

The Systemic Approach, Biosemiotic Theory, and Ecocide in Australia

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**Iris Ralph,**  
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**Abstract:** In her article "The Systemic Approach, Biosemiotic Theory, and Ecocide in Australia" Iris Ralph summarizes an argument in defense of disciplinarity ("openness from closure") that Cary Wolfe makes in *What is Posthumanism?* She also comments on an implicit argument that Wendy Wheeler makes in *The Whole Creature: Complexity, Biosemiotics and the Evolution of Culture*. As Ralph argues, Wheeler's implicit claim is that biosemiotic language, which humans share with other biological beings, connects human animals and nonhuman animals on moral and affective grounds. Ralph summarizes Wolfe's defense of disciplinarity that literary and cultural studies scholars who engage with the "question of the animal" generate claims which complement interrogations of the moral and affective distinctions between human animals and nonhuman animals. Ralph uses Wolfe's and Wheeler's arguments to read Nugi Garimara's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Robyn Davidson's *Tracks*, and Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* in an ecocritical context.

**Iris RALPH**

### **The Systemic Approach, Biosemiotic Theory, and Ecocide in Australia**

Scholars in both the arts and the sciences are confronting one of the most pressing contemporary ethical questions, "the question of the animal" in the face of escalating evidence against clear lines and stable distinctions between humans and other-than-human beings, bodies, agencies, forms of consciousness, identities, languages, subjectivities, and systems. Animal studies and cultural studies scholar Cary Wolfe addresses this question in his 2010 book *What is Posthumanism?* He does so by way of what at first glance appears to be an incongruous, highly incompatible, and deeply conservative line of argument, a defense of disciplinarity—relatively discrete disciplinary knowledge—and a defense in particular of (the disciplines of) literary and cultural studies. Wendy Wheeler addresses implicitly the question of the animal her 2006 book *The Whole Creature: Complexity, Biosemiotics and the Evolution of Culture*. I rely on Wolfe's and Wheeler's claims in my own address of the question of the animal, an ecocritical reading of the 1995 semi-autobiographical and postcolonial narrative *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* by Nugi Garimara (Doris Pilkington), the 1995 travel narrative *Tracks* by Robyn Davidson, and the 1938 Australian foundation narrative (and anti-foundation narrative) *Capricornia* by Xavier Herbert. I read these three writings by relying on terms and concepts unique to or generated in ecocriticism as it is practiced in literary and cultural studies contexts according to Wolfe's claim that disciplinary-specific knowledge can contribute uniquely to the question of the animal. I also read these writings as texts which question modern ecocidal attitudes and practices. Relying on Wheeler's argument that humans as a species are related morally and affectively to members of other species because of their shared biosemiotic languages, I argue that this view as it is made in the arts hardly has been recognized as such because of the overemphasis on humans' "articulate language."

In the chapter entitled "'Animal Studies,' Disciplinarity, and the (Post)Humanities" of *What is Posthumanism?* Wolfe argues that it is "only through disciplinary specificity" or through the discursive protocols of scholars' fields of disciplinary expertise that one can "contribute something specific and irreplaceable" to "the question of the animal" (117). Although this "something specific" is not "something accurate," it is, nonetheless, as Wolfe continues, "something specific" (114). He goes on to elaborate this point in his argument in defense of disciplinarity by referring to the work of Niklas Luhmann in systems theory and to Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction. Systems theory (more broadly known as complexity theory) and deconstruction theory, two of the most important theories to emerge in the last fifty years in literary and cultural studies, both emphasize difference or "radical heterogeneity," a term and concept that first appears in Wolfe's study in an earlier chapter entitled "Meaning and Event" (14). Systems theory holds that any system (for example, an ecosystem, an animal species, an organization, an academic discipline, a city, or a poem) functions as such—as a more or less discrete or autonomous or distinctive functioning entity—because of, not in spite of, its engagements with neighboring or adjacent systems, which constitute its "environment." So long as these engagements do not cause excessive or irredeemable loss of or do not overdetermine the systems adjacent to it, the result is more (not less) systemic complexity, difference, and autonomy. In other words, the system's, or organism's, or body's, or brain's, or object's independence (of operation or function), or capacity for autopoiesis—a term that Wolfe takes from Luhmann and Luhmann takes in turn from the work (in biology) of Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco Varela—is a reflection of the "seemingly paradoxical fact" that the system must be "both open and closed" (Wolfe 111). In order to exist and reproduce itself, the system must maintain its "boundaries and integrity through a process of self-referential closure" (111). Paradoxically, it is only on that basis of closure that the system can "then engage in 'structural coupling' with [its] environment" (Wolfe 111; for recent studies in the systemic approach see e.g., Estok, "Tracking"; Domínguez, Saussy, Villanueva 12-15; Schmidt <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1569>>; Tötösy de Zepetnek; Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári; for a bibliography of the field see Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Bibliography" <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1115>>).

