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# The Longest Revolution: Cultural Studies after Speciesism

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**ABSTRACT:** This article is a provisional exploration of the field of cultural studies from a committed animal rights perspective. It argues that cultural studies will need to be reformed in response to increasing public concern about animal welfare issues and the growth of environmental consciousness. A number of critical readings of literary texts are employed to exemplify how this reformation might manifest itself in practice. It includes a review and critique of some current work in the field and suggests that cultural theory is presently unable to respond fully to the place of animals in cultural production.

**KEYWORDS:** Animal rights, cultural studies, literary criticism, speciesism

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.<sup>1</sup>

Thus nineteenth-century political economy attempted to model the centrality of the human experience and to recoup the possibility of a teleological hermeneutic on the grand scale. The progressive erosion of faith in this vision has been marked – in western Europe, Australasia and the USA at least – by the replacement of the terms in Marx's slogan as if, by such an act, a new equation with a superior heuristic force might be developed. Thus, we can find Marx rewritten in a number of modes: we can replace 'class struggles' by 'gender conflict', by 'racial antagonism', by 'sexual prejudices', by any phrase which signifies the struggle of the old against the young, the sick against the healthy, the physically challenged against the physically able, the colonised against the coloniser. The fragmentation of political activism and political science in the post-Marxist, post-modern world (and by this I mean, quite arbitrarily, the world since 1960) has been marked by a proliferation of paradoxically parochial grand narratives each of which, quite properly and often with genuinely moving conviction, seeks to revisit and rewrite the human narrative which Marx had encoded by using class as his master term. In this essay I propose to argue that there is a final reformulation of Marx's dictum:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of the struggle between humans and non-humans.<sup>2</sup>

I will be proposing that both political science and cultural studies (from which context I am writing) can and should be rewritten so that an entirely new perspective, based on the vision of history as a conflict of species, specifically a conflict between humans and non-humans, emerges. This project is, I propose, allied to the related but different claims of environmentalism (in the most general sense of the word) to challenge the categories of social analysis. I will, in particular, attempt to sketch out the shape of a cultural study which proceeded as if this vision were correct. I will be writing from the conviction that it is and from the assumption that, in twenty years time, speciesism will be as politically, philosophically and socially indefensible as racism and sexism are today.

Let's start with a song by Robert Burns:

Now westlin winds, and slaught'ring guns  
 Bring Autumn's pleasant weather;  
 The moorcock springs, on whirring wings,  
 Among the blooming heather:  
 Now waving grain, wide o'er the plain,  
 Delights the weary farmer;  
 The moon shines bright as I rove at night,  
 To muse upon my Charmer.

The Pairtrick lo'es the fruitfu' fells;  
 The Plover lo'es the mountains;  
 The Woodcock haunt the lanely dells;  
 The soaring Hern the fountains:  
 Thro' lofty groves, the Cushat roves,  
 The path o' man to shun it;  
 The hazel bush o'erhangs the Thrush,  
 The spreading thorn the Linnet.

Thus ev'ry kind their pleasure find,  
 The savage and the tender;  
 Some social join, and leagues combine,  
 Some solitary wander:  
 Avaunt, away ! the cruel sway,  
 Tyrannic man's dominion;  
 The Sportsman's joy, the murd'ring cry,  
 The flutt'ring, gory pinnion !

But Peggy dear, the ev'ning's clear,  
 Thick flies the skimming Swallow;  
 The sky is blue, the fields in view,

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All fading-green and yellow:  
 Come let us stray our gladsome way,  
 And view the charms of Nature;  
 The rustling corn, the fruited thorn,  
 And ilka happy creature.

We'll gently walk, and sweetly talk,  
 While the silent moon shines clearly;  
 I'll clasp thy waist, and fondly press,  
 Swear how I lo'e thee dearly:  
 Not vernal show'rs to budding flow'rs,  
 Not Autumn to the Farmer,  
 So dear can be, as thou to me,  
 My fair, my lovely Charmer!<sup>3</sup>

In this song Burns brings together the conventional poetic devices of rustic seduction and a more savage, satirical vision which shows how these conventions are rooted in the bloody political reality of property relationships which are policed by the various game laws. In juxtaposing these two modes of writing Burns effects a magnificent subversion of the conventions of eighteenth-century nature poetry as these developed in the space, both temporal and ideological, between Alexander Pope's *Windsor Forest* and *Epistle to Burlington* and James Thomson's *The Seasons* and which had their roots in seventeenth-century topographical verse.

