohm (1831-1919) and Helene Böhlau (1856-1940)”, *Millennial Essays on Film and Other German Studies*, ed. Daniela Berghahn and Alan Bance, Bern, 2002), 111-125.

validity of emotion in moral decision-making.<sup>6</sup> For many feminist and animal studies theorists, the dualistic hierarchies of sexism, which positions men above women, and speciesism, which positions human above non-human animals, go hand-in-hand in our society and can only effectively be opposed together, along with other oppressive dualisms such as racism. Sabine Hastedt argues: ‘Beide Unterdrückungsverhältnisse gründen auf einem Herrschaftsprinzip, in dem Dualismen konstruiert werden (etwa der Natur/Kultur-Dualismus), die auf Werthierarchien beruhen. Diese wiederholen sich in allen Systemen von Dominanz’.<sup>7</sup> Such dualisms are made possible by the reduction of women and animals to their biological nature, whereby they both become others who can be used. As Lori Gruen puts it, ‘The role of women and animals in postindustrial society is to serve/be served up’.<sup>8</sup> Josephine Donovan sees this unequal relationship in psychological terms as part of society’s construction of mature masculinity, which involves men separating themselves from, and exerting power over, nature, women, and animals.<sup>9</sup> If, as is the case in Duve’s novel, women sometimes appear to have a greater affinity with animals than men, this may be less because

---

<sup>6</sup> See Donovan, ‘Animal rights and feminist theory’; see also Lori Gruen, *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethics for our Relationship with Animals*, New York 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Sabine Hastedt, ‘Die Wirkungsmacht konstruierter Andersartigkeit—Strukturelle Analogien zwischen Mensch-Tier-Dualismus und Geschlechterbinarität’, *Human-Animal Studies: Über die gesellschaftliche Natur von Mensch-Tier-Verhältnissen*, ed. Andre Gamerschlag, Andrea Heubach, Swetlana Hildebrandt, Markus Kurth, Sarah Lentz, Aiyana Rosen, Andreas Stark und Sven Wirth, Bielefeld 2011, p. 192.

<sup>8</sup> Lori Gruen, ‘Dismantling oppression: an analysis of the connection between women and animals’, in *Ecofeminism: women, animals, nature*, ed. Greta Gaard, Philadelphia 1993, pp. 60–91, p. 61.

<sup>9</sup> Donovan, ‘Animal rights and feminist theory’, p. 367.

of any ‘naturally’ greater capacity for empathy than as a consequence of their shared subjugation.

Although it is supported by many feminist and animal studies thinkers, however, the linking of feminism and the animal movement is not without political risks. For centuries, women have been compared to animals by those seeking to denigrate them and deny them full ‘human’ status. Thus women’s struggle for liberation has sometimes involved attempts to distance themselves from animals and ‘the animal’, to refute their proximity to less rational creatures.<sup>10</sup> The association between the two could also hinder the animal cause. Linking movements with distinct—if related—agendas can lead to the instrumentalisation of one by the other. As Claire Jean Kim argues in *Dangerous Crossings*, ‘analogizing’, although it can help to validate a cause, may mean treating the other cause ‘as a means to an end’, ignoring its differences and asymmetries and thus exploiting the suffering of others.<sup>11</sup> The analogy between the abuse of women and of animals can obscure the vast difference in scale and degree: animals, unlike women, are kept in captivity, bred and killed in their millions, and to compare this maltreatment to that of women is, according to some, to trivialise it.<sup>12</sup> Certainly,

---

<sup>10</sup> Marian Scholtmeijer writes: ‘The posited identification of women with animals represents a more substantial threat to women than identification with nature. Nature in the abstract is grand and important; animals, particularized, seem lesser beings than ourselves’, ‘The Power of Otherness: Animals in Women’s Fiction’, in *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan, Durham NC, 1995, pp. 233-34. See also Anna Richards, “‘Halb Tier, halb Engel’”.

<sup>11</sup> Claire Jean Kim, *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species and Nature in a Multicultural Age* Cambridge 2015, pp. 285-86.

<sup>12</sup> See Andrea Heubach, ‘Der Fleischvergleich: Sexismuskritik in der Tierrechts-/Tierbefreiungsbewegung’, in *Human-Animal Studies* (2011), p. 266.

in the past the comparison of women's fate with that of non-human animals has sometimes served women writers and activists, who often describe women suffering sexual or other abuse as 'meat', as a mere metaphor to illustrate the degradation of women but not to question that of animals,<sup>13</sup> who remain 'absent referents'.<sup>14</sup>

This article will suggest that through fiction, women writers, in this case Karen Duve, can contribute to debates about women and non-human animals, about their respective experiences, and their shared subjugation. Fiction can allow women to explore similarities and affinities in an open way, while avoiding some of the dangers discussed above of 'analogizing'. As well as expressing their own experience of otherness, women writers can imagine the perspective of non-human animals and give them a 'voice'. In *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation* (2002), John Simons argues that animals in fiction are often deployed, or read, as ciphers for human concerns, but that literature can also occupy a special place in our attempt to understand animals, as the site of speculations about other existences: that is, animals sometimes 'appear in texts [...] in and for themselves.'<sup>15</sup> The feminist critic Marian Scholtmeijer finds women writers particularly well placed to represent animals in this way, to 'perform that most anti-androcentric of acts: thinking themselves into

---

<sup>13</sup> For example, in the 1971 interview 'Germaine Greer—Opinions That May Shock the Faithful' by Judith Weinraub, Greer compared women to 'beasts who are castrated in farming in order to serve their master's ulterior motives—to be fattened or made docile,' without any apparent pro-animal agenda. See *The New York Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1971, p. 28.

