

# The Animal In-Habitant Made an Out-Sider: Representation of Animals in Medieval Mystery Plays

Dünya Sakini Hayvanın Dünyadan Dışlanması:  
Orta Çağ Mister Oyunlarında Hayvanların Temsili

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## Abstract

According to the Western metaphysical philosophy, human species is supposed to be superior to the nonhuman animals with respect to the former's physical space, bodily form, possessing mind, being able to reason, having a distinctive and complicated language as well as being susceptible to pain and death. Such kind of an approach encourages humans to deny animals some basic intrinsic rights, such as living. However, as far as the recent research and philosophical/ethical discussions point out, human superciliousness is out of question. This study will dwell upon certain research made in the field of animal studies that refute the assumptions of Western metaphysical thought. It will refer, among others, particularly to the research conducted by Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Jacques Derrida, Michael Allen Fox & Lesley McLean, Peter Singer and Cary Wolfe. Then, within this context, it will denote the anthropocentric representations of animals in the mystery plays, which were created and performed in medieval Britain out of the stories in the Old Testament. But at the same time, it will draw attention to a number of rational, talking, living, respected animal portraits in these plays and assert that medieval English mystery plays, though produced under the influence of the Old Testament in which God announces human beings' ascendance, call forth a harmonious life with our animal companions.

**Keywords:** Western Metaphysical Philosophy, Animal Studies, Mystery Plays, Medieval Britain, Old Testament

## Öz

Batı metafizik felsefesine göre, insan türünün hayvanlardan, ikamet ettiği alan, vücut yapısı, bir zihne sahip olması, düşünebilmesi, kendine özgü komplike bir dilinin olması, acı çekip ölebilmesi bakımlarından üstün olduğu kabul edilmiştir. Böyle bir yaklaşım, insanların hayvanları temel, doğuştan getirdikleri, yaşamak gibi belli haklardan yoksun bırakmalarına yol açmıştır. Fakat, güncel araştırmalara ve felsefi/etik tartışmalara bakıldığında, bir insan üstünlüğünden bahsetmek söz konusu değildir. Bu çalışma, hayvan çalışmaları alanında yapılan ve Batı'nın metafizik düşüncesini çürüten belli araştırmalar üzerinde duracaktır. Söz konusu hayvan araştırmalarından özellikle Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Jacques Derrida, Michael Allen Fox & Lesley McLean, Peter Singer ve Cary Wolfe tarafından yapılan çalışmalara göndermede bulunacaktır. Bu çerçevede, orta çağ Britanyası'nda, Eski Ahit'teki hikayelerden esinlenerek yaratılan ve sahnelenen

Çankaya University *CUJHSS* (ISSN 1309-6761), December 2022, 16/2:181-196

<https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/cankujhss>. DOI: 10.47777/cankujhss.1091075

Submitted: March 21, 2022; Accepted: October 14, 2022. © 2022 authors (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

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mister oyunlarındaki antroposantrik hayvan betimlemelerini inceleyecektir. Fakat aynı zamanda, bu oyunlardaki akleden, konuşan, yaşayan ve saygı duyulan hayvan portrelerine dikkat çekerek, içerisinde Tanrı'nın insana hakimiyet bahsettiği Eski Ahit etkisinde üretilmiş olsa da orta çağ İngiliz mister oyunlarının hayvan dostlarımızla barışçıl bir hayat çağrısında bulunduğunu gösterecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Batı Metafizik Felsefesi, Hayvan Çalışmaları, Mister Oyunları, Orta Çağ Britanyası, Eski Ahit

## Introduction

Animal Studies have recently become the focus of interest in the academic world, where there are many supporters of animal rights along with a number of opponents. The most notable arguments in this field of study revolve around whether animals are to be given rights, what kind of criteria should be taken into account while giving them rights, and whether they can ever reason about gaining these rights. This study discusses the different statements made about the intrinsic rights of the animals specifically by Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Jacques Derrida, Michael Allen Fox & Lesley McLean, Peter Singer and Cary Wolfe. Within the theoretical frame provided by their debates, the present study targets to redefine the nonhuman subject in some certain medieval English mystery plays<sup>1</sup>. Medieval mystery plays were performed to teach Christianity to the common people in the Middle Ages and they were composed of the stories in the Old Testament. This study focuses on how animals are represented in these plays without discussing the doctrinal statements they make. For this aim, it closely analyses *The Creation, Adam and Eve; Balaam, Balak and the Prophets; Abraham and Isaac; and Noah*. While critically handling the animal representations in these particular plays, it principally argues that animals should not be expected to meet certain criteria in order to be treated as respectfully as their human companions.