As Wolfe goes on to argue, disciplinary knowledge is strengthened by scholars who work narrowly within the boundaries of their own discipline. Referring to the work of Luhmann in systems theory, he characterizes this work as a commitment to the fundamental principal of existence of "openness from

closure" (117). However, as Wolfe argues, in order to do this kind of interdisciplinary work, scholars must engage with knowledge claims being generated outside of their disciplines. This part of his argument is hardly new to scholars of comparative literature, but it continues to be resisted by literary and cultural studies scholars who perceive claims generated out of disciplines other than their own disciplines as claims that are ancillary to literary and cultural studies—not essential to the study and teaching of literature—or worse, as claims which are irrelevant. Wolfe's argument foregrounds the fact that these scholars may be reducing and making insular, obsolete, and dependent what they could be expanding and making magnanimous, viable, and autonomous. Literary and cultural studies are not necessarily doomed because their scholars are responding to external pressures from adjacent or more distant disciplines such as social systems, ecology, geophysics, climatology, and ethology. These two areas of study are being challenged, not threatened by scholars who are addressing concerns that in the "humanist" lamplight of traditional literary and cultural studies appear unseemly and unfitting to them.

Wolfe uses systems theory to defend disciplinarity by arguing nonetheless for "trans-disciplinarity" (113). In doing so, he targets literary and cultural studies scholars who argue that scientists (ethologists, cognitive scientists, primatologists, zoologists, and so forth) are better equipped to address this question. As Wolfe argues, knowledge about "the animal" is expanded when scholars approach it using very different tools of inquiry. The "in-house" forms of addressing the question of the animal practiced by literary and cultural studies scholars might not be "transparent" (or instantly so) to scholars working outside of these studies. They even might not be readily accessible to scholars working in an adjacent area. They fall under projects which define the sub-disciplines of ecocriticism, ecofeminism, feminist ecocriticism, ecophilosophy, environmental justice studies, postcolonial ecocriticism, and posthumanism. The "fundamental principal" of "openness from closure" that characterizes these and other disciplinary areas of inquiry is by no means worth defending merely in order to fabricate and sustain these areas. The principal is worth defending in the sense that when scholars abide by it (engaging in current urgent environmental and animal rights issues and debates within the normative bounds of or according to the protocols of their own profession, or within their own vocational area of expertise), they generate potentially unique and irreproducible claims about normative distinctions between human animals and nonhuman animals.