<sup>14</sup> 'Absent referent' is a term used by Carol J. Adams when she discusses how 'meat', as sold and eaten in Western society, is distanced from its origin, non-human animals, in *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* [1990], London 2010.

<sup>15</sup> John Simons, *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation*, London 2002, p. 6.

the being of the wholly “other”, the animal’.<sup>16</sup> In *The Aesthetics of Care*, Josephine Donovan suggests that some women writers, by means of ‘attentive love’, have depicted animals ‘mimetically’ rather than in a figurative way more often than male writers, thereby speaking for, rather than absencing, the literal referents.<sup>17</sup>

To ‘speak for’ another being is always an act of interpretation, which is often based on a power imbalance and which runs the risk of misrepresenting the ‘spoken-for’. This must be particularly true in the case of non-human animals. To what extent can any human being, male or female, ‘think themselves into the being’ of a non-human animal and to what extent can this experience can be conveyed through language, which non-human animals do not possess? The American philosopher Thomas Nagel argued influentially in 1974 that it was impossible to comprehend what it was like to be an animal,<sup>18</sup> but pro-animal writers try nevertheless to ‘listen’ to non-human animals and convey their point of view. In fact both the role of anthropomorphism in our attempts to understand animals and our potential to inhabit their perspective have been reevaluated in recent years. As Derek Ryan observes, many animal theorists have attempted to disentangle anthropomorphism from anthropocentrism, emphasising the potential of empathetic imagination to allow us some insight into animals’ experiences and thus to challenge fixed boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’.<sup>19</sup> In 2016 two

---

<sup>16</sup> Marian Scholtmeijer, ‘The Power of Otherness: Animals in Women’s Fiction’, p. 233.

<sup>17</sup> Josephine Donovan, *The Aesthetics of Care: On the Literary Treatment of Animals*, New York 2016, pp. 101-102.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Nagel, ‘What is it like to be a bat?’, *The Philosophical Review*, 83, no. 4 (October, 1974), 435-450. Nagel argues that a human being could never know what it was like to be a bat, even if he or she had the same experiences as the bat, because of their different types of brain.

<sup>19</sup> Derek Ryan, *Animal Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Edinburgh 2015, pp. 38-41.

books were published in English describing their authors' attempts to 'live as animals' and understand how they perceive the world.<sup>20</sup> One of these has been translated into German. Recent natural history books in German, such as Peter Wohlleben's *Die Gefühle der Tiere* (2016) or his best-selling *Das Seelenleben der Tiere* (2016), argue that animals experience emotions in a way often believed to be reserved for human beings and that 'Tiere sind uns näher, als wir je gedacht hätten'.<sup>21</sup>

For a work of fiction to be pro-animal, it should not only 'concretize [...] the state of being other', but also affirm it.<sup>22</sup> Just as feminist critics have valorised those novels which end, not with the sacrificial death or defeat of a female protagonist, but with her fulfilment or liberation, so animal-friendly fiction, according to critics such as Scholtmeijer and Donovan, can subvert traditional narrative structures which involve the victimisation and sacrifice of animals. For example, authors can depict fictional animals who escape captivity or death, or they can 'invent[...] the terms whereby power relations are reversed', so that 'animals can assault the species that assaults them'.<sup>23</sup> As the human-animal research group Chimaira argues, attributing agency to animals, rather than portraying them as passive, counteracts the traditional relegation of animals, and of animal-human relationships, to the 'natural' rather

---

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Thwaites, *GoatMan: How I Took a Holiday from Being Human*, Hudson NY, 2016), Charles Foster, *Being a Beast*, London 2016, translated as *Geschmack von Laub und Erde: Wie ich versuchte, als Tier zu leben*, Munich 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Wohlleben, *Die Gefühle der Tiere: Von glücklichen Hühnern, liebenden Ziegen und träumenden Hunden. Ein Plädoyer für Respekt und Achtsamkeit* (pala, 2016); Wohlleben, *Das Seelenleben der Tiere: Liebe, Trauer, Mitgefühl—erstaunliche Einblicke in eine verborgene Welt*, Kiel 2016. The quotation is from the back cover of the latter book.

<sup>22</sup> Scholtmeijer, 'The Power of Otherness', p. 233.