Although it is not the primary concern of this study to discuss the place of animals in Christian ecclesiastical tradition, it is a requirement to mention the ground on which animal representations are based upon in medieval mystery plays. It is in *The Book of Genesis* that God is acclaimed to have declared human superior to animals and to the environment. He says that "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (*Genesis* 1:26). Since human was created in the image of God, it was assumed by Western metaphysical thought that only human beings, not the other species, could possess "both earthly dominion and an immortal soul as unique entitlements from God" and that "there is a radical

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<sup>1</sup> All mystery plays referred to in this study are cited from *English Mystery Plays: A Selection*, edited by Peter Happé.

difference in kind between humans and the other animals” (Shannon 138). However, when those divine lines are approached by putting aside the anthropocentric assumptions, they are observed to be implying a call to respect animals and their rights. An instant of such an approach is provided by Ryan Patrick McLaughlin, who suggests “an animal-friendly hermeneutic” to reread the *Genesis* (144). The fact that God bestows “dominion” upon humans in *Genesis* 1:26 over animals does not suggest any slaughter of animals and it has all to do with the translation of the word “radah” (151). As disclosed by McLaughlin, that word can be translated not as a “dominion” but as “a human rule that God intends to establish – a nonviolent Earth community” (149), which is an implication of “a peaceful respect for the lives of other animals” (151). Relying upon this interpretation, it can be stated that it is not the flesh of animals but a harmonious earthly life together with animals that God proposes in *Genesis*.

Yet still, the way humans interpreted the statement of God as well as their own presumption that they were superior creatures in terms of space, appearance, reason, and language helped humans to deny animals basic rights as well as to justify humans’ exploitation of animals. Hence, in medieval mystery plays, which were mainly inspired by the Old Testament, it is highly possible to observe anthropocentric representations of nonhuman animals. However, these plays also, in an allusive manner, call forth respect to and harmonious relationship with our nonhuman companions, which problematises the anthropocentric reading not only of mystery plays but also of the Old Testament. In order to make this argument much clearer, the nonhuman characters, thinking Serpens, talking Asina, sacrificed lamb/ram, and the sacrificed animals for meat will be analysed respectively in the mystery plays *The Creation, Adam and Eve; Balaam, Balak and the Prophets; Abraham and Isaac; and Noah*. The doubtful and presumed distinction of humans from the animals will be laid bare as represented in these plays with respect to the space they occupy, the material of their bodies, their capabilities to reason, to think, to talk and to die. By referring to the ground-breaking research in the animal studies as well as to the implications in those mystery plays, this study will raise to assert that animals have certain intrinsic rights to live and to be respected irrespective of any human precedence.

### **Space and Body of Humans and Nonhumans**

Humans together with nonhumans share the same “dynamic and everchanging topology” (Barad 177); in other words, the same “physical space” (Fox and McLean 147). This very topological space is believed to be free of “absolute exteriority or absolute interiority” (Barad 176), which allows the same intrinsic rights to be taken up by all species. That is why, Karen Barad, who asks human beings in her agential realist account to be responsible towards the rights of the animals, does not accept humans’ assumption of the role of “agency” (172). In the huge “topology” humans and animals inhabit, they “intra-act iteratively” with each other (177), but they do not have such a mutual communication tool as language

and they are represented through their own distinctive appearances and abilities. It is due to the fact that while these intra-actions are taking place, surely, there will be cuts through which boundaries and properties will be determined between nonhumans and humans. However, we will be still intra-acting in the mutual topology outside of which we cannot find any anthropocentric place for ourselves. As Stacy Alaimo indicates, the worlds of humans and nonhuman animals “continuously and effortlessly extend into” each other (256). Even if these two beings are defined as “different organisms,” there appears a kind of “synergy” between them because, for Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “[t]heir landscapes interweave, their actions and their passions fit together exactly” (qtd. in Westling 165). Accordingly, it can be stated that humans experience physically and biologically being in the world along with all the other species, not on their own.