Wheeler's *The Whole Creature: Complexity, Biosemiotics and the Evolution of Culture* is a study that points to new discoveries in the area of biosemiotics, to "the study of signs and significance in all living things" (19). Wheeler's argument is that "our understanding of human behavior and reasoning is incomplete when we fail to take account of the role of the body, emotion and tacit knowledge" (33). She thus challenges the view that human language is primarily constituted by the dispassionate, amoral, affect-less armature of "words and discourses," so-called articulate language (17). She argues that human language has a much larger biosemiotic base and that this generous substratum of human language is common to all biological beings. Wheeler blames the reification of articulate language on both neoliberalism and "'the linguistic turn' in cultural studies in the late 1970s and 1980s and, to some extent, beyond that into the 1990s" (16). Neoliberalism, she argues, has overemphasized "individualism" and underestimated the fundamental "sociality" of humans and, by implication, all other living beings (13). By "sociality," Wheeler means biological evolutionary processes of "symplogetic co-operative communication" that begin in the basic unit of life of the cell and are shared by all living creatures (13). The linguistic turn in literary and cultural studies, Wheeler argues, has had an equally damaging effect on "our understanding" of what it means to be human. It privileges the emotionally threadbare "words and discourses" of human language and it underestimates the much larger or more extensive biosemiotic building blocks of human language (17). Wheeler repeats here that the biosemiotic basis of human language is one that humans, as a biological species, share with other biological species. Significantly, she also argues here, and at length in the remaining chapters of her study, that morality and affect are materially, biologically located, or generated in this biosemiotic stratum of language (17). Wheeler does not dismiss the "power" of articulate language, but she argues that articulate language comprises only one system, and not a very large one at that, of an extraordinarily complex system of communications and exchanges that enable humans to read the external environment. She calls these communications and exchanges "semiotic communication" (17). Here again, in

stating that the basis of human "sociality" is biosemiotic communication, Wheeler implies that sociality extends across biological species lines (17).

Wheeler situates her arguments in the context of the question of the human. Nonetheless, she points to the question of the animal when she argues that the reification of (human) "articulate language"—"abstract conceptual knowledge articulated in written or spoken language"—has had the effect of "obscur[ing] and occlud[ing]" interest in and attention to forms of language that are more extensive than, and as sophisticated as, articulate language (17). These forms of language are "unconscious," "gestural," and semiotic communication, and they are common to all biological beings (17). Wheeler also points to the question of the animal when she emphasizes the need to give more consideration to the biological, biosemiotic, "materialist, but non-positivist and non-reductionist" bases of affect (empathy, sympathy, forgiveness, selflessness, protectiveness, self-identification with "the other," and so forth) (15). Towards this emphasis she devotes a chapter to recent discoveries in the areas of epidemiology and psychoneuroimmunology. Similar to the work of other scientists, scientists in these two areas are establishing the main, biological grounds for humans' ability to ethically and affectively "read," relate to, and cooperate with members of their own species. As Wheeler repeats, biosemiotic, communication is the basis of affect and its corollary, morality. By extension, her argument is that this substratum of language (biosemiotic communication), one that is shared across biological species lines, morally and affectively connects humans as biological beings with other biological beings including animals.

Also, although Wheeler is mostly interested in scientific explanations of sociality, morality, and affect, she recognizes the contribution of the arts to those findings. Here again, Wheeler gestures toward the argument that morality and affect cross biological species lines. In the chapter in which she discusses the contribution of the arts, she begins by commenting on the normative view that reason and emotion, the mind and the body, "are best kept apart" (80). This view, she argues, "is a result of a long history of philosophical thinking in which rationality—reasonable thinking and behavior—was seen as a way of escaping from brutal conflict" (80). She avers this view insofar as it has enabled humans to reject "primitive superstitions, beliefs, and the unassailable right of powerful groups or individuals to impose their will on others by force" (80). She attacks it for the reason that it has led to the dismissal "of the intimate relation between mind and body, reason and passion," or the disregard for "affective life" (80-81). She then argues that the affirmation of ethical and affective behavior can be best understood only if scholars engage in studying a wide range of "forms of human knowing." These forms of knowing include not only scientific forms of knowing but also forms of knowing generated out of "art" and "morality," the two "great spheres" of human activity in addition to "science" (81). Here, in recognizing the contribution of "art" and "morality," Wheeler singles out two areas, literary and cultural studies, and, within these two areas, ecocriticism. She states that it is ecocriticism that brings "literary and cultural studies together with the biological sciences" (106) and she goes on to imply that ecocriticism is the most fruitful area within literary and cultural studies for addressing distinctions between human animals and nonhuman animals.