<sup>23</sup> Scholtmeijer, p. 235.



than the ‘social’ order.<sup>24</sup> Scholtmeijer suggests that ‘link[ing] female outcasts and animal victims’<sup>25</sup> is also an empowering strategy, ‘ensuring that animals are not alone in their pain’.<sup>26</sup>

As the opening and closing female and animal deaths in *Regenroman* illustrate, Karen Duve links animal oppression under patriarchy with that of women. Indeed, power relations in society as a whole—between human and non-human animals, between men and women, and between human beings and the environment—are portrayed in bleak and powerful ways in many of her works. Her latest novel, *Macht* (2016), depicts a dystopian future where women may finally be in charge and vegetarianism the norm, but in which the defeat of patriarchy has come too late: the environment is already all but destroyed. Men such as the protagonist rebel against their disempowerment by abusing women and slaughtering animals or indulging in images of animal slaughter and mutilation in top-shelf magazines, thereby illustrating the association between pornography and meat-eating which Carol J. Adams remarks on in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, Duve has less to say about the link between sexism and speciesism in her recent non-fiction book, *Anständig essen* (2011), an account of her experimentation with different kinds of ethical eating: organic, vegetarian, vegan and fruitarian. Duve is interested in the effects of these different diets on her health, but her main concern in *Anständig essen* is for the environment and for animal rights. There are brutal descriptions in the book of the way animals are kept and killed, and

---

<sup>24</sup> Chimaira Arbeitskreis, ‘Eine Einführung in Gesellschaftliche Mensch-Tier-Verhältnisse und Human-Animal Studies’, *Human-Animal Studies* (2011), p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> Scholtmeijer, p. 238.

<sup>26</sup> Scholtmeijer, p. 235.

<sup>27</sup> Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* [1990] (2010), p. 68. See also *The Pornography of Meat*, New York 2004.

Duve describes how she takes part in an animal liberation group's break-in at a battery farm. Only occasionally does she make an association between gender and animal exploitation, such as when she suggests that men are particularly unwilling to think about the origins of the meat they eat,<sup>28</sup> or compares keeping pets to men keeping a harem or a having a housewife at home (p. 96).

*Regenroman* was written before Duve's open political engagement with and activism for animal rights, as described in *Anständig essen*. Nevertheless, the novel contains perhaps her most interesting commentary on animals and women, and is certainly, as Boa writes, 'if not a programmatic assertion of animal rights, then at the least a plea for change in the prevailing relations between human beings and other animals'.<sup>29</sup> Duve rejects the long-standing Western philosophical tradition which establishes a hierarchical dualism between the human and the animal, which defines the characteristics of the former—such as reason, language, reactivity, self-consciousness, or immortality—against the latter,<sup>30</sup> and which ignores animals' heterogeneity, or as Derrida puts it, 'corral[s] a large number of living beings within a single concept: "the Animal"'.<sup>31</sup> Almost all the human characters in

---

<sup>28</sup> After meeting a meat-eating ex-boyfriend at a barbecue she asks, 'Wie kommt es, dass so viele an sich nette und intelligente Männer so wenig Bereitschaft zeigen, in Zusammenhängen zu denken, wenn es um ihren Fleischkonsum geht?', Duve, *Anständig essen: Ein Selbstversuch*, Munich 2012, p. 175.

<sup>29</sup> Boa, p. 61.

<sup>30</sup> See Derek Ryan, *Animal Theory: A Critical Introduction* (2015) for an account of this tradition from Aristotle via Descartes and Kant to the present day, as well as of philosophical challenges to anthropocentrism, past and present.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', translated by David Wills, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28, No. 2. (Winter, 2002), 369-418, (400).

*Regenroman* are described, by the narrator or by one another, as a kind of animal, often to connote their appearance or their movements: Martina has the elegance of a racehorse (p. 29); Isadora has a chin like an amphibian (p. 99), eats like a pig (p. 104), approaches Leon sexually like a tigress (p. 220), and crawls like a cat (p. 218); Pfitzner has the eyes of a melancholy adder (p. 26); Leon with backpain is like a toad when he crawls onto the doctor's table (p. 196) and a beetle lying on his back (p. 211)—to name just some. The most important animal character has the name of a Biblical human figure, Noah, while the weak male human protagonist is ironically called Leon, meaning lion. There are similarities of behaviour between the non-human and the human characters as well. Duve has been accused by critics of portraying characters in this novel who are 'resolutely trapped at the level of cliché'<sup>32</sup> or in 'cartoon' fashion.<sup>33</sup> In fact, as I shall argue later, there is some psychological detail, but it is true that her human characters frequently demonstrate a certain almost instinctual or animal-like simplicity of motivation and response: common human emotions in this novel are hunger, fear, physical comfort and discomfort, aggression, and sexual desire. The male admirers who 'sich strafften wie Vorstehhunde' (p. 8) whenever Martina appears are an example. Using indirect free speech, Duve's narrator presents events from different points of view, including that of Noah the dog. When Harry and Pfitzner visit Martina and Leon for the first time, for example, events are conveyed partly from Noah's perspective: he identifies the visitors as dominant males in the pack and hopes that Leon will submit to them to avoid any trouble.<sup>34</sup> If this seems like a typically canine interpretation of events, Leon's is not much more sophisticated: here, as on many occasions in the novel, he strives and fails to assert his

---

<sup>32</sup> Peter Graves, 'Karen Duve, Kathrin Schmidt, Judith Hermann: "Ein literarisches Fräuleinwunder"?' , *German Life and Letters*, 55:2, 2002, 196-207, (200).