Therefore, it is no wonder that “[a]nimals share the sixth day of creation with humans” as implied in *Genesis* 1:24-31 and “animals, as well as the Earth itself, are included in the Noahic covenant” as given in *Genesis* 9:8-11 (McLaughlin 145). Similarly, the heavenly world represented in the mystery play *The Creation, Adam and Eve* houses humans and animals equally. The spaces in “Paradise” are determined not according to the kinds of the species but depending on the characteristics of evil and goodness. Demon is banished from God’s presence and dreams about the day when “into Paradise will [he] gone/As fast as ever [he] may” (70.207-208). The evil Demon, as is laid down in the play as well as in the creation myth, cannot inhabit the same space together with the other creatures. However, it is in “Paradise,” where Adam, Eve, and Serpens – humans and an animal – go around together. This is what McLaughlin also observes while interpreting the *Genesis* 2:18-19, according to which “animals are not created as resources for Adam, but rather companions with Adam” (145). Even after Adam and Eve commit sin by approaching the forbidden tree, it is not only Serpens, who is punished but also the human species. In this mystery play, beyond the boundaries of this physical world, a kind of mutual “topology” (Barad 177) is illustrated, where humans and animals “intra-act” (177) and two seemingly different worlds “extend” into each other (Alaimo 256). As far as this physical world is concerned where we are situated at present, it is highly problematic for humans to attribute a different moral space to animals and to keep them completely outside the moral sphere of the humanity.

Apart from their environment, human and animal species are “comprised of the same material” (Alaimo 257). The mis/correlation between the material out of which man is created and the superiority he assumes is an unavailing argument. It can be likened to Demon’s statements in Christian theology about his being a superior creature only because of his material. In the play, *The Creation, Adam and Eve*, to illustrate, Demon asserts that he is different from the newly created human species since the latter is “made of claye” (69.177), as a result of which he rejects the bliss and the authority bestowed upon this new creature. In fact, it is not the

material that entitles man to a superior state; if it were so, Demon would have a better status. Although man assumes, just like Demon, that he has a distinctive material in creation which makes him the authoritative figure in the world, humans and animals are made of the same substance, regardless of which animals do possess the same bliss and privileges as humans.

### **Capability to Reason is Only a Human Attribute?**

European metaphysical thought has long striven to differentiate the space and the body of the human from those of animals as a means to justify humans' having deprived animals of basic rights. The principal ground for the human supremacy over nonhuman animals is rooted in European renaissance, which idealised the Western man as "the measure of all things" and as the "Man of Reason" (Lloyd qtd. in Braidotti 18). The kind of man centralised is the man who is best described "visually by Leonardo in the famous sketch of the Vertruvian body as the perfectly proportioned healthy, male and white model" (Braidotti 18). This model, as Rosi Braidotti underlines, excludes nonhuman animals along with a number of other human and nonhuman others in sexual, racial and natural terms (19). Since animals do not fit in that perfect image, they are not to be evaluated in terms of rational men's moral spectrum. As is postulated by the Western man, animals tend to experience a lack of reasoning capacity and they are in "mental retardation," which denies them being conscious of their own actions (Coetzee 62). Nevertheless, possessing reason and perception, even if they are considered to be human attributes, cannot be accepted as justification of human condescension in any matter. Barad clearly asserts that "man isn't merely the measure of all things" (143). She proposes an alternative approach to the division between the rational man and the so-called retarded, imperfect counterpart of the Vertruvian model. She asserts that "'able-bodiedness' is not a natural state of being but a specific form of embodiment that is co-constituted through the boundary-making practices that distinguish 'able-bodied' from 'disabled'" (158). Therefore, both forms are the parts of the same phenomenon but their division is defined only by an agential cut and through practice, so the less advantaged side cannot be considered to be the other in any way.