Wheeler's brief nod to ecocriticism appears in a chapter in her book where she emphasizes the importance of non-scientific literature in speculating about "the human." As in other chapters in her study, Wheeler points to the work of scholars (situated in both the arts and the sciences) who are interested in the question of the animal. A reading of three works of Australian literature reveals much about this question. On the basis of Wheeler's claims in which affect and morality are not exclusive human traits, it is clear that the three texts and countless texts like them should receive far more attention than they are receiving as writings that question normative, dismissive, and exploitative attitudes toward nonhuman animals. *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *Tracks* bring up these questions in the context of the efforts to eradicate rabbits and the uses of camels as service animals. *Capricornia* brings up this difficulty in the context of the ecocide of thousands of native Australian animal and plant species by Anglo-European settlers and colonizers. They represent the many literary or imaginative arguments for respecting very real social, affective, and moral ties between humans and other animals (see also, e.g., Malamud <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1072>>; Prater <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2054>>).

Garimara's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* is well known as a postcolonial narrative of Garimara's mother Molly Craig and two other "half-caste" Aboriginal Australian girls, Daisy and Gracie, who are

discriminated against by Anglo-European Australians on the basis of their gender and race. It also is a story about Anglo-European Australian anthropocentric attitudes towards and treatment of the common species of European rabbit (*oryctolagus cuniculus*). As the narrative reflects, those attitudes were particularly Anglo-European, not shared by most Aboriginal Australians. In 1931, Molly Craig (then fourteen years old) escaped with Daisy and Gracie from the Moore River Native Settlement, an institution for half-caste Aboriginal children located near the state capital of Perth in the southern part of the state of Western Australia (as Kim Scott writes about this same institution in another critically recognized writing, *Benang*, the institution is now called Mogumber). The three girls walked away from the compound shortly after arriving there. They had been abducted from their home in Jigalong under the authority of the Department of Native Affairs. They were taken from Jigalong by car, then rail, and then ship to the Moore River Native Settlement. When they escaped from it, they walked 1600 kilometers back home to their country in the northwest of Western Australia. Their journey took seven weeks, through country that was very different from their own country in the Pilbara desert region of Western Australia, and already vastly altered by white pastoralists (Garimara xii).

Anglo-European pastoralists began arriving in what is now the state of Western Australia in the early decades of the nineteenth century. In 1826, the first English military post was established at King George Sound, now called Albany, the southernmost point of Western Australia (Garimara 5). In 1829, the first civilian settlement, the Swan River Colony, was established in the country of the Nyungar people, in what is now called Freemantle, south of Perth. Vast acreages of the new "arcadian" country of West Australia were claimed by the Anglo-European settlers for farming of sheep, cattle, and wheat (Garimara 11-18). Today, the wheat belt in the southwest corner of Australia extends 160,000 square kilometers (an area larger than the size of many European countries) (see Hughes-d'Aeth 18). The land that was cleared to make way for the wheat industry was a tremendously biodiverse region: "its geographical isolation by ocean and desert, coupled with a temperate yet oscillating climate" allowed for a speciation that was "rivaled only in the canopies of tropical rainforests" (Hughes-d'Aeth 18). In 1973, a survey of a small area of the old country, a "remnant bushland" area of fifty square meters in the northern wheatbelt town of Eneabba, counted 13,000 individual plants" (Hughes-d'Aeth 19). The Nyungar people (also known as the Noongar, comprising seventeen tribal groups whose country is in the southwest region of Western Australia) shared this country with these plant species and countless other animal species for over forty thousand years.