However, Burns's song is far more than a commentary on the insufficient relationship between polite aesthetics and sensuous experience or a wedge driven between the intensional and extensional dimensions of an anticipated poetic world. It is also a vision. In this poem Burns challenges the conventional eighteenth-century view that animals in nature are to be depicted only in order to show the increasing dominance of man as a shaping force in the environment. He develops a view of the environment as if animals had an equal share in it. The reader is first required to see the poem's landscape much as s/he does in much of Pope or Thomson: squinting down the barrel of a fowling piece. But the poem then slowly shifts its focus and imagines the life of the various birds who are living away from the view of man. It uncovers a scene full of hidden energy in which the landscape itself enters into a transitive relationship with the animals: 'the hazel bush *o'erhangs* the Thrush'. Burns is here using a shift in focus from human to non-human as a way of transforming the vocabulary and grammar of the eighteenth-century poem. He is refusing the banal prerequisites of an aesthetic devoted to the articulation of a relationship between man and nature which is expressible only through the complete reification of non-human species and creates in its place the image of a landscape which is so fully democratised that both humans and non-humans may find a distinctive place within it.

The enabling imperatives of the third stanza give to all species the right to pleasure and this liberational vision releases the conventional description of nature into the service of a more genial account of the place that human beings might have within it. The political radicalism which impels Burns's assault on the bucolic world leads him away from a merely satirical smirk at a smug little genre; it gives him an insight which is both revolutionary and revelatory. His poem poses a great 'what if': What if animals are sentient? It then answers its own question by asserting that they certainly are and that this implies the need for a reevaluation of the human/non-human relationship. It also asserts that this reevaluation will lead to a new intensity in the relationships between humans. The delicacy of the final stanza escapes cloying sweetness as it has been carved out of a transcendent aesthetic and a political engagement with the 'slaught'ring guns' of Autumn and is accurately placed on the far side of a highly argumentative poem which has slyly emerged from an ostensibly decorative piece of light verse.

This somewhat compressed reading of one poem is designed to demonstrate the transforming power of a non-speciesist vision or, rather, the broad implications for all facets of human experience of the repudiation of speciesism. It would be easy to reproduce this kind of procedure many times and, by so doing, work towards a new set of canonical values and artefacts that would delineate a cultural history predicated on a set of positions which are either non-speciesist or anti-speciesist or both. This is in itself a worthwhile project; among other things it would tend to demonstrate that the clear relationship between concern for animals and political radicalism which has been exemplified many times in the history of the animal welfare and animal rights movement holds good in the aesthetic field too. However, such a project is far beyond the scope of a brief essay. What I want it do instead is to use Burns's vision as a tool for examining some current aspects of cultural studies and the ways in which cultural studies might be changed in order to accommodate a non-speciesist perspective.<sup>4</sup>

The growth in philosophical, political and ethical writings on questions of animal rights which are exemplified in the works of Singer, Regan, Midgley, Masson and McCarthy, Ryder, and Linzey and in the anxious response of Scruton has barely been matched by a similar growth in work in the cultural field.<sup>5</sup> There are rare examples, notably the writings of Adams, Baker and Dekkers, but, broadly speaking, there has been a marked lack of concern for the position of animals in cultural history.<sup>6</sup> There is even anecdotal evidence of direct hostility. Let's suppose that a young postgraduate of my acquaintance is following a course in critical theory and suggests to one of his tutors that he wants to write an essay on animal rights. From an eminent professor comes the answer: 'What are you? Seven years old?'. This association of an interest in animals and infantile behaviour is interesting and reminiscent of the associations between effeminacy and concern for animal welfare which were commonly made in the early nineteenth century. What we see here is the idea that the notion that animals