In order to deconstruct the anthropocentric approach to the concepts of reasoning and being consciousness as well as the ability to think and to perceive, it is also required to deal with them from the perspective of cognitive science and phenomenology. In accordance with the enactive approach to cognitive science, it is not acceptable to ground how we comprehend the world purely on certain processes that take place in human brain. In order to make sense of the world, we need to act since "we *enact* our perceptual experience; we act it out" (Noë 1). According to Alva Noë, we possess "certain kinds of bodily skills," with the help of which we develop an understanding of how to perceive the world by moving certain parts of our body and by employing certain sensory abilities (2). Only the ones can perceive who have the grasp of their sensory and motor capabilities,

which is an integral part of their competence to know the world. Hence, it can be claimed that knowing or perceiving is not an intellectual concept since knowing includes, in addition to mind, bodily movements and experiences. Merleau-Ponty, the forerunning philosopher in phenomenology, is one of the figures who paved, to a certain extent, the way for the enactive approach to cognition. For Merleau-Ponty, thinking cannot be reduced to the activities of human mind and “rather than a mind *and* a body, man is a mind *with* a body” (56). It is again Merleau-Ponty who reversed the Cartesian saying, “I think therefore I am” as “I can therefore I am” (qtd. in Bleeker, lecture). As is clear from Noë’s and Merleau-Ponty’s arguments, body takes part actively in the process of perceiving the world before us, which makes perception embodied and enactive. In other words, it can be said that body and mind operate in an intra-active manner and extend into each other with no separate space reserved for each. While animals, for instance, are building their houses, arranging their environment in accordance with the requirements of their bodies and in conformity with the other beings in that territory, it is hard to determine “where behavior begins and where mind ends” (Merleau-Ponty qtd. in Westling 170). Hence, as far as animals are concerned, it can be argued that they are conscious of their activities and they are able to reason, a fact which is deduced not from their possession of a brain but from their acting capabilities. As Louise Westling clearly indicates, “mind or consciousness has evolved or emerged from tacit beginnings over millions of years, into more and more reflexive abilities in animals” (170). It is animals’ as well as humans’ ability to act bodily and in harmony with their environment that proves their competence to reason.

Even if possession of a brain is taken as the basic requirement for beings to have their rights, how it is applicable to life in ethical terms is still ambivalent. In relation to this discussion, Peter Singer indicates that “the claim to equality does not depend on intelligence, moral capacity, physical strength, or similar matters of fact,” because it is an undeniable fact that “[e]quality is a moral idea, not an assertion of fact” (*Animal Liberation* 4). Despite these ethical concerns, even if certain facts are considered essential for moral rights or moral equality, there will be animals that will overtake humans in reasoning or in similar kinds of competences. As a matter of fact, Serpens in *The Creation, Adam and Eve* appears to be surpassing the human characters, Adam and Eve, by its wit. It knows very well how to tempt a lady into committing sin:

Woman, I say, leeve not this!  
 For yt shall not lose yow blisse,  
 Ne no ioy that is his,  
 But be as wise as he.  
 God is coynt and wyse og wytt,  
 And wottes well, when yow eate hit,  
 Then your eyes shalbe unknit;  
 Like goddes yow shall be

And knowe both good and evill also.  
 Therefore he counselled yow therfro,  
 Yow may well wyt he was your foe,  
 Therefore dose after me. (71.221-32)

Serpens promises Eva the crown in Paradice stating that she would be the “goddess” after eating the forbidden fruit. Moreover, as far as he claims, that fruit would provide wisdom for Eva by untying her blindfold. Obviously, Serpens’s wisdom outshines that of the human species who is assumed to have superior capacity to reason. Hence, within the context of this play, it can be stated that human beings’ assumption of superiority is hard to be grounded on the “fact[s]” (Singer, *Animal Liberation* 4) related to their intelligence in order to justify their casting animals aside.

### **Only Humans Have a Complicated Form of Language?**

Serpens and its wit can be understood only when it can speak, when the wit is represented by means of human language. Humans, while separating human consciousness and human space, seem to be concerned, among others, with using a complex system of language peculiar to humans. This assumption is what Singer calls “speciesism” (*Animal Liberation* 6) and what Cary Wolfe critically grounds on the “representationalist” idea adopted in Western metaphysical philosophy, which is also known as Cartesian philosophy (131). According to the philosophers of Western metaphysics, understanding, knowing, pretending and thinking are to be differentiated from being conscious of these actions. As far as they are concerned, animals may do the former but not the latter owing to their lacking human language. In other words, animals can “react,” which is thought to be an intrinsic competence, but cannot “respond,” which is peculiar to humans and which can be actualised only using linguistic tools (133). Wolfe criticises the fact that language is the basic measurement in metaphysical Western philosophy, according to which thinking ability is evaluated, and that “talking’ is central to a representationalist notion of ‘thinking’” (132). In addition to the Western metaphysics, behaviourism has a similar anthropocentric approach to the use of language by the species to have conversation with the outside world. The behaviourist thinkers believe that “similar behaviour of animals with similar nervous systems is to be explained in the same way” (Singer, *Animal Liberation* 12). To put it bluntly, they presume that if animals had the same consciousness and mental abilities as humans, the former would speak just like the latter. As surmised by these anthropocentric approaches, so long as animals are not able to express themselves in the same way as human beings or to respond to their environment using human language, they are not to be treated like humans or given equal rights. Moreover, depending on the inference that animals cannot reason or speak about their affliction, humans can kill animals, make them suffer, and deny them crucial rights.

