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Return to the Fable: Rethinking a Genre Neglected in Animal Studies and Ecocriticism

Introduction: Neglect and Attention Concerning the Fable

In the discourses of animal studies and ecocriticism at least two rhetorical strategies to deal with the literary genre of the fable can be distinguished: First, scholars of both fields regard the fable with restraint and skepticism, associating the respective texts with a potential anthropocentrism concerning the depicted animals, plants and things (cf. Ritvo; Fudge; Simons). The basic assumption underlying this skepticism is that animals and environments in fables are only features of the moralistic function of the genre. In this sense, all natures depicted in fables finally refer back to the human and are reduced to vehicles for human purposes. For this reason, fables are still often ignored or avoided in animal studies and ecocriticism. Second, some scholars acknowledge the fable as a valuable source for understanding human attempts to examine the nonhuman world with literary means (cf. Harel; Schuster; Waldow; Borgards "Tiere und Literatur"; Schönbeck). These scholars emphasize the theoretical implications of fables and include them in their works and agendas. The basic assumption underlying this interest in the fable is that fables are documents of a human attempt to deal with and understand the more-than-human world, nonhuman others and their relations to each other and to the environment.

Hence, the question whether fables are of theoretical value is being controversially discussed, especially in animal studies. One significant example for the restraint and skepticism is John Simons' rejection of the fable in his monograph *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation* (2002) because it has "little to offer." Simons describes the genre as a narrative which exclusively explores "the human condition" and doubts that the animals depicted in those texts are "presented as having physical or psychological existence in their own right" (119). In this sense, the meaning of the animals depicted in fables seems to be reserved for humans. In a similar vein, Jacques Derrida argues in *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (2006/2008) that he wants to "avoid fables" (27) He associates them with an "anthropomorphic taming" and argues that fabulation or–as Geoffrey Bennington translates Derrida–

"fabulization" remains a "discourse" only "of man, on man, indeed on the animality of man, but for and in man" (37). A closer look at the arguments of those who are skeptical about fables shows that, according to them, the fable is characterized by a problematic and disproportional relationship of humans and animals, a relationship that is fundamentally anthropocentric and anthropomorphic. Fables are written in human language and often aim at human morals. For many critics, anthropomorphism in fables is only anthropocentric, naïve or even narcissistic. The skeptics reject the fable with the moral argument that "humans project their own thoughts and feelings onto other animal species because they egoistically believe themselves to be the center of the universe" (Daston and Mitman 4), which is the same argument ethologists put forward to support their restraint against anthropomorphism.

I argue that our theoretical premises are crucial for understanding and evaluating literary animals in general. That fables are texts that often relate animal stories about incidents in order to illustrate human morals belongs to the central theoretical assumptions about them in literary theory. But can we also learn something from fables about animals or environments and the way humans deal with them literally and in literature? As this remains an open question, scholars of both fields are still interested in the genre. I argue that the fable, both as a literary genre and as fiction or literature in general,[1] is a prime example of zoopoetics *and* ecopoetics because the fable problematizes and theorizes the relation of texts, animals, and environments.

Another reason for the yet undiminished interest in fables is that theoretical key texts of ecocriticism and animal studies include fables both as a method and an object of research. In the following, I briefly revisit three canonical texts for animal studies and ecocriticism, namely Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), Michel Serres' *The Parasite* (1980), and Jacques Derrida's *The Beast & the Sovereign* (2009). These authors include fables and thus demonstrate their theoretical potential. I approach key passages of these texts with two core questions in mind: What is the specific way in which the authors include the fable in their theories and what role do they play in developing these theories? How is it possible to develop from these key passages more general theoretical thoughts concerning the use of the fable in animal studies and ecocriticism? By analyzing these texts, my chapter aims at returning to the fable theoretically, underlining the need for a contemporary fable theory that opens up new ways to think about the relations of texts, animals, and environments.