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are a fit topic for academic consideration in the cultural field is somehow inferior, either intellectually or, I fear, ideologically, to concerns with class, gender or sexuality. It is easy to bracket this neatly as speciesism (which, of course, it is) but I sense here another kind of anxiety. The animal and the child do not easily fit into the categories which are necessary if we are to show how culture can act as the reproductive agency of a whole host of asymmetrical power relationships. Animals and children are not easily or glibly politicised and, by and large, require others to speak for them. They are far from obvious exhibits in the black museums of the liberal academy and are not usually enthroned in the pantheon of the oppressed. Because animals are so universally exploited their victim status creates a scandal which is best ignored. They do have their uses though: you can insult people with them without being accused of racism, sexism or homophobia.

It is thus the case that in the language of cultural studies, which in practice is co-extensive with the language of the radical and liberal academy, the non-human world provides a hidden space, an agency for the return of all the repressed monstrosities of our culture. Interestingly enough, Roger Scruton's characteristically intelligent pamphlet on animal rights exploits a very similar linguistic terrain in its characterisation of the proponents of animal welfare. Ultimately, Scruton (who quite rightly directs his fire at the disgracefully shallow utilitarianism of much animal rights philosophy) seems to argue that 'sentimentality' is at the root of the widespread interest in matters of animal rights and welfare. He argues that the lack of a public outcry over the BSE cattle cull points up the essential selfishness of the sentimentalist position.<sup>7</sup>

Leaving aside Scruton's deafness to public outrage at the cattle cull it is worthwhile exploring his account of the sentimental as it seems to shadow, but on a very different plane, the idea that a concern for animals is somehow a sign of the intellectual and emotional immaturity which was identified above. Scruton sees sentimentality in dramatic terms as:

a vice which certainly does infect our dealings with the animal kingdom ... Many of the questions I have discussed have been so clouded by sentimentality that it is worth offering an account of it...<sup>8</sup>

Scruton argues that sentimental emotions are selfish, nothing more than 'another excuse for the noble gesture'.<sup>9</sup> This may be true to some extent and it is certainly the case that sentimentality appears often to be more interesting in its own right than the object of the sentiment: but note the violence of the language here. The careful objectivity with which the philosophical and moral claims of animal rights thinkers have been dismantled up to this point is abandoned and we are, instead, confronted with highly coloured rhetoric in which moral turpitude ('vice') takes on the organic form of bacterial infection. The suppressed fury of Scruton's pamphlet finally breaks out here and the entire structure of his opponents' arguments, which he has hitherto probed with a philosopher's scalpel, is shown to be vitiated not intellectually but emotionally. In essence,

Scruton is arguing that his opponents are children who are just as incapable of subtle feeling as they are of subtle thought.

It is interesting, however, to note that Scruton understands extremely well the reasons for the distaste for animal studies which were expressed by the professor in the anecdote cited above. 'For animals', he says, 'cannot answer back...They allow us complete freedom to project into their innocent eyes a fantasy world in which we are the heroes'.<sup>10</sup> The turn of thought here is again precisely that of our tutor except that here the stress is on the idea that animals embody our fantasies of power rather than embarrass them. In both cases, drawn from the left and right wings of philosophy and cultural studies, the language of rational discourse – and common politeness, which, to my mind, is a similar thing – breaks down when confronted by the non-human subject. What is at stake here is not the rights and wrongs of animal studies but the ability of academic discourse to contain and embody our desires and the cathectic power over the products of culture with which that discourse provides us.