<sup>33</sup> Teresa Ludden, 'Nature, Bodies and Breakdown', p. 54.

<sup>34</sup> See also p. 84, p. 126, pp. 130-1.

masculinity, and then acts subserviently. Other characters, too, act like ‘animals’ in this scene: while Harry’s bull terrier Rocky humiliates Noah by peeing on his territory and finally attacks him, Pfitzner and Harry humiliate Leon and abuse Martina. A further blurring of the boundaries of the human is evident in Duve’s depiction of Isadora, an almost mythical figure who keeps company with unidentifiable creatures.<sup>35</sup>

The novel does not have the overarching human perspective typical of most works of literature: there are many narrative perspectives, some of them animal and none omniscient, and little either of the ‘humanistic self-awareness of the autobiographical subject’ or of ‘the pompous (and peculiarly masculine) exceptionalism of the Western Subject’ identified by Anat Pick.<sup>36</sup> Duve has little reverence for humanity and she does not endow her human characters with much capacity to reflect on their thought processes or grow in self-knowledge in the course of the novel, with the partial exception perhaps of Martina. In fact, the most significant character development is a negative one: after Martina leaves him, Leon retreats to the sofa, where he lies lethargically, eating, sleeping, and becoming, as Teresa Ludden observes, like a slug.<sup>37</sup> Finally, he crawls on all fours into the swamp, covers his face in mud, and grunts, before suffocating there. In contrast to the novel’s fast-moving, dramatic scenes, such as when Martina is raped and Harry and Pfitzner are blowtorched to death, scenes which

---

<sup>35</sup> In an interview in *Der Spiegel*, Duve explains that the creature whom Leon sees standing next to Isadora on the moor is a ‘Waldschrat’ –a fairytale woodland figure—whom she had originally written as a more major character in the novel, ‘Ich stehe gern im Regen’, *Der Spiegel*, 41/1999, accessed online 03/10/2017 at <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-14906960.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Anat Pick, *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film*, New York 2011, p. 80, p. 90.

<sup>37</sup> Ludden, ‘Nature, Bodies and Breakdown’, p. 51.

Peter Graves perhaps has in mind when he refers to the novel's 'increasingly far-fetched plot',<sup>38</sup> Duve's narrator lingers over descriptions of the 'natural' world, which is marked by consistency and small, repeated events, not dramatic, human-directed ones. Thus the novel's eponymous rain falls almost constantly, as underlined by the weather report epigraphs to each chapter; thus the slugs return to the garden again and again, with apparently boundless tenacity. On a rare day of rain-free, but humid weather, the narrative voice leaves Leon mid-return from the doctor to attend to the perspective of the insects:

Die Insekten konnten ihr Glück kaum fassen. Zu Millionen schlüpfen sie unter Dachschindeln, Borke und anderen klammen Verstecken hervor, krabbelten, flatterten, taumelten mit steifen Beinen und zerknüllten Flügeln durcheinander, versuchten, noch ein paar Blüten zu bestäuben oder einige Wirbeltiere anzuzapfen, und kopulierten bei jeder sich bietenden Gelegenheit.<sup>39</sup>

The sights, sounds, smells and feel of life in the marshy countryside—sense impressions accessible to 'animals' as well as to human beings—permeate the novel.

If in these ways Duve suggests the shared animality of all creatures, human and non-human, there are nevertheless moral gradations to be drawn. Duve turns the traditional hierarchy of characteristics on its head: non-human animals in the novel possess more of those qualities such as selflessness, dignity and honour which have traditionally been ascribed to human beings. This applies not just to animals traditionally appealing to human beings such as dogs or horses: even the slugs in *Regenroman*, who invade Leon and Martina's land and house, have a certain dignity. They refuse to be defeated, despite Leon's attempts to eradicate them: for Boa they are 'the most heroic figures in the novel'.<sup>40</sup> Duve

---

<sup>38</sup> Graves, 'Karen Duve, Kathrin Schmidt, Judith Hermann' (2002) (200).

<sup>39</sup> Duve, *Regenroman*, p. 199.