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[1] The OED lists four meanings of the fable, but only three of them are relevant in our context. First of all, fable means any "fictitious narrative or statement; a story not founded on fact." Those fables, for example myths or legends, are often associated with falsehood. Second, fables are short stories, "devised to convey some useful lesson; *esp*. one in which animals or inanimate things are the speakers or actors; an apologue." Third, fable means a "plot or story of a poem." Finally, the word refers to a "talk, in phrase to hold (a person) in fable, a discourse, narration" ("fable, n.").

"A Fable for Tomorrow" (Carson 1)

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* published in 1962 has become one of the most famous texts, if not *the* initial text of the late twentieth century's environmental movement. Until today, people who try to reconstruct the history of the environmental humanities or of ecocriticism often praise Carson's nonfiction book (cf. Horward 74; Rigby, "Ecocriticism" 156; Garrard 1; Heise 160). The reasons for the repeated appearance as a key reference until now may include its rhetorical and poetical qualities. In contrast to the nonfictional character of the whole book, *Silent Spring* contains a so-called "Fable for Tomorrow" that has become paradigmatic for the controversies that emerged after the release of the book (cf. Oravec). Inserted at the very beginning, it obviously uses literary strategies to introduce the argument of a contemporary crisis of the human relation to the environment. The text does not try to hide but rather underlines the fabulous character of this initial point. Already the title of the chapter contains the "alarming" concept "fable" and thus plays with the connotation of a fictional and false story that can simply be rejected as an account of something that probably never took place and will never exist in the future. Furthermore, the title raises the question of anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism.

Silent Spring begins with the depiction of a prosperous, cordial city surrounded by a pastoral landscape:

> There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings. The town lay in the midst of a checkerboard of prosperous farms, with fields of grain and hillsides of orchards where, in spring, white clouds of bloom drifted above the green fields. (1)

The literary history of the fable is not analyzed in Carson's first chapter but evoked in the course of the narration. At least two literary backgrounds are relevant here, Enlightenment and Romanticism, as Catrin Gersdorf has shown in her article about the intertwinement of animals and environments (25). Whereas the tradition of the Enlightenment plays a central role in the revealing analysis of the disastrous impact of DDT use in the remainder of the book, the romantic tradition is crucial for an understanding of the opening. These first sentences are indicators of the genre of romantic fairy tales and many children would recognize and attribute them to the brothers Grimm whom Carson refers to a bit later in the text (32). Furthermore, William Wordsworth and his proto-ecological writings are evoked here.[2] It is striking that, in his *Lyrical Ballads*, one often finds the imagination of a "green past" in contrast to the industrialized present. In Carson's introductory fable, the town is harmoniously embedded in its natural surroundings. The imagined city reminds the reader of "pastoral farms, / green to the very door" (110), just like the one described in "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey." The contrast depicted in *Silent Spring* is not one between city and countryside, but one between the past and the present. The fable is a means to narrate a temporal transition in the relation of humans, nonhuman animals and their environment.

Exemplary of the "harmony," "beauty," and "abundance" of nature, as it is described in *Silent Spring,* appears the rich variety of "countless birds" that was well-known all over the country: "The countryside was, in fact, famous for the abundance and variety of its bird life, and when the flood of migrants was pouring through in spring and fall people traveled from great distances to observe them". The songs of the birds and their becoming silent are one central aspect of the narration of a grave transformation in the process of civilization that is also a rupture within the history of living life: "Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change" (2). The beginning (of the book and of the fable) is a reminder of the latent historical background of the contemporary crisis that occurs against the backdrop of a beautiful past and results from the widespread use of pesticides in agriculture.