In addition to the cattle and sheep that English immigrants brought to Australia for farming, they introduced other animal species. These included a common animal species of rabbit, introduced in 1859 by the grazier Thomas Austin. He imported twenty-four rabbits to his property in the southeastern state of Victoria and released them there as a "harmless" addition to the activity of hunting animals for sport (see Government <[http://archive.agric.wa.gov.au/PC\\_93076.html](http://archive.agric.wa.gov.au/PC_93076.html)>). As in the British Isles, where rabbits were imported in the year 1176, "presumably to improve the protein diet of the peasantry," rabbits in Australia adapted so successfully that "their status became that of pest" (White 19). The title of Garimara's novel is a reference to the first of three major rabbit-proof fences constructed in an effort to stop the invasion of rabbits from eastern Australia into pastoralist properties in the west of Australia. This was the fence that enabled Garimara's mother Molly Craig to find her way home. It covered a distance of 1,834 kilometers, running from south to north, from near the port of Esperance (on the Southern Ocean) to the Eighty Mile Beach above Port Hedland (Garimara 32). Construction of it began in 1907 in Jigalong, the depot founded for the purpose of the construction of the fence. Molly's white father, Thomas Craig, was one of the government inspectors at Jigalong (Garimara 32). Molly's mother Maude, the daughter of a Budidjara man, was one of the first people born at the site of the depot (Garimara 109). In the nineteenth century, Molly's and Maude's peoples, the Mardu and the Budidjara, had steadily moved to Jigalong from their country in the north because of the increasing frequency of attacks on them by white settlers. For Molly and Maude, the rabbit-proof fence does not affect them one way or the other as a structure that might deter the spread of rabbits. To them, it is beacon of "love, home and, security" (Garimara 109). Nonetheless, they recognized it as a "typical response" by the white people to "a problem of their own making" and a "futile attempt" by Anglo-Europeans to marginalize an unwanted fellow creature (Garimara 109).

The building of the rabbit-proof fences was a relatively benign ecocidal practice. A later method, the infection of rabbits with the viral disease myxomatosis, was not. Australian farmers first used



myxomatosis against rabbits in the 1950s. In the species of European rabbit introduced into Australia one hundred years earlier, *oryctolagus cuniculus*, it causes painful swelling and discharge from the eyes, nose, and anogenital regions and a slow agonizing death. This virus was also widely used against rabbits in England. The use of it significantly decreased after 1972, the date of publication of the novel *Watership Down* by Richard Adams. Christopher Hitchens wrote about the enormous influence that Adams' "lapine masterpiece" had in bringing public attention in the United Kingdom to the "horrible laboratory-confected disease" of myxomatosis (360). *Watership Down* was remarkable not only because it evoked better than any book before it the world of "hedgerows and chalk-downs and streams and spinneys" of an earlier, extraordinarily popular bestiary text, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, but also because it succeeded in doing what no scientific paper had been able to achieve: it mobilized the public to protest the "gassing and massacre" of and "organized cruelty" against rabbits (Hitchens 360-61).

*Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* records what much of Western Australia looked like before White pastoralists transformed it into a vast area of cattle, wheat, and sheep stations. The area of Perth was dense with banksia, kangaroo paws, "thickly clumped paperbark," "prickly bark," acacia, and grevillea (Garimara 82-83). Further north the country was populated with grass trees, zamia palms, and "scattered marri, wandoo and mallee gums" (Garimara 89). Further north, the country was populated with "tall, thick mulgas, gidgies and the beautiful bright green kurrajong trees that stood out against the grey-green colours of the other vegetation" (Garimara 106). Garimara implicitly comments on the acts of ecocide against native species of flora as well as the acts of genocide against Aboriginal Australians, including Garimara's own Mardudjara (or Mardu) people. She also makes implicit comparisons between attempts by the Department of Native Affairs to "weed" out so-called pure or full-blood Aboriginal Australians and efforts by the Australian wheat and livestock industry to halt the spread of rabbits. The figure in the novel of "the rabbit-proof fence" brings together these two histories, one of genocide, one of ecocide.

Less than thirty years ago, comparisons between the genocide of human animals and the ecocide of nonhuman animals—comparisons performed by ecocritics—were distasteful and even abhorrent to literary and cultural studies scholars, including feminists and postcolonialists. A particularly pertinent example is the connection that the animal rights activist Marjorie Spiegel made between "the treatment of Africans as slaves and the treatment of animals" in her 1988 *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (see Huggan and Tiffin 136). As Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin emphasize in reference to Spiegel's study, "any direct or metaphorical connection between the treatment of [African people and nonhuman animals]" was, and still is, "a politically dangerous one to argue, whatever the obvious analogies" (136). A more recent example is the comparison that J.M. Coetzee makes between the treatment of Jewish people and the treatment of animals in a 1999 essay entitled "The Lives of Animals." In the 1999 collection of critical essays (edited by Amy Gutman) that takes its name after and includes Coetzee's essay, the other contributors to the collection—Amy Gutman, Marjorie Garber, Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger, and Barbara Smuts— theorize about the connection Coetzee makes between "the murdered Jews of Europe and slaughtered cattle" (Garber 81; Coetzee's essay also appears in his 2003 novel *Elizabeth Costello*). Huggan and Tiffin also point out that under older, classic feminist and postcolonial studies, the word "animal" typically carries negative value. Scholars questioned chauvinist and colonialist beliefs under which women and people of color were treated as beings less than animals; however, they did not challenge the closely related belief of speciesism. Under this prejudicial belief, which still has not been successfully challenged, it is acceptable to treat most nonhuman animals in ways that it is completely unacceptable to treat human animals.