Of course, the greatest discursive product of all is the human being and modern cultural studies is concerned, to a very large extent, with the Foucauldian analysis of the formation of the Subject through discourse. The non-human can certainly be constructed in this way but cannot interact with the discourse either to promote it or to subvert it. Indeed, the discursive formations which produce the institutions within which animals are most commonly figured – such as medical laboratories, zoos, and circuses – do not produce accounts of animals but accounts of the human. The non-human must therefore appear entirely reified by the protocols of cultural analysis and epitomises an Otherness so totalising that it blocks out all competing accounts. In other words, the concern for animal rights poses a fundamental challenge to the ability of modern cultural studies to deliver an analysis of its objects which is anything but provisional and partial and which undermines the historical faith in teleology on which all such projects ultimately depend. Even an attractively alternative account such as Fukuyama's fails to account for the interaction of human and the non-human in its resolute adherence to a neo-Hegelian anthropocentricity.<sup>11</sup>

For Fukuyama the last man has progressed away from the 'bestial' first man and it is the casualness of the assumption that the slide into barbarism must necessarily be a slide into the domain of the non-human that gives away the intellectual anxiety which excludes the non-human from the historicising narrative.<sup>12</sup> However, if we assume that the 'last man' is genuinely the production of an historic process which is now ending in the resolution of contradiction and struggle, then this resolution must literally involve the incorporation of the bestial into the concept of the last man, who thus, it appears, becomes less manly because incompletely human. The linguistic slip gives way to speculation on the possibility that, while liberal democracy may have resolved the longer tensions of human relationships as these are depicted by political economy, the true

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tension that is inscribed in our desire to segment the environment into human and non-human remains as an anxiety which haunts the new world order of the liberal intellectual like a spectre.

The case that current models of cultural studies are inadequate to deal with a position based on a commitment to animal rights and a concern for animal welfare may also be seen in the total exclusion of animal matters from the map of the subject as it now stands. We might take as a model of this a Reader which is widely used in undergraduate cultural studies courses.<sup>13</sup> It has sections as follows: *The Culture and Civilisation Tradition, Culturalism, Structuralism and Poststructuralism, Marxism, Feminism, Postmodernism, The Politics of the Popular*. This is a very valuable collection and I do not intend to attribute to it or to its compiler the hostilities towards animal issues which I identified above. Rather, I wish to stress how the categories represented (which form what most people would, I think, consider as a standard model of the field) entirely preclude the entry of a non-speciesist perspective. When we exclude the first three areas (which are essentially historical anyway) we are left with theoretical accounts which explicitly exclude the non-human or include it only in objectified form.

What this means is that the topography of cultural studies as it currently stands is the product of discourses which depend on speciesism for their integrity as the building blocks of a systematic politics. It would not be possible to insert an animal rights perspective into these discourses though, of course, Marxism, for example, may well have plenty to say about animal rights. The attempt to substitute the contents of the grand narratives of cultural studies shows us immediately that, contrary to the way they are generally understood and used, they offer neither methods nor specific techniques for the reading of cultural texts. Marxism, Feminism, Post-Modernism are world views and, as such, need developed positions on culture but they are not, in themselves, cultural theories. It would, therefore, appear to be possible to adopt any analytical or hermeneutic methodology in the development of a non-speciesist account of culture. A non-speciesist world view does not necessarily imply any particular technique.

If cultural studies were to be mapped from a non-speciesist viewpoint we might begin by assembling the materials for a non-speciesist historiography. Much of this work has already been done by Thomas, Ritvo, Ponting, Turner, Spencer and Marshall among others.<sup>14</sup> However, in these cases, we need to distinguish carefully between a history which sets out merely to trace and describe the interactions between humans and non-humans and the development of conceptualisations of the non-human and a history which, from a committed position, seeks to enlarge the ethical and philosophical grounds of its own inquiry. Thus we might distinguish between works such as Sir Keith Thomas's *Man and the Natural World* or John Mackenzie's *The Empire of Nature*, which are both of the greatest value but which do not probe towards a non-speciesist position, and Peter Marshall's *Nature's Web* which sets out very deliberately to



write a world history from an ecological perspective which is able to comprehend a critical attitude towards speciesism.<sup>15</sup>

Once these materials have been assembled we may begin to map the new space through the creation of a typology which enables the contours of speciesism to be defined. Once this has been done, it would then be possible to begin to arrange existing materials and to predict the forms of new cultural artefacts and aesthetic concepts. I would suggest that the following categories offer a start:

- the animal as metaphor
- the animal as symbol
- the animal as human
- the animal as object

Clearly this quadripartite division need not be exhaustive but it initiates a project which is imaginative, scholarly and designed to incorporate the possibility that when philosophy is inclusive and democratised it can change the world as well as understand it.