After the turning point in Carson's fable, the absence of the birds is of major importance: "There was a strange stillness. The birds, for example, where had they gone? Many people spoke of them, puzzled and disturbed…. It was a spring without voices" (2). In his paper on the animal fable, Louis Marin formulates the paradigmatic question of the genre as follows: "Que signifie, dans le discours de la fable, la bête parlante" (775)? After raising this question, Marin himself gives the most prevalent answer: "Une allégorie de l'homme. Soit" (775). With regard to the introductory fable in *Silent Spring*, the question has to be rewritten in the following way: What does it mean when the birds in the fable stop singing? The answer is not as easy as in the case of the animal fable. Certainly, those silenced birds cannot be read as a human allegory. Instead, they do not seem to refer to anything but themselves. In fact, their song and subsequently their silence render legible a transition from ecological harmony to disharmony. As a result, the birds do not sing anymore.

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[2] The romantic tradition is considered to be one of the most important literary backgrounds of what we have called "ecocriticism" since the early 1990s. Cf. Bate, *Romantic Ecology*; Kroeber, Rigby, *Topographies*; Hall.

In romantic poetry, songs of birds are ubiquitous; often, texts stage the beginning of the birds' song, famously so in "The Nightingale," but sometimes they also display grief about the becoming-silent of the birds, as in "La Belle Dame sans Merci" by John Keats, which is–as Jonathan Bate has shown–one of the important intertexts of *Silent Spring*. The beginning of the birds' song is strongly associated with beauty, but also with melancholy about a certain loss, as it is the case in Wordsworth's "The Nightingale":

> …. All is still,
> A balmy night! and tho' the stars be dim,
> Yet let us think upon the vernal showers
> That gladden the green earth, and we shall find
> A pleasure in the dimness of the stars.
> And hark! The Nightingale begins its song,
> "Most musical, most melancholy bird!"
> A melancholy Bird? O idle thought!
> In nature there is nothing melancholy. (42)

The speaker in "The Nightingale" reflects upon the meaning humans give to the nightingale and its song. In the poem the nightingale is interpreted as a symbol for melancholy, but at the same time the concession is made that such a meaning is only a human ascription and that the nightingale (and, ultimately, all nature) is not itself melancholic. Thereby, the nightingale paradoxically keeps its melancholic meaning because it refers to something that existed only in the past and is lost now according to the speaker. The song of the nightingale reminds the speaker of this lost meaning that was introduced, as the text reminds us, by a "night-wandering Man, whose heart was pierc'd / With the remembrance of a grievous wrong" (42). The same association of the nightingale's song with melancholy and grief about something lost is also evoked in the first (and the last) stanza of "La Belle Dame sans Merci:"

> O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
> Alone and palely loitering?
> The sedge has withered from the lake,
> And no birds sing. (441)

In Wordsworth's "The Nightingale," the birds sing; in Keats' "La Belle Dame sans Merci," they are silent. This is one simple difference between the two ballads. However, in both cases the birds refer to the absence of love and beauty. Whereas the song of the nightingale refers to its own lost traditional meaning, the silence of the birds is associated with the absence of the "belle dame." The same economy of absence and presence is implicated in the beginning of *Silent Spring*, the title of which already anticipates the becoming-silent of the birds. It would make no sense to reject Carson's fable altogether with an argument against anthropocentrism. The fable rather problematizes the becoming-anthropocentric of the *anthropos*.

The "Fable for Tomorrow" articulates severe changes in the ecological relations between humans, animals, and plants. Carson does not develop a fable theory, but uses the fable as a method in order to narrate a change in the relation of humans, animals, and environments. Her fable is not an object of research but a means to begin her book with a generic example that can easily be related to existing cities "in America or elsewhere in the world" (3).