<sup>40</sup> Boa, 'Lust or Disgust?', p. 61.

portrays Noah the dog as vastly morally superior to Leon: he is more protective of Martina when she is threatened and their relationship becomes closer than hers with Leon. In some ways he is cleverer too: like his namesake, he is able to navigate the watery landscape which defeats Leon. Thinkers such as Lacan have argued that while human beings possess the potential to ‘respond’, animals can merely ‘react’.<sup>41</sup> But Noah has agency. When Leon chases past him out of the door, he considers following, ‘Dann entschied er aber, daß Leons Jagd ihn nichts anging’.<sup>42</sup> Sometimes he guides others to safety through the swamp; on one occasion he decides to leave Leon there (p. 274). His relationship with Martina and Leon is not characterised by the typical power asymmetry of pet-owning and its commodification of animals which is illustrated by the vet who treats Noah. The vet expresses surprise that people want to cure small birds, advising one of his clients: ‘Kaufen Sie sich doch ’nen neuen—die kosten fünfzig Pfennig’ (p. 145). Martina and Leon do not ‘buy’, nor are they ‘given’ Noah as a possession; he arrives at their door of his own accord. Sometimes he accepts Martina’s affection or does as they ask him, sometimes he doesn’t (p. 122). Towards the end of the novel, he disappears from Martina’s life and from the narrative, leaving Martina to regret his absence like a lost lover and the narrator, and by extension the reader, without omniscience over his fate. His disappearance is not even narrated directly, but via a conversation between Leon and Isadora, who explains: ‘Noah ist schon die ganze Woche weg. Stommert jetzt wieder ganz allein herum. Martina hat das persönlich genommen’ (p. 267). In this respect, *Regenroman* fulfils Scholtmeijer’s suggested criteria for a pro-animal narrative, in which the animal characters evade captivity and reverse animal-human power relations.

---

<sup>41</sup> See Jacques Derrida and David Wills, ‘The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)’, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 2 (Winter, 2002), 369-418 (400).

<sup>42</sup> Duve, *Regenroman*, p. 84.

The relationship between women and animals is portrayed by Duve as typically different from that between men and animals. From a male perspective, women deal ‘sentimentally’ with animals. When the vet suggests that the man who brings in the ailing bird should simply replace it with a new one, the man explains: ‘er weiß, aber das kann er seiner Frau nicht erzählen’ (p. 145). Martina’s father is angry that her sister, who is studying to be a vet, is protesting against the use of frogs for vivisection (p. 66). Interestingly this judgement on women’s ‘sentimentality’ is shared by the critic Peter Graves who in his article on Duve’s novel ridicules Martina’s ‘quintessentially gendered role’, describing her in belittling terms as a ‘sensitive soul appalled at the thought of trapped slugs actually being killed’.<sup>43</sup> As indicated above, Martina’s relationship with Noah is particularly close and thus particularly liable to be ridiculed by men and seen as a substitute relationship for a human-human one. In *Melancholia’s Dog* (2006), Alice Kunziar writes about the importance and the misunderstanding of women’s relationships with dogs. In the women writers she discusses, the dog is not ‘a convenient substitute for a male partner’,<sup>44</sup> but a better alternative. While ‘the arrogant male eye [...] traditionally inspects and judges women,’ the dog’s gaze is ‘confirming, benevolent’ (p. 116), and helps to restore to women ‘a lost subjectivity’ (p. 109), but men typically disparage a woman’s attachment to a dog and consider it ““unspeakable”” (p. 111). This certainly seems to be the case in *Regenroman*, where Martina, who is rejected by her father for her adolescent sexuality, who suffers from bulimia, and is objectified by Leon, finds solace and reinforcement in the company of Noah, or to use Kunziar’s words about woman-dog relationships, ‘a compassionate antidote to the shame suffered in a male-dominated world’ (p. 117). Leon cannot understand Martina and Noah’s bond and is jealous:

---

<sup>43</sup> Graves, ‘Karen Duve, Kathrin Schmidt, Judith Hermann’, p. 200.

<sup>44</sup> Alice A. Kuzniar, *Melancholia’s Dog: Reflections on our Animal Kinship*, Chicago 2006, p. 117.

‘*Noah und ich* ... Das durfte ja wohl nicht wahr sein. Es war dieser blöde Hund, der sich zwischen ihn und sie geschoben hatte’ (p. 205). He considers it perverse (p. 120) for Martina to ‘pamper’ (verzärteln) Noah in the way she does (p. 111).

Women and animals suffer in different ways in *Regenroman*. The human female characters are humiliated, objectified or abused sexually: Kay for her homosexuality and her masculine appearance, Isadora because of her weight, Martina because of her attractiveness. Sometimes they are killed for sexual motives, too—the detective shows Leon photos of several young female victims of the murderer responsible for the corpse Leon finds at the beginning of the novel. Non-human animals in the novel, meanwhile, are kept and abused as pets, slaughtered for food, or, as are the slugs, killed because they are a nuisance. Despite the differences, Duve links their suffering in various ways. Women and animals are victims of the same male perpetrators, sometimes on the same occasion, and the men who abuse them are motivated by the same basic drive. Teresa Ludden argues that in *Regenroman* the ‘feminine’ is ‘predominantly aligned with the disgusting, horrific and animal throughout’.<sup>45</sup> In fact, while women are shown to have particular compassion for animals, for Duve it is the contemporary construction of masculinity that involves a negative kind of ‘animality’, understood as aggressiveness, and the men in her works are more ‘animalistic’, not just than the women, but also than the non-human animals themselves. Harry and Pfitzner, in particular, appear almost as parodies of masculinity in their attempts to dominate others. They are both pimps. Pfitzner is also a boxer and he drives a large, expensive car. Although Harry feels some affection for his dog Rocky, this does not preclude abusing him. By threatening that he will break the women’s fingers or beat Rocky, Harry extracts obedience from the prostitutes and the dog alike: ‘Alle lernten bei Harry schnell, ob es Mädchen oder Hunde waren’ (p. 126). The first time Pfitzner and Harry visit Leon in the countryside,

---

<sup>45</sup> Ludden, ‘Nature, Bodies and Breakdown’, p. 54.