From this beginning we can look, for instance, at the ways in which feminist scholars have used animal issues in the context of the analysis of patriarchal institutions. Carol Adams's superb book *The Sexual Politics of Meat* or Coral Lansbury's *The Old Brown Dog* are good examples.<sup>16</sup> Both Adams and Lansbury use the historiography of speciesist practices (meat eating and vivisection) to cut into various sexist discourses (e.g. gynaecology, pornography and sexual violence). Both writers make connections between the disempowerment and exploitation of women and the plight of animals and show how early feminists often made common cause with early protestors against cruelty to animals. However, in Lansbury's book animals remain at an essentially symbolic level. As she herself says:

Surely no human activity is more imbued with paradox than our attitude to animals and, in this context, the way men have regarded women.<sup>17</sup>

The treatment of animals is utilised to provide an ongoing symbol of the treatment of women and a grand analogy is forged between male attitudes to both. I am sure that this insight is correct and I have no wish to denigrate Lansbury's work, which is stimulating and full of interest, but I do not think that the critique of sexism which she develops incorporates an analogous or parallel critique of speciesism. This critique remains only as a quasi-metaphorical vehicle for her work's sexual politics. In other words, the animal and the question of its rights within the context of human history remain mute presences which serve only to amplify the voice of the oppressed human. It is interesting that Lansbury uses Anna Sewell's best-seller *Black Beauty* as an example of the symbolic connections between sexual and class oppressions. The same text has

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recently also been used by Moira Ferguson to study issues of racism and Englishness and, here again, the speciesist dimensions of Sewell's text are essentially sublimated within a symbolic matrix which serves and articulates a very human politics.<sup>18</sup>

Carol Adams writes:

Eat Rice, Have Faith in Women. Our dietary choices reflect and reinforce our cosmology, our politics. It is as though we could say, 'Eating rice is faith in women.'<sup>19</sup>

This turn of thought explores the notion that vegetarianism, as one practice of a non-speciesist philosophy, is more than a mere analogy to feminism in a non-patriarchal symbolic order. Adams is proposing a discourse (which she calls Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory) that is capable of refusing the reincorporation of the non-human body into an anthropocentric history. For her the very act of converting this discourse into a symbolic matrix which represents human activity and aspiration would seem to be a speciesist practice no matter how well meant or benevolent it is. One of the first tasks of a non-speciesist cultural studies would, therefore, be to graft onto the typology outlined above an account of the ways in which the metamorphosis of the non-human body – into aesthetic discourse, into food – can be seen to serve different levels of speciesist ideology, from the nakedly exploitative to the fellow travelling. If we are really to take seriously the reformulation of Marx I proposed above this will be an inevitable task if a genuinely new cultural studies is to emerge which represents more than a recollection of the subversive voices of the past. This is why the project is revolutionary.

The process of dealing with cultural texts from a new perspective involves inevitably what in other contexts has been described as 'reading against the grain'. The visual arts must be viewed so as to interpret the role of the animals which crouch in the corners of the frame or stare from their owners' lap. Just as some art historians have recently become interested in the production of the female nude from the point of view of the model so a new reading of painting would see the centrality of the physical traces of fur and bristle in the brush strokes, the function of gall and crushed bodies in the media and pigments. History must be written so as to filter out the hubbub of human voices and attend to birdsong and the barking of dogs. Our analysis of the practices of popular culture must be reoriented towards the bears who danced for the crowds, towards the monkeys not the organ grinders. Literary criticism and cultural analysis will become a search for the traces of a new kind of consciousness. I have suggested that the most promising work so far has been done on the intersections of animal rights philosophy and feminism.<sup>20</sup> However, it is plainly important to link this work into the growing body of eco-historical studies too. Even if these have no necessary allegiance to non-speciesism and no necessary interest in cultural production they do constitute a concerted attempt to redraw the discursive boundaries of academic practice in the interests of a politics which poses

profound challenges to the orthodoxies of both Marxism and Liberal Humanism and the many tendencies which they are capable of containing.