"La Fontaine explains this to me further on" (Serres 5)

Michel Serres' book *Le Parasite* (1980) begins in a quite similar fashion. Like *Silent Spring*, it begins by telling a fable. But there are also differences concerning the status of the fable for the theory that is developed and its relation to the literary texts used to construct the argument. Serres invents a fable (like Carson), and at the same time he explicitly mentions certain literary backgrounds (unlike Carson). He refers to French poets like Jean de la Fontaine (*Fables*, 1684-86) or Edme de Boursault (*Fables d'Ésope*, 1690). At the same time, Serres does not deliver an analysis of these literary texts but uses them in order to demonstrate and develop his own argument. The first chapter is entitled "Rat's Meals" and "Cascades," and it begins as follows:

> The city rat invites the country rat onto the Persian rug. They gnaw and chew leftover bits of ortolan. Scraps, bits and pieces, leftovers: their royal feast is only a meal after a meal among the dirty dishes of a table that has not been cleared. The city rat has produced nothing and his dinner invitation costs him almost nothing. Boursault says this in his *Fables d'Esope*, where the city rat lives in a house of a big tax farmer. Oil, butter, ham cheese–everything is available. It is easy to invite the country cousin and to regale oneself at the expense of another. (3)

After the first few sentences, the text reveals the source of the fable and thus transforms its status from a proper invention to a quotation. The text quotes the comedy *Les Fables d'Ésope* by Boursault, a text published in 1690, some years after La Fontaine's last series of fables containing rather loose translations of Aesop's antique fables. In Boursault's comedy, the Greek fabulist Aesop is one of the main characters who, from time to time, instructs or persuades his interlocutors with a fable. The comedy of Boursault can be considered a direct reaction to the collection of La Fontaine. The most obvious difference between La Fontaine's fables and those of Boursault is that the latter mixes the genres of the fable and comedy, introducing human characters who tell fables to each other and thereby relate themselves to the fabulous animals. When he takes up this genre mixture of Boursault and inserts it into his own theoretical account, Serres makes the question of genre even more complicated (cf. Zillén). Three genres are involved: the fable (Aesop, La Fontaine), the comedy (Boursault), and a theoretical or philosophical genre (Serres). Serres refers to *Les deux rats*, a fable that is included in *Fables d'Ésope*. By quoting Boursault in the beginning of his book, he underlines that he tries to describe a certain system of relations. Already in the literary model, the characters of the comedy and that of the fable share a complex relationship. The text of Boursault displays that relationship between the human characters of the play and the animal characters of the narrated fables. Regarding Serres' dealing with the fable, it becomes obvious that not only the different genres but also the different human and nonhuman characters do not relate to each other by opposition or substitution, rather they become part of a relational fabric or a "parasitic chain" (3) as Serres calls it.

La Fontaine's "Le Rat de ville et Le Rat des champs" is the second fable the text quotes. La Fontaine writes his version of the fable some years earlier than Boursault and includes it in his three volume collection *Fables choisies, mis en vers*. By quoting La Fontaine's version, Serres shows that it is possible to describe every character in the fable as the parasite, depending on the perspective and the position in the chain of parasites. The fable brings this aspect into play in a moment of *peripeteia*, a turning point. Suddenly, a human character interrupts the meal of the two rats and thereby creates a new parasitic regime:

> The meal was all two rats could wish;
> But as they took their leisure,
> Something–most likely humanish–
> Came by to spoil their pleasure.
> Outside the door they were eating:
> Noises of frightful kind!
> Off flees the city rat, retreating;
> Country friend close behind. (La Fontaine, *Fables* 12)

The *peripeteia* is initiated by a noise that Serres also describes as parasitic, "an interruption, a corruption, a rupture of information," responsible for disrupting the prevalent order and generating a new one. A "parasitic" relation is a "relation without a reversal of direction" (5) of at least two living beings or objects. For Serres, fables are outstanding objects of research but also a means to demonstrate parasitic relations. To understand this point, it is necessary to outline his implicit fable theory that leads him to the assumption that "La Fontaine explains" something to him "further on" (5).

Serres diagnoses that both fable and science are characterized by anthropomorphism, in the sense that both go back to certain human practices in cultural history, such as hunting and "human habits and customs" more generally. These habits have been transferred from humans for instance to little animals. What he demands now is to "reverse" anthropomorphism by trying to recognize human behavior in the actions of animals.