Martina and Noah both become objects of their violence in their attempts to defend one another. Pfitzner kicks Noah, and when Martina defends the dog, Pfitzner calls her a ‘cunt’ and has Harry pull her hair (p. 136). Noah defends Martina by biting Harry, upon which Harry sets his dog Rocky on Noah, who attacks and wounds him. The next time they visit, Harry brutally rapes Martina, calling her a ‘blöde Sau’ (p. 237) as he does so, an animal which, as Anat Pick writes, is often employed as a ‘figure of female oppression and degradation’.<sup>46</sup> After Rocky attacks a baby, Harry kills him by beating him, tying him up with a heavy stone attached and dropping him in the Elbe. As argued above, Duve draws an implicit parallel between the corpse of the dog and that of the female murder victim which Leon finds floating in a river. When Duve offers the ubiquitous novelistic motif of the dead woman at the beginning of her novel, it is as if, after centuries of literary use, it needs no introduction or motivation. She replaces it in its more typical, concluding narrative position with a dead dog.

Leon is a less extreme version of masculinity than Pfitzner or Harry, although he wishes it were otherwise. He is aware of his failure to be a ‘real man’, someone he describes as ‘jemand[en], der einen stehen hatte, wenn es darauf ankam—und damit fertig’ (p. 30), and attempts to assert himself. His relationship with Martina is largely based on his pride at ‘possessing’ a beautiful woman, whom he renames—changing her name from the old-fashioned Roswitha—as he might a pet. Duve makes it clear that the male desire to ‘possess’ women has something in common with the desire to kill animals and to dominate nature. When Leon and Martina visit the house in the countryside for the first time, he feels a hopeless longing at the sight of nature, because it seems to—and indeed finally does—elude his control:

---

<sup>46</sup> Pick, *Creaturely Poetics*, p. 81.

Der Schönheit einer Frau konnte man beikommen, indem man mit ihr schlief. Und ein schönes Tier konnte man erschießen oder kaufen oder essen. Aber was konnte man schon mit einer Landschaft anfangen. (p. 42)

Duve's formulation of the drive to eat animals as the expression of a will to dominate and as an aspect of sexual politics rather than a mere nutritional need is shared by Carol J. Adams, who links the slaughter of animals for food with the objectification of women in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990). Adams argues that in patriarchal society, meat-eating is connotated as masculine, associated with power and virility. Metaphors of meat and consumption, she writes, are often used to describe women's suffering, and vegetarianism is a feminist as well as a pro-animal act. Although there is no explicit mention of vegetarianism, in *Regenroman* masculinity is clearly associated with meat-eating. Before he lives with Martina, Leon shares a bachelor flat across the road from an abattoir where his flatmate works as a slaughterman. The air in the flat is so saturated with blood when the window is left open that Leon has the taste of raw steak in his mouth (p. 21). Early in the morning, looking out the window:

[er] sah [...] dort die Lastwagen ankommen, an deren Lüftungsschlitzen sich Tiernasen drängten, manchmal meterlange Doppeldecker voller Schweine. Sie kamen früh morgens, wenn es in der Stadt am ruhigsten war, seifenrosa Schweine mit absurd langen Körpern und obszönen Hinterteilen, deren Schwänze abgebissen waren. Einmal hatte er gesehen, wie eines entwischt und stolpernd über das Gelände geirrt war, bis blutbespritzte Männer es wieder eingefangen und an den Ohren zurückgezerrt hatte. Wenn er das Fenster zum Lüften öffnete und der Wind ungünstig stand, roch er Blut und Tod—besonders im Sommer. (p. 20)

Here Duve describes the arrival of the animals from the perspective of Leon, who is apparently unconcerned about their fate, at most amused, interested or annoyed on his own

behalf—he finds the time of day ‘ruhig’, their long bodies absurd or obscene, their colour unthreateningly ‘soap-pink’, their attempt to escape clumsy, the wind which blows in the smell unfavourable to him. But behind this naïve perspective, Duve conveys some of the horror of the scene to the reader, who can recognise that the animals, packed into double-decker lorries and biting each others’ tails off, are being delivered at a time which is ‘peaceful’ because then few people will observe them; that their bodies are fattened and distorted for maximum profit; that the blood the men are splattered with testifies to the violent deaths of other animals; and that the smell of blood and death are not only present when Leon wants to air his room. Naturally, when the ‘masculine’ characters Harry and Pfitzner visit Leon and Martina in the countryside, Martina serves them meat, recalling Lori Gruen’s comment, cited above, that in our society women and animals are there ‘to serve/be served up’. Leon, now the feminised victim of these more powerful men, cannot help seeing himself as the bloody steak they are consuming: ‘Leon kam es vor, als wäre er selbst dieses Fleischstück, und die Gabel war Pfitzner, der ihn gepackt hielt’ (p. 133).