I will now suggest how readings of cultural texts might emerge from a non-speciesist perspective with a critique of a sonnet which was written by Sir Philip Sidney in 1581 or 1582:

I on my horse, and Love on me, doth try  
 Our horsemanships, while by strange work I prove  
 A horseman to my horse, a horse to Love,  
 And now man's wrongs in me, poor beast, descry.  
 The reins wherewith my rider doth me tie  
 Are humbled thoughts, which bit of reverence move,  
 Curb'd in with ear, but with gilt boss above  
 Of hope, which makes it seem fair to the eye;  
 The wand is will; thou, fancy, saddle art,  
 Girt fast by memory, and while I spur  
 My horse, he spurs with sharp desire my heart;  
 He sits me fast, however I do stir;  
 And now hath made me to his hand so right  
 That in the manage myself takes delight.<sup>21</sup>

This poem, which is part of long sequence written as a virtuoso exercise in the Petrarchan style, can be used to demonstrate the processes by which texts can be taken out of conventional critical discourse and reread as part of a new cultural framework.

In the sixteenth century there would have been few dissenting voices raised against the proposal that animals had no reason and that man was set over the animals by virtue, among other things, of his god-given reason. At much the same time as Sidney was writing his sequence of poems Montaigne published his speculations on the possibility that the relationship between humans and non-humans might not all be one way but here Sidney situates himself as someone who has, initially, little doubt about the relative position of man and horse in the hierarchy of nature.<sup>22</sup> To ride a horse is for a Renaissance man like Sidney not merely a gentlemanly accomplishment necessary for the public display of status but also a symbolic act which reproduces the divine management of Creation and reinforces the natural order by which the rational rules the irrational. The poem can thus be situated within a history which both organises the chronology of ideas about the non-human and, by reference to Elizabethan riding manuals, concretises the human/non-human interaction it describes.<sup>23</sup>

The poem thus appears at first unproblematic and capable of categorisation with other texts which make symbolic and objectifying use of the non-human. However, Sidney begins to see himself as a horse which is being ridden by a god, Love. The poem sets up a contradiction: within a Christian cosmology the rider (Sidney) sits in God-like state on his mount but in the pagan world of mythology

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Sidney himself is ridden by a god. The theology of the poem is unexceptional as it thrives on the literary convention by which the pagan personification of desire can happily co-exist with Christian virtue in the same text. However, when we look at the sonnet as a document in the textualisation of speciesism the play of differing cosmic systems becomes more interesting. In the poem's 'Christian world' the rider is impeccably orthodox and rules brute creation in the manner recommended by Catholic, Protestant and Neo-Platonic thinkers alike. The position of the human is unambiguous. In the poem's 'pagan world' the nonrational side of the human is allowed more liberty (although under the guidance of a god) and is explicitly allowed into the poem. The relationship between two poetic cosmologies allows Sidney to introduce a duality into the poem and to explore the ambiguities that arise out of the speculation (made explicit by Francis Bacon some sixteen years later) that man is god-like in his reason but brutal in his passions.<sup>24</sup>

Although this account adds some complexity to our understanding of the poem it is still relatively easy to fit it into the history of the debate on human nature which characterises both the philosophy and art of the later sixteenth century and to place it in a pre-existing symbolic matrix. Sidney is also playing with the metaphorical value of the non-human and shuttling between the suggestion that he is a metaphor for his horse and that his horse is a metaphor for him. A new thought seems to enter the poem at line four and the novelty of this thought perhaps accounts for the semantic difficulties at this point. The verb 'descry' is far separated from its subject, the pronoun 'I' in line two. This weakens the subjective force of the action which is doubly attenuated not only by the structure of the sentence but also by the parenthetical apostrophisation of the subject in the phrase 'poor beast'. This draws attention away from the 'I' as human subject which has, in the course of the sentence, replaced itself with the non-human subject 'horse'. 'I' has to govern the subjectivity of both horseman and horse but if a horse is irrational it cannot be given human attributes and thus is incapable of the introspective perception implied by the verb 'descry'. A horse may be sensible of 'man's wrongs' (cruelties) in that it can feel the whip or the spurs but it could not 'descry' them. The power of Sidney's idea thus inevitably disrupts the syntax of his language: animals are not capable of speech. We have a long time to go before we reach the novels of Tolstoy, Radclyffe Hall or John Cowper Powys, where dogs, horses and trees are occasionally given non-anthropomorphised subject positions, but this sonnet by Sidney does seem to mark one of the earliest moments at which the consciousness that the non-human can be a subject quite distinct from the human and can be described without recourse to the symbolic or objectifying matrices of speciesism is articulated and explored.

