

Intimate Encounters: Primate Literature as a Narrative of Relationship

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The general objective of this project is to produce a monograph concerned with analyzing the ways in which humans approach the human/animal divide in the twenty-first century. In order to do so, attention will be paid to human exchanges with a boundary species—nonhuman primates, such as chimpanzees, orangutans, gorillas, and bonobos—and to the ways in which such interactions are portrayed in recent Anglophone literature as a narrative of relationship where the human is deeply affected by the nonhuman. This presents us with a transformation in human-animal interactions where, often, the human experiences a process of animalization while the animal is humanized, thus showing the reader the contingent nature of the species boundary.

Given its interdisciplinary nature, the project uses what Lorraine Code defines as “scavenger methodology.” It mixes literature, philosophy, and science, blending them by using concepts derived from feminist and material ecocriticism, feminist epistemologies, and references to the work of primatologists in what it is intended to be a reflection on the topic of relationality as represented in novels that narrate intimate encounters between human and nonhuman primates. This type of analysis features in previous publications of mine, but I intend to expand it so as to illustrate this issue in works published in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. These works are: *God’s Grace* (Bernard Malamud, 2005), *Primal Tears* (Kelpie Wilson, 2005), *Brazzaville Beach* (William Boyd, 2009), *Ape House* (Sara Gruen, 2010), *Lucy* (Laurence Gonzales, 2010), *The Evolution of Bruno Littlemore* (Benjamin Hale, 2011), and *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (Karen Joy Fowler, 2013).