As discussed above, feminist critics have explained men’s comparative lack of affinity with animals as a consequence of the ‘Western male maturation process’. In keeping with this view, in *Regenroman* Duve suggests that men’s assertion of power over animals and women serves to reinforce their ego against the dissolution threatened by the other. As Boa points out, the world of *Regenroman* is characterised by ‘a general blurring of distinctions’,<sup>47</sup> such as that between liquid and solid. Rejecting the ‘abject’—the maternal, the animal, the feminine—in order to shore up a distinct sense of self,<sup>48</sup> the men in the novel experience disgust in the face of animals, women, and their fluids. When a salamander whom Martina finds in the garden drips its ‘milky’ slime (p. 42)—clearly a female-connoted fluid—on

---

<sup>47</sup> Boa, ‘Lust or Disgust?’, p. 57.

<sup>48</sup> See Dawne McCance, *Critical Animal Studies: An Introduction*, Albany 2013, p. 90.

Leon's hand and stings him, Leon is repulsed by the 'Schleimvieh' (p. 43), and Martina's attempts to soothe his hand with her spit call forth a disgusted tirade against the use of spit by 'ihr Weiber', in particular his mother (p. 43). Henceforward Leon will be engaged in a hopeless battle to keep the damp and the slugs at bay in his new house. Having sex with Isadora feels both exciting and threatening to him because of what he perceives as her engulfing softness and wetness---'Als würde er mit dem ganzen Moor schlafen' (p. 152). In the face of such damp and amorphous threats, male characters exercise power over others to assert their own identity. When Leon manages to control both Martina and their dog Noah at once---by shouting at her that she should make Noah lie down---he immediately feels more defined as an individual: 'Gleich fühlte er sich besser. Fühlte, wie sein Selbst wieder Konturen bekam' (p. 230). And, even more shockingly, Harry has the same experience of a more defined sense of ego when he rapes Martina: 'Jedesmal, wenn er in diesen anderen Körper eindrang, fühlte er, wie dieses *ich* deutlicher wurde' (p. 238).

If men are carnivorous and aggressive, then, this is neither 'natural' nor 'animal-like', but part of a particular construction of masculinity. Feminist and animal studies critics have suggested that narratives about extreme or prevalent animal violence, reproductive competition and polarised sex roles are constructed in the patriarchal interest: that they work, as Adams and Donovan argue, 'to reinscribe male-supremacist ideologies, both in promoting a view of nature as dominated by aggressive and violent males, and in sanctioning human male behaviour that follows this model'.<sup>49</sup> Television documentaries about wild animals, for example, can often 'turn into a nearly pornographic parade of carnivorous violence' (p. 6), distorting the natural world, 'where the vast majority of creatures are not carnivorous---do not kill and eat one another---and where caring, cooperation, and symbiosis are more prevalent

---

<sup>49</sup> Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan, 'Introduction', in *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (1995), p. 6.

than the ‘red in tooth and claw’ behaviour repeatedly served up in the media’.<sup>50</sup> Nature programmes depend on drama and action, whereas happenings in ‘nature’ are typically more gradual. For the person watching them, according to Charles Siebert, these programmes are an ego-trip: they transmute the indifference of nature into a show put on for human viewers.<sup>51</sup> Viewers, as Randy Malamud agrees, are put in a ‘position of ultimate (and delusory) mastery’<sup>52</sup> over the animals they are viewing.

Although Duve identifies examples of animal violence towards other animals in *Anständig essen* and tries to work out a compassionate solution to them,<sup>53</sup> in *Regenroman* few of her non-human animals are violent, and those who are are influenced by human male characters, or seen and represented from their perspective. Rocky, the dog who injures Noah, is trained and commanded by Harry. When Harry and Leon watch a documentary about violent komodo dragons on the television, the scene is almost comic in its exposure of their projections and the satisfaction they derive from it. In the ‘masculine’ environment of his bachelor flat, the air thick with blood from the abattoir, Leon is watching six komodo dragons chase a deer up against a wall. Harry arrives and snatches the remote control as Leon attempts to turn it off, eager to see the violence perpetrated by these creatures who, he delightedly informs Leon, can break your legs with a stroke of their tail, to which Leon adds

---

<sup>50</sup> Adams and Donovan, ‘Introduction’, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> See Charles Siebert, ‘The Artifice of the Natural: How TV’s Nature Shows Make All the Earth a Stage’, *Harper’s*, February 1993, 43-51, p. 48, as cited in Randy Malamud, ‘Zoo spectatorship’, in *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, ed. by Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald (Berg, 2007), p. 233.

<sup>52</sup> Randy Malamud, ‘Zoo spectatorship’, in *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, ed. Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald, Oxford 2007, p. 234.