However, language is not an outcome only of a mental process taking place in human mind. Nonhuman animals, too, have their own systems of communication which human beings are unable to perceive. Humans, who are “restricted to the resources of [their] own mind” (Nagel 169) and their own experience cannot fully comprehend what kind of an experience is to be an animal for an animal. Thomas Nagel, who explores “what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat,” firmly asserts that “there are facts which could not ever be represented or comprehended by human beings, even if the species lasted for ever - simply because our structure does not permit us to operate with concepts of the requisite type” (171). The fact that the linguistic experiences of animals are not conceivable through the linguistic representation of the humans does not necessarily mean that animals have no language. Moreover, as Louise Westling draws attention, relying on Merleau-Ponty’s account of embodiment, “language is embodied, an organic and physical part of the natural world” (174) and it both encompasses and transcends the semantic world of the humans. Accordingly, it is essential to redefine what language is in a broader way that incorporates the “complex communication systems of animals whose linguistic activities we are only beginning to understand” rather than reducing it only to a speech system owned by humans (175). Furthermore, even if human language, along with its complex syntactical forms, is considered to be a signifier of intellect, there are many studies that show the animals’ ability in using human language. One of these studies, the “ape-human participatory action research (PAR)” was conducted at the Great Ape Trust, Iowa (Bradshaw 15). The apes in the study employed human language meaningfully to get into contact with the humans by “exchanging ideas, thoughts, feelings, and wishes” (17), which, for G. A. Bradshaw, “dispels the myth that language and science are the unique property and privilege of *Homo sapiens*” (15). The research underlines the fact that animals join the human species in meaning making process while in conversation with the cultural and physical environment, contrary to Cartesian assumptions.

The mystery play, *Balaam, Balak and the Prophets*, illustrates the anthropocentric approach to the ability of using human language as a signification of reason and superiority. While a story is narrated in the play about how Balaam is appointed by God in order to lead the king Balak to the right path, Balaam’s ass, Asina, starts to talk unexpectedly. It is only when Asina expresses its pains, thanks to a miracle by God, and when an angel appears in order to help it that Balaam gets wise to the pains he causes on Asina’s body. Even though Balaam is on a journey as a servant to God’s commands, he needs warning in human language against his mistreatment of animals. Since he is a human being, he is ignorant of animals’ being vulnerable to pain as much as humans. Asina, first, confronts him by referring to its previous services: “Maister, thou dost evell witterly,/So good an ass as met o nye” (196.211). Then, it questions its master’s behaviours: “Now hast thou beaten me thry,/That beare the thus aboute.” (196.211-12) Lastly, it defends its rights by saying that



To smyte me now yt is shame.  
 Thou wottest well, master, pardy,  
 Thou haddest never ass like to me,  
 Ne never yet thus served I thee;  
 Now I am not to blame. (196-97.220-24)

Angelus also warns Balaam about the rights of the ass in a threatening way:

Why has thou beaten thy ass thry?  
 Now am I comen thee ton ye,  
 That changes thy purpose falcelye,  
 And woldest be my foe.  
 And the ass had not downe gone,  
 I wold have slayne the here anone. (197.229-34)