It is instructive to compare Sidney's insight with a moment from *The Faerie Queene* by his contemporary Edmund Spenser. At the end of Book II a number of men who have been turned into animals by the enchantress Acrasia are given

back their human form. One of them, a man called Grill, who has been a pig, complains that he preferred being an animal. This is the response:

...See the mind of beastly man,  
 That hath so soon forgot the excellence  
 Of his creation, when he life began,  
 That now he chooseth, with vile difference,  
 To be a beast, and lack intelligence.  
 ...The donghill kind  
 Delights in filth and foul incontinence;  
 Let Grill be Grill and have his hoggish mind,  
 But let us hence depart, whilest wether serves and wind.<sup>25</sup>

Once again, we see here a conventional sixteenth-century attitude to the question of the superiority of man over animals. It is shocking and, essentially, blasphemous to express a preference for animal nature. However, at the end of his sonnet Sidney comes close to doing just that. In his role as horse he appreciates the skilfulness with which he is ridden and the position in which he is placed by this skill in horsemanship becomes the location of 'delight'. I do not think that Sidney is here being like Grill, who prefers the sensuousness of life as a pig to the restrained virtue of life as a man, but he is certainly articulating the possibility that a horse may have more than a merely instinctive response to his rider and that the art of riding is not merely the exercise of rational power over the irrational. This conclusion underpins the emergent consciousness of the distinctness of non-human nature which was identified as struggling to the surface earlier in the poem. The irony of the poem's position resides in the fact that Sidney identifies the rational faculties which make his humanity possible as the very things which are used to turn him into a horse.

I have attempted to read Sidney's sonnet as if the project to reform cultural studies from a non-speciesist perspective were now under weigh. The poem has been set in a history which places a concern with the relationship between humans and non-humans at its centre and analysed with a view to placing the varied forms of that relationship at its affective and intellectual core. Read 'against the grain' the poem can be pulled away from its adherence to the conventional opinions of its time and inserted into a new kind of cultural history. What I have tried to show is that a non-speciesist cultural canon cannot be constructed only from texts or artefacts which show an explicit sympathy with the non-human experience. It is important to include other things, some of which will show explicit hostility to non-speciesist positions but which can still be categorised and some which can, like Sidney's sonnet, be incorporated into the prehistory of non-speciesist aesthetics. I doubt if anyone who wanted to explore the culture of the United States from the viewpoint of Native Americans would try to ignore the novels of Fennimore Cooper or Disney's cartoon *Pocahontas*.

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If we are to reform and reconstruct the macro-political environment so that questions of environmental value and conservation come to the fore the academy must play its part. Cultural studies is unlike science or social science in that it seems incapable of having a very direct effect on the social practices which must change if enlightened environmental policy is to inform legislation. However, I see cultural studies as predominantly concerned with meaning and the history of meaning and with the ways in which people make sense of their experience through non-utilitarian aesthetic production. It is thus vital, if changes in public attitudes, the economy and the law are to have lasting effect, that there is a matching impetus in the study of signifying systems. This, more than most things, will enable the deep embedding of environmental consciousness and I would argue strongly that the development of non-speciesist perspectives is a vital factor in the creation of this consciousness and its sustenance. Art historians, literary critics, semioticians, musicologists, social historians could and should be at the forefront of the movement to change the place of environmentalism both within the academy and more generally. Arguing from the case of cultural studies I have tried to show that one of the reasons that they are not is that the mapping of their disciplines by means of grand narratives (of which I take post-modernism to be the latest development) prevent the formulation of a language and a perspective that enables the appropriate ways of seeing. I have also tried to show that this need not be the case and that a new vantage point is potentially available to us.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, quoted from McLellan (1978), p.222.