> I'll close the triangle[3], agreeing with science rather than with the fable. The intuition of the parasitologist makes him import a common relation of social manners to the habits of little animals, a relation so clear and distinct that we recognize it as being the simplest. Let's retrace our steps for a moment, going from these habits back to those manners, reversing anthropomorphism. We have made the louse in our image; let us see ourselves in his. (7)

At this point it becomes obvious that this understanding of the fable differs from an anthropocentrism that is characterized by a trivial anthropomorphism.[4] Rather, Serres highlights that it is possible to reverse the anthropomorphism at least "for a moment" and to acknowledge the "intuition" of the scientist concerning the "habits" of little animals. Leaving aside the question of whether biologists necessarily make use of anthropomorphisms, he underlines that the ascription of animal habits should be based on observations. According to Serres, there is an intimate correlation between the "social manners" of humans and the "habits of animals." The paradigm of this coherence is the parasitic relation that is a trait of animals as well as humans in their social sphere. To "reverse" anthropomorphism means that Serres does not want to make statements about the human-like behavior of animals, but about the animal-like behavior of humans (theriomorphism):

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[3] Serres defines the triangle a little bit later in the text as follows: "The triangle is closed. At each of its points, through story or science, social science or biological science, just one relation appears, the simple, irreversible arrow" (8).

[4] For different forms of anthropomorphisms, cf. Daston and Mitman.

"We have made the louse in our image; let us see ourselves in his" (7). The theory of parasites comes with a fable theory that enhances this genre of animal literature because it educates the reader about animal habits as well as social practices with the necessary degree of complexity.

Serres argues that fables fundamentally deal with a "system of relations" that are considered parasitic relations, "the simple relation of the abusive companion." With his interest in "intersubjective relations" (8) shown in fables, he implicitly rejects the assumption that fables "contain" an anthropomorphic allegorical meaning that has to be deciphered. He focuses on humans that are considered parasites because they are the permanent abusive guests of animals and plants. Not only with regard to Serres' writing (which could be called parasitic itself), one consequence of this insight could be that the relations of the writer as well as the reader of fables to the animals and plants within fables are parasitic relations. Accordingly, the premise of further readings of fables would have to be that it is yet unclear and maybe impossible to decide "what belongs to the system, what makes it up, and what is against the system, interrupting and endangering it" (16). Finally, it is remarkable that Serres highlights a resemblance between the relations within an environment and the relations between the host and parasite and thereby naturalizes his theory of social relations: "The equilibrium of a living being in its environment resembles the one that the host and parasite finally realize and sometimes arrive at" (167). However, he acknowledges that environmental relations can be parasitic, when he takes a closer look at the relations of human beings to the animals they consume literally, as clothes or nourishment. His argument leads up to a point where the collective and the whole system of parasitic relations are equated with the "environment" (10), underlining the political implications of parasitic relations.

It becomes apparent that Serres develops his theory with the help of fables. By quoting the fables of Boursault and La Fontaine, he reflects the relation of textual genres and of hosts and parasites. Fables are prime objects to study parasitic relations. His theory of the parasite includes a theory of the fable that might be called the "relation theory." It implies that readers can use fables to track a complex structure of relations, a relational fabric, where social practices correspond to animal habits. The hierarchy implicit in the system of parasitic relations (Serres' "environment") that only go in one direction, has a political dimension. In the last part of my chapter, I am taking a closer look at the political dimensions of fables and of fabulation.

"What is a fable?" (Derrida 24)

I am going to conclude with some remarks on Jacques Derrida's lectures published in 2008 under the title *La bête et le souverain.* In the first session of his last seminar, Derrida raises the question "What is a fable?" (24) and underlines a characteristic openness of the fable which is already part of the answer. In *The Animal That Therefore I Am* Derrida still wanted to "avoid fables" (27) and rejected them as "zoopoetic" (6), i.e., as literature that has nothing to do with real animals like his cat.[5] His last seminar, however, begins with considerations concerning fables that are connected to the constellation of beast and sovereign: "Every seminar begins with some fabulous 'as we will shortly show'" (*Beast* 24). The text revolves around the absence of the wolf: "There is only a word, a spoken word, a fable, a fable-wolf, a fabulous animal, or even a fantasy" (5). This contemplation about wolves goes back to the general definition of the fable as a discourse or a narration and associates the word with a fictional character. At the same time, Derrida states that "these fables or fantasies vary from one place and one historical moment to another" (4). As someone giving a seminar on wolves, he is confronted with different cultural and historical backgrounds of wolf fables and their relation to his perspective.