Only told in human language, human species can take notice of the animals and their rights. In this context, are humans to be staved off inflicting pain on animals always through a kind of divine intervention? Do animals have to speak human language to prove their intelligence and to make their rights recognised? Are all human beings able to express how much they feel pain? One of the academicians defending the rights of animals in John Maxwell Coetzee's stories on animals is Elizabeth Costello. Elizabeth's example about an Indian mathematician shows that a human being can also fail to express his intelligence through the expected medium. Srinivasa Ramanujan is regarded to be "the greatest *intuitive* mathematician of our time" (my emphasis) but when he was taken to Cambridge, he failed to adapt not only to the climate or food but also to the academic requirement of "mathematical proof or demonstration" (Coetzee 24). Can we say that he is not intelligent or not a good mathematician only because his knowledge is only "intuitive"? Is it justifiable to consider him lower in terms of reasoning capacity since he could not show his knowledge in terms of certain academic criteria? Does anybody have the right to expel him from the circle of intelligent mathematicians or to get rid of him completely by killing him? Here, in fact, Srinivasa Ramanujan appears as one of "the negative opposites of the dominant human norm" (Braidotti 18). Since "[t]he 'Man' of classical humanism was positioned at the pinnacle of an evolutionary scale," the ones who are "'other than' or 'different from' [that] 'Man', is actually perceived as 'worth less than' 'Man'" (18-19). In this respect, Ramanujan is an instance of the "racialized other" of Man while Asina is a "naturalized other" of the same dominating Man (19). Hence, in the story, the case of Ramanujan is not different from that of the ass, Asina, in *Balaam, Balak and the Prophets* in that the intelligence of both is measured by some methods foreign to their nature. However, Asina remains in life as it is successful in human language with the help of a divine intervention but Ramanujan dies because of his failure in adapting to alien conditions, so do most animals which cannot show their perception of death through a human medium, language.

### **Animals Have No Idea of Suffering?**

In addition to lacking language to express suffering, it is claimed that animals cannot reason about suffering or death; thus, there is no point in stopping to inflict pain on animals or to slaughter them. However, Coetzee's Elizabeth rejects the requirement of "intellectual horror," that is, reasoning about horror (65). She believes that animals' very "being is in the living flesh" and that the capability to have pain or to suffer cannot be grounded upon possession of mental faculties (65). Michael Allen Fox and Lesley McLean also argue that humans cannot achieve a moral space including both humans and nonhumans if they remain at the level of "intellectual grasp" rather than "affective perception" (159). According to their claims, to understand the intrinsic rights of animals as beings is through understanding their condition in terms of "affective perception" (159). This specific perception comes to mean not observing things from a distance but apprehending them "in a 'highly lucid and richly responsive way'" (159). In Fox and McLean's article, to illustrate, a girl faces the reality of an animal death and feels the bitterness of its suffering only after she has emotively perceived it before her eyes. The kind of perception adopted by this girl is also an attempt to view the nonhuman animals and their suffering from their points of view just as Nagel does to understand what it means to be a bat from the perspective of a bat. For Nagel, the basic question is "what would be left of what it was like to be a bat if one removed the viewpoint of the bat?" (173). Human beings need to be aware of the "subjective" (170) character of the experiences of all human and nonhuman others in order to develop a respectful understanding towards them. Man's limited perception of his others does not give him the right to exploit them.

In the mystery play, *Abraham and Isaac*, both the character Isaac and the audience are able to understand the death of an animal as they do that of a human being only after the lamb/ram is brought as a sacrifice in place of a human, Isaac. While in the Brome version of the play, the animal to be sacrificed is "[a] fayer ram" (165.323), it is "[a] lambe that is both good and gaie" in the Chester cycle (149.434). First, in dramatic terms, the tension that rises to the highest level with Isaac's voluntarily yielding to death is released with the coming of the ram/lamb but, at the same time, the suffering of a dying animal is experienced in an empathetic way. Second, in religious terms, the aim of using "lamb" not "ram" in the Chester cycle is to give a message related to the Christian doctrine: Christ, who is represented by lamb, sacrificed himself for the sake of humanity. Hence, it can be asserted that "Isaac is not a sacrificial victim but a type fulfilled by the sacrificial Christ" (Frantzen 445). In this respect, lamb gains a kind of symbolic function and divine attribution; so, the Christian audience is sorrowful as much for the lamb in the play as they are for Christ. Though in metaphorical terms, humans and animals are given a certain kind of space and opportunity in the play to express their suffering equally and it is through the suffering of a human,

human species are able to develop “affective perception” (Fox and McLean 159) towards that of the animals.