<sup>2</sup> It is true that Marx appears to have attributed a consciousness of the struggle to the participants although this attribution is not necessarily consistently maintained across the range of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. I would wish to assert, however, that whatever view is taken with regard to Marx the struggle between humans and non-humans is consciously understood by both sides.

<sup>3</sup> Kinsley (1869), pp. 2–3.

<sup>4</sup> Cultural Studies has developed as a subject which concentrates, almost exclusively, on contemporary and near-contemporary cultural production. In this essay I have deliberately worked from examples drawn from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. This is for two reasons: firstly, those periods seem to contain moments of secular change which are reflective of the crisis of philosophy in the late twentieth century; secondly, by adopting a deliberately oblique approach to the subject I am attempting to stress the need for a radically new approach. Darnton (1984), Stovkis (1989), Jacoby (1994) and Passmore (1975) give some materials for the development of historical perspectives. Simons (1996) adopts a more conventional contemporary view.

<sup>5</sup> Singer (1995), Regan (1984), Midgley (1983), Masson and McCarthy (1996), Ryder (1989), Linzey (1994), Scruton (1996).

<sup>6</sup> Adams (1991), Baker (1993), Dekkers (1994).

<sup>7</sup> Scruton (1996).

<sup>8</sup> Scruton (1996), p. 99.

<sup>9</sup> Scruton (1996), p.100.

<sup>10</sup> Scruton (1996), p. 100.

<sup>11</sup> Fukuyama (1992).

<sup>12</sup> Fukuyama (1992), p. xxiii. Interestingly enough, when Fukuyama turns to a more detailed discussion of the 'first man' and his use as a category in the writing of Hegel and Hobbes, he is more concerned to stress the 'counter-instinctual' or 'non-animal' attributes of this construct. An evolutionary process therefore appears to have taken place by which Fukuyama's readiness to use animal imagery in the early sections of his book has been selected out by the demands of his later argument. See Fukuyama (1992), pp. 143–161.

<sup>13</sup> Storey (1994).

<sup>14</sup> Thomas (1984), Ritvo (1987), Ponting (1991), Turner (1980), Spencer (1993), Marshall (1995). It may well be significant that, of these writers, Ponting, Spencer and Marshall are not professional academics.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas (1984), Mackenzie (1988), Marshall (1995).

<sup>16</sup> Adams (1991), Lansbury (1985).

<sup>17</sup> Lansbury (1985), p. xi.

<sup>18</sup> Lansbury (1985), pp. 63–82, Ferguson (1994).

<sup>19</sup> Adams (1991), p. 190.

<sup>20</sup> This link also has an historical dimension: the feminist Frances Power Cobbe was active in the animal rights movement in the 1870s in England as was Caroline White in the USA in the 1880s and 1890s. See Turner (1980), pp. 89–95.

<sup>21</sup> Kimbrough (1969), pp. 189–190.

<sup>22</sup> Waller (1910). The essay 'Of Cruelty' argues that 'I ... am easily removed from that imaginary sovereignty that some give and ascribe to us above other creatures' (p.124) and goes on to assert that 'There is a kinde of enter-changeable commerce and mutuall bond betweene them and us' (p.125). John Florio's English translation (cited here) appeared in 1603. The essay was written in the 1570s and published in French in 1580.

<sup>23</sup> Lansbury (1985), pp. 96–111 discusses the relationship between riding, gynaecology and pornography in the nineteenth century. There is surely also a sexual dimension to the image of riding in Sidney's poem which may bring together, at a very early point, the associations between the mastery of horses and the mastery of women which had become commonplace by the Victorian period.

<sup>24</sup> Harrison (n.d.). Bacon's essay 'Of Nature in Men' (pp. 177–180) is especially relevant here. The essays were published in 1597.

<sup>25</sup> Hamilton (1977), p. 298.

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