As Huggan and Tiffin go on to argue in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, prior to the 1980s and even as late as the 1990s, most postcolonialist and feminist scholars were not interested in the horrific treatment of animals. They were more interested in the horrific treatment of people—namely, women and people of color (see Huggan and Tiffin 136). When comparisons between racism and speciesism and between chauvinism and speciesism began—e.g., Marjorie Spiegel's book *The Dreaded Comparison* and Greta Gaard's edited collection *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* are cases in point—there was considerable resistance to those comparisons. However, as many ecocritics persuasively argue—for example, Huggan and Tiffin in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, Simon C. Estok in *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia*, Joni Adamson in *American Indian Literature*,

*Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place*, Cary Wolfe in *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species and Posthumanism*, and Gaard (as well as Estok and Serpil Oppermann) in *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*—anthropocentric forms of prejudice are inseparable from the forms of prejudice that are constructed upon differences of race, ethnicity, and gender.

Huggan's and Tiffin's postcolonial ecocriticism term for the question of the animal is "zoocriticism" and it refers to this question as it appears in literary or imaginative writings which identify "not just with animal representation but also with animal rights" (Huggan and Tiffin 18). *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* is representative of this body of literature, one that has not been given its due in this respect. Another such writing, Robyn Davidson's *Tracks*, also represents this body of literature. In 1977 Davidson travelled across the interior of Australia with her beloved dog Diggity and several adopted camels—including Zeleika, the matriarch, between four and five years old (Davidson 123), Zeleika's newborn son Goliath, Dookie, four years old, "nominally the king ... but ... the first to hide behind [Zeleika's] skirts" when there is trouble, and Bub, three years old, "in love with Dookie" and a natural clown (Davidson 84). Davidson's travel narrative is an incisive and witty critique of the federal government of Australia under the leadership of the then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (1975-1983). Equally significantly, it addresses the question of the animal in the context of camels, an animal species that was introduced to Australia as a beast of burden. Davidson's ecofeminist commentary on chauvinist and racist stereotypes of women and Aboriginal Australians parallels her observations of people's reductive speciesist assumptions about an animal that was introduced to Australia as a service animal but later abandoned. It also speaks powerfully for the very real affective and moral relations and communications that are possible and do exist between humans and other animals.

When Davidson arrives at 5:00 a.m. in Alice Springs, a town in the center of Australia "with a dog, six dollars and a suitcase full of inappropriate clothes" (19), she experiences almost immediately gender discrimination. She also registers the racism of the majority of the White townspeople towards Aboriginal Australians. Reflecting on her vulnerable identity as a woman, she compares herself to the animals of rabbits who look desperately for a "safe place to stay" away from the humans who are excitedly killing them. "Rabbits, too," she writes, "have their survival mechanisms" (23). Later, not far from Uluru and the sister Olga rocks, she meets a Pitjantara man, her future guide and mentor. She imagines that she appears to him as a kind of rabbit because when she introduces herself by her first name "Robyn," he tells her that it is close to the word for "rabbit" in the language of the Pitjantara (162). Davidson's self-identification with rabbits, a "vermin" and feral Australian animal species, carries with it a zoocritical critique of her own race of people, the Anglo-Europeans who overran the Australian continent and engaged in genocide and ecocide of the people and animals who had been in Australian long before.