These "thorny frontier questions" (4) become more explicit when the listener and reader of the seminar consider the role of specific fables–now understood as a genre of literary text–in Derrida's discourse. He begins his seminar with a hidden quotation from the beginning of La Fontaine: "The reason of the strongest is always the best. As we will shortly show" (7). Derrida does not make the literary reference explicit at this point. Later on in the session, the source is revealed, it is the *promythion*, the moral tenet of *Le loup et l'agneau* : "La raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure: Nous l'allons montrer tout à l'heure" (La Fontaine, *Œuvres* 44). Derrida plays with this epigram from the beginning of La Fontaine's fable to reflect upon the absence of wolves, both in the fable and in his seminar, and about the relation of "the beast" and "the sovereign."

Like Carson and Serres, Derrida uses the fable as a starting point to elaborate his theoretical argument about the relationship of the beast and the sovereign. I argue that the beginning of his seminar also contains a fable theory that cannot be described adequately in terms of an underlying anthroprocentrism or a naïve or narcissistic anthropomorphism.

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[5] For an analysis of this differentiation, see the introduction to this volume as well as Driscoll and Hoffmann.

In the first session, Derrida distinguishes "figures of the wolf" including "fables and fantasies" on the one hand and "real wolves" that "[w]ithout asking permission … cross humankind's national and institutional frontiers, and his sovereign nation-states" on the other hand. But rather than turning to real wolves and insisting on their reality like he did facing his cat in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, he fleshes out the power or–as Alexander Kling has described it–the "energeia" (20) of the fabulous wolf that requires his absence ("*pas de loup"*) (Derrida, *Beast* 5). This very absence "bespeaks," according to him, "power, resource, force, cunning, ruse of war, stratagem or strategy, operation of mastery" (6). The political value of the fabulous wolf is considered even higher than the value of the real wolf: "The strength of the wolf is all the stronger, sovereign even, is all the more all-conquering [a raison de tout] for the fact that the wolf is not there, that there is not the wolf itself, were it not for a *pas de loup*, except for a *pas de loup*, save a *pas de loup*, only *a pas de loup*" (6). The enigmatic sentence suggests that fables of wolves not only show political power but produce political power through rhetorics. This leads to the following questions: First, how do fables show political power? Second, how do they produce evidence?

Derrida argues that, in fables, the beast and the sovereign are connected by means of analogy. After having quoted the first lines of La Fontaine's fable *Le loup et l'agneau* ("The reason of the strongest is always the best; / As we shall shortly show") several times, he refers to Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Du contrat social* (1750) and points out the resemblance between the chapter entitled "Of the Right of the Stronger" and La Fontaine's fable. This leads to a reading of the fable as a *mis-en-scène* of political power. Derrida identifies the means employed to articulate political power in La Fontaine's fable as well as in Rousseau's text.[6] It is articulated with the help of the "*analogy* that kings were gods, or that peoples were beasts" (Derrida, *Beast* 12). In what follows, Derrida shows interest in the "multiple and overdetermined analogy" that binds together "man" and "animal" in order to highlight the "porosity of [the] limit between nature and culture" (15):

> Of course, the word "analogy" designates for us the place of a question rather than that of an answer. However one understands the word, an analogy is always a reason, a logos, a reasoning, or even a calculus that moves back up toward a relation of production, or resemblance, or comparability in which identity and difference coexist. (14)

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[6] Rousseau's text has been translated by Geoffrey Bennington.