<sup>53</sup> She tries to feed her cats vegan food, for example, *Anständig essen*, p. 179, p. 186.

that they also dig bodies up in graveyards. The impression of a horror film continues in the description of dragons eating the deer:

Einer der großen Drachen lag schluckend auf einem Bein des Hirsches, einer fraß Stücke aus seiner Brust, und einer riß ihm den Bauch auf, wühlte seinen Schlangenkopf hinein und kam mit blutig glänzenden Schuppen wieder heraus. Und die ganze Zeit schrie der Hirsch und schrie und schrie, bis ihn die Warane vollständig unter sich begraben hatten und seine Schreie erstickten. (p. 23)

Although narrated in the third person, this scene, with its gruesome description of bodily penetration and prolonged agony, is clearly seen through the eyes of Harry, whose favourite expression is ‘ohne Ende’ (e.g. p. 22, p. 127, p. 133, p. 139, p. 140) and who admiringly calls the dragons ‘tolle Drecksviecher’ (p. 23). When the blond female presenter then attempts to approach the dragons, Harry and Leon are fascinated and aroused. They clearly identify with the violent animals and interpret the woman’s behaviour in sexual terms: she is ‘pervers’, an ‘aufdringliche Fotze’ (p. 24), who strokes the dragon’s (phallic) tongue and ‘lobte den Drachen für sein schönes Organ’ (p. 24). Leon laughs when a dragon nearly attacks her and insists, in an obvious assertion of his own independence, that her attentions are unwelcome: ‘Komodowarane wollen das gar nicht [...] Reptilien legen überhaupt keinen Wert darauf, daß man mit ihnen rumknutscht. Das nervt die bloß’ (p. 24). Harry, further illustrating his ‘mastery’, then decides it is time to turn the programme off. Clearly, the extreme animal violence and its association with sexuality in this scene cannot be taken at face value, mediated as they are through the construction of the documentary—something underlined by the narrator’s reference to ‘Kameraeinstellungen’ (p. 23)—as well as through the perceptions of its viewers Leon and Harry. ‘Nature’ in *Regenroman*, as Ludden has pointed out, is portrayed as a construct which society uses to justify its ‘hierarchical character’ (p. 48). When Leon makes Noah jump up for his food on the grounds that it is ‘natural’, Martina

flatly rejects his appropriation of the idea of ‘nature’ to explain his taunting of the dog: ‘Das ist nicht Natur, das ist gemein’ (p. 77).

In her non-fictional work *Anständig essen* Duve discusses animal exploitation in a direct and powerful way, but the novel offers different possibilities. Several critics have interpreted the animals in her novels in a metaphorical sense,<sup>54</sup> but in fact Duve uses fiction to speculate about the real experiences of animals, about their otherness and their similarities with human beings. The ‘fantastical’ strand in her fiction allows her to present existences which are not wholly explicable in human terms:<sup>55</sup> hence the almost magical aura of Noah. Duve inhabits and juxtaposes different human and non-human perspectives; contrasts dramatic, often violent human-directed events with the more gradual pace of animals and of the countryside; undermines the traditional hierarchy between human and non-human animals; and imagines how power relations could be reversed. While Noah is allowed a

---

<sup>54</sup> For example, Elke Brüns reads the monkey in Duve’s novel *Taxi* (2008) ‘als Wissensfigur des Menschen’, in ‘Der Affe in der Arbeitswelt: Mensch und Tier in Karen Duves Roman *Taxi*’, *Gegenwartsliteratur: A German Studies Yearbook*, vol. 8, 2009, (232). For Heike Bartel the incident with the monkey is a parodic element to the story, with the monkey personifying Nature, ‘Karen Duve, *Taxi*: Of Alpha Males, Apes, Altenberg, and Driving in the City’, in *Emerging German-Language Novelists of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lyn Marven and Stuart Taberner, Rochester 2011, pp. 189-190. For Alison Lewis, the frogs in Duve’s novel *Dies ist kein Liebeslied* (2004) are an ‘obscene’ and ‘disgusting detail’, which reveal her debt to Günter Grass, ‘Karen Duve’s *Dies ist kein Liebeslied*’, in *The Novel in German since 1990*, ed. Stuart Taberner, Cambridge 2011, p. 169.

<sup>55</sup> Bartel argues that the ending of *Taxi* ‘crosses the boundaries from the realistic into the fantastic’, ‘Karen Duve, *Taxi*: Of Alpha Males, Apes, Altenberg, and Driving in the City’, p. 189.

‘happy’ ending, however, she shows that animals, like women, remain victims under a patriarchy which constructs masculinity against a female or animal ‘other’. Although there are closer bonds between animals and women, there is no ‘essential’ or simplistic affinity between femininity and animality. Duve’s understanding of both gender and what constitutes ‘personhood’ appears to be fluid rather than essentialist, as illustrated by the human characters Kerbel and Kay, both of whom exceed the boundaries of their biologically ascribed sex, by the ‘animality’ of the human characters, and by the ‘human’ qualities of the animals. She depicts a common enemy, but women and animals are not instrumentalised or generalised in the service of the other cause. To lump them unthinkingly together would be to resemble a character such as Harry, who expects his underlings to obey ‘ob Mädchen oder Hunde’.