Camels, similar to rabbits, were an introduced species which became eventually feral and today are regarded as a vermin animal species. They were brought to Australia in the 1850s, in the same decade rabbits were introduced to the continent, along with their Afghani and North Indian owners (Davidson 20). They were introduced for the purpose of opening up inaccessible areas, for transporting food, and for use as labor in the period of the construction of the telegraphs and railways (Davidson 20). When the animals were no longer needed, they were abandoned. In 1977, the year Davidson flew by plane from Queensland to Alice Springs with the purpose of trekking with camels from Alice Springs to the coast of Western Australia, the wild camel population was approximately ten thousand and their only "natural enemy" was the human (Davidson 20). Davidson's moving tribute to the individual camels whom she trained for two years and then relied on as laborers and carriers in order to trek more than two thousand kilometers across the central deserts of Australia raises difficult questions about human reliance on animals as service animals. It also belongs to a growing body of literature that holds that the mutual affinities between human animals and other animals should not be ignored or dismissed and humans as a species should not continue to refuse many nonhuman animals the moral considerations humans extend to their own species. In the area of biosemiotics, scientists are making this argument on the basis of biological evidence for the moral and affective ties between humans and other living creatures. Writers such as Davidson also are making this argument, an argument that is based on people's "tacit" and "experiential" knowledge, as well as on conceptual or articulate knowledge (see Wheeler 47). Tacit knowledge, as Wheeler defines it, is "creaturely skillful



phenomenological knowledge" and it is possessed by all living creatures if articulated as written and spoken discourse only by humans) (47).

Davidson argues implicitly that the affinities between human animals and other animals are too many to ignore in her autobiographical account of her relations, communications, and affinities with a small family of adopted companion animals and service animals. Her many descriptions of the animals evidence that bonds between human animals and nonhuman animals are as affectively and ethically significant as bonds between humans. This is not to argue that any given species of animals, including the human species, prefers the company of another animal species to its own. Rather, it is to say that the connections between different animal species are underestimated and betrayed by erroneous assumptions about language, affect, morality, and difference. One of the many nights in the desert Davidson spends chasing after "Zelly," Dookie, and Bub when they renege and bolt for freedom, expresses this implicitly. When at last Davidson finds all of the camels and brings them back into the camp, she is torn between wanting to continue to berate them or hug them with joy. The camels also exhibit affection for Davidson despite an equally conflicting desire to be free of Davidson's company and her ropes, tackles, saddles, and bags: "They hung around me like flies, shuffling their feet, looking embarrassedly at the ground, or coyly through their ... lashes, acting apologetic and loving and remorseful" (91-92). Earlier in *Tracks*, Davidson writes that "They are the most intelligent creatures I know except for dogs" (29). Davidson might be faulted for this statement in the sense that she measures camel (and canine) intelligence against human intelligence (noting that camels have the intelligence of an eight-year old human). Nonetheless, this statement and *Tracks* as a whole is a moving record of the affective and moral relations between just one human being and a small troupe of other animal beings.