Derrida underlines that the analogies developed in fables are characterized by identity and difference of both human and nonhuman animals. These analogies are organized and thereby "cultivated" and "accredited" whenever they are articulated. From this perspective, fables are not only "representations" of power relations, they are, at the same time, "fictive and performative" (217) actualizations of power relations. On the one hand, Derrida is interested in real beasts that "play a role in civil society or in the state" like the elephant that was dissected by Louis XIV during an anatomy lesson (250-75). On the other hand, like La Fontaine, he is interested in fabulous beasts that show the "essence of political force and power, where that power makes the law" (217). Power passes through the fable, "power is itself an effect of fable" (218). This is the reason why Derrida's fable theory is neither anthropocentric nor anthropomorphic in the sense that animals in fables only function as masks for human characters. What is more, Derrida's fable theory is based on complex analogies and points in two directions; the direction of the humans and their animalistic politics and the direction of nonhuman animals and their zoopolitics.

Conclusion

I have shown that fables are of considerable theoretical import in three canonical, albeit very different, texts–Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Michel Serres' *Le parasite*, and Jacques Derrida's *The Beast & the Sovereign*–that can all be considered central references in animal studies and ecocriticism. At beginning of my chapter, I drew a distinction between two different stances towards fables: neglect and attention. Considering these two options, I have pointed out that both critics and proponents usually agree on the anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism of the fable. However, while the critics discard the genre as an object of research because it is regarded as little more than a document of anthropocentrism and naïve or narcissistic anthropomorphism, scholars who take an interest in fables do so precisely because they want to examine anthropocentric relations and reflect on anthropomorphism. What is more, the latter use fables as a method to think through these problems. They deem a "strategic" anthropomorphism necessary to deal with animals and environments in texts.[7] This appreciation of fables may be an incentive to ask for a contemporary fable theory that does more than repeat the common belief that fables speak of animals but mean humans.

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[7] Markus Wild describes this as the "positive function" of anthropomorphism (cf. 27).

In all three examples, the fable is used as a method in order to develop a theory, be it Carson's narration about the change in the relation of humans, animals and environments in the history of the living life in *Silent Spring*, Serres' reflection on the parasitic relation of animal habits and social practices in *The Parasite*, or Derrida's contemplation about the power effects of the fable and of fabulation in *The Beast & the Sovereign*. What the texts have in common is that they all theorize the relations of texts, animals, and environments. Certainly, fables feature animals more prominently than environments, making them more likely to be of interest for animal studies scholars. Yet, as I have shown, they can also play an important role for ecocritics and their concerns about environments.

This leads to the conclusion that fables are both an invaluable source and a useful instrument to interrogate fundamental assumptions and theoretical principles in animal studies and ecocriticism. Without a doubt, literary texts and their strategies are objects and methods of research in both fields. As a prime example of zoo- and ecopoetics, the fable addresses a theoretical core problem shared by both fields. Drawing from the analyses of passages in Carson, Serres and Derrida, three characteristics of this core problem can be highlighted: First, in every text about animals and environments, animals and environments themselves are neither completely present, nor completely absent (like the birds in *Silent Spring* or the wolf in *The Beast & the Sovereign*). Second, every text about animals and/or environments necessarily displays and develops relations of texts, animals and environments at the same time. Finally, these relations are always multidimensional, hierarchical and political. These characteristics also play a role in recent major texts of theory like Donna Haraway's book *Staying with the Trouble*, in which she develops and performs a new way of "speculative fabulation" that takes into account that the anthropos has become "unthinkable" (30). Haraway's proposition to deal with animals and environments in a new way also includes a different approach to ancient fables. Haraway wants to "resignify and twist the stories, but no more than the Greeks themselves constantly did" (54). Although it may seem challenging, future studies of fables have to acknowledge that fables are both objects and methods of research that display and organize texts, animals and environments. Therefore, fables are indispensable for our understanding of animals and environments.

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