*Capricornia* is another text that confronts implicitly the question of the animal. Set in a "thinly disguised version of the post-Federation region of what is now the Northern Territory" (Huggan 93), Herbert's novel traces the fortunes and misfortunes of Norman Shillingsworth, a man who has a White father and a Black mother. The themes of half-caste identity and racism are shadowed by a second theme, ecocide. Herbert describes the meeting of two identities, one older and dominated by other-than-human life, one younger and dominated by human life in the period between 1788 and the first decades of the twentieth century. The novel, more than five hundred pages long, opens with these lines: "Although that northern part of the Continent of Australia which is called Capricornia was pioneered long after the southern parts, its unofficial early history was even more bloody than that of the others ... [one of three reasons for this] is that the pioneers had difficulty in establishing permanent settlements, having several times to abandon ground they had won with slaughter and go slaughtering again to secure more. This abandoning of ground was due not to the hostility of the natives, hostile enough though they were, but to the violence of the climate, which was not to be withstood even by men so well equipped with lethal weapons and belief in the decency of their purpose as Anglo-Saxon builders of Empire" (1). The language of irony and satire that appears here and throughout the remaining pages can be compared with a mode of thinking that animal rights philosopher Cora Diamond calls "deflection," a term that Diamond takes from the work of the philosopher and US-American literature scholar Stanley Cavell (Diamond 57). Diamond defines "deflection" as the means by which "we [distance] ... ourselves from our sense of our own bodily life and our capacity to respond to and to imagine the bodily life of others" (53). Deflection "describes what happens when we are moved from appreciation, of a difficulty of reality to a philosophical or moral problem apparently in the vicinity" (Diamond 57). In *Capricornia*, Herbert uses self-consciously the language of deflection of irony and satire to critique the horrific, unjust genocidal and ecocidal projects of Anglo-European settler and colonizer peoples. Further, according to Wheeler's definition of human speech (written and spoken), even if Herbert were to chose a different prose—a harder, plainer, more sober language—he would not more fully capture or express those projects. Any language he would use would be "articulate language" only, or only "words and discourses" (Wheeler 17). That language cannot completely represent morality and affect, which belong to the more extensive language of biological or biosemiotic language. At the same time, *Capricornia* points to and acknowledges this larger base of language and it does so in the very particular sense of how this language allows and explains the moral and affective forms of recognition and communication across species.

*Capricornia* represents literary and cultural arguments which underline Wheeler's scientific explanations for and implicit defenses of the kinds of "tacit" knowledge, "experiential knowledge," and "passionate knowing" (Wheeler 49) that connect human beings and other living beings. As a text written by a human, it is only a form of "articulate language" and follows the "linguistic" path (Wheeler 13) of human enterprise; nonetheless, it written by a human being who, as a biological being, acutely recognizes the sophisticated languages, subjectivities, sensitivities, communicative capacities, affects, and moralities of beings other than human beings. These myriad, grossly underestimated kinds of communications, relations, and ethical and affective behaviors, which connect human beings to other kinds of beings, are spoken for in *Capricornia*. One example of this critical recognition of nonhuman beings is as follows: "A kangaroo leapt off the road and thud-thud-thudded into silence. A family of kangaroos, same number as the [O'Cannon family] and about the same size, bounded ahead through a cutting. A buffalo dozing in Chinaman's Creek woke with a start and bolted. A shower of white cockatoos fell out of a bloodwood tree, yelling, 'A man—a man—a Disturbing Element!' A large admiral lizard leapt up on a rail, stood on hind legs with fore legs raised like hands and watched for a moment the trundling Thing, then loped down the cess-path with arms swinging and iridescent frill flying out like a cape" (202). Another example appears in these lines: "On a flooded plain through which the road ran high on an embankment a group of long-legged brolgas stood. They stared at Tim, who, as he always did, took off his hat and bowed and cried to them, 'Goo' mornin' ladies—lovely day!' And they, as if in courteous reply, extended pearl-gray wings and curtsied, stared after that strange creature that neither walked nor crawled nor flew but glided so fantastically with creaking limbs" (202). Herbert cannot escape the pathetic fallacy of anthropomorphizing his world. However, speaking for the other living beings and attempting vaingloriously to translate them is not the same as establishing that these other living beings have no languages of their own. Also, as Wheeler's arguments about biosemiotic language imply, nonhuman biological beings can recognize and communicate with human beings because their languages have a common ground.

In conclusion, scholars in the sciences, as well as in the arts were not willing to confront the question of the animal in the past. Wolfe argues that literary and cultural studies scholars cannot continue today to dismiss or exclude it from their disciplines. Wheeler draws on the work of scholars situated in the biological and social sciences in order to address the question of the human. Her main argument is that scholars have placed too much emphasis on (human) articulate language. Wheeler's implicit argument is that scholars who give undue significance to articulate language underestimate other forms of language that are shared across biological species lines. As Wheeler also implicitly argues, these forms of language—biosemiotic based communication—enable humans to relate morally and affectively to other biological beings, namely nonhuman animals. Garimara's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Davidson's *Tracks*, and Herbert's *Capricornia* are three literary texts which represent the vast body of literature waiting to be addressed for what it says about human kinship with other animals.

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