The question of animals’ death and suffering is what Jacques Derrida also concentrates on in his work *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. While discussing the question of “Can they suffer?” Derrida puts much emphasis on the actuality of death and states that animals do suffer no matter how much or to what extent they experience it (28). Singer, likewise, indicates that any attempt to measure the degree of animals’ suffering is not helpful due to two kinds of likelihood. On one hand, the same amount of violence may cause more pain on a human baby than a thick skinned horse; but, on the other hand, “[s]ometimes animals may suffer more because of their [so-called] more-limited understanding” (*Animal Liberation* 16). Derrida, however, avoids from such kind of levelling and his initial concern is beyond whether animals are able to suffer since he believes that “being able to suffer is no longer a power; it is a possibility without power, a possibility of the impossible” (28). He sheds light on the fact that we share with animals living as well as dying, in other words, “the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life,” “the experience of compassion,” “the possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower” as well as the “anguish of this vulnerability, and the vulnerability of this anguish” (28). Animals can die like humans and what causes human compassion with animals is animals’ inability, just like humans, to avoid the reality of death.

Not only the ram/lamb does pass away as a sacrifice to God in *Abraham and Isaac* but some other animals are also killed to please God and to sustain human life in *Noah*. Both instances have to do with religious rituals. Noah in the Chester version of the play, in order to thank God for ending the Flood, promises to sacrifice some of the animals saved:

Noe: . . .  
 Ah, Lord, honoured most thou be,  
 All earthed ryes now I see,  
 But yet tyll thou comaunde me,  
 Hence will I not hye.  
 All this water is awaye  
 Therefore as sone as I maye  
 Sacrifice I shall doe in faye  
 To thee devoutlye. (129.285-292)

Although the fact that they die is a piece of irreversible reality, some people “who are opposed to cruelty to animals” believe that at least these animals die in a respectful manner and they are put upon a pedestal as sacrifices to God (Singer, “Becoming a Vegetarian” 172). On one hand, thanks to the ritualistic implications, these animals are treated respectfully and they do not become the victims of the capitalist world that aspires merely for economic gain by slaughtering animals. On the other hand, as Carol J. Adams proposes, those rituals do not rely on a religious

background but originate from a cultural heritage that underlines the slaughter of animals as a representation of “patricide” (241). Adams, who is concerned with the sexual politics and who considers meat consumption a kind of patriarchal act, suggests that

What is consumed is the father. The men are said to resolve their hostility toward their father through the killing of animals. The dead animal represents the father whose power has been usurped by the sons, yet, who, as ancestor forgives them. In this typology, the worst fears of a patriarchy—fathers being deposed by sons—are displaced through ritual and the killing of animals. Meat becomes a metaphor for the resolution of the tension between father and son for power; meat is viewed as male. The questions arises: do we ritually enact primal patricide whenever we sit down to a meal of meat. (241)

Evidently, eating meat is not only a matter related to animals but also a feminist issue for Adams. Through the lenses of this approach, the sacrifices of the animals in *Abraham and Isaac* and *Noah* appear to be the instances of a patriarchal relation between God and his representatives, humans.

In order to challenge the indoctrination of this cultural tendency, Singer’s suggestion can be put forward, which is “[b]ecoming a [v]egeterian” or at least seeking for the ways of “how to produce less suffering and more food at a reduced cost to the environment” (“Becoming a Vegetarian” 172). The proposal that promotes becoming a vegetarian can be opposed with the claim that animal flesh is indispensable in human beings’ dietary. However, according to some recent archaeological findings, there is so much testimony that points out human beings’ “early plant-based dietary” (Adams 194). That is why the vegetarians uphold the idea “that we are the meat eaters who never evolved a body equipped to digest meat” (194). It is not only archaeology who says that humans are originally plant eaters but also the Old Testament, according to some interpretations. McLaughlin claims that vegetarianism can be promoted as the “*ideal* or divinely” dietary for humans (152), by referring to God’s words in *Genesis* 1:29, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food” (qtd. in 148). This fact is also referred to in the Chester version of *Noah* in Deus’s address to Noah after the Flood: “you have eaten before / Grasse and rootes, sith you were bore” (131.333-34). As is clear, God created the plants for the purpose of food for humans and for animals; thus, it can be argued that He did not offer, in the first place, animal flesh for human consumption. Both the Chester *Noah* and McLaughlin’s article point out the fact that it is with the Flood that humanity is allowed to make use of animal flesh as food. Deus in *Noah* tells Noe that although you have been nourished by plants so far, now “Of cleane beastes now, less and more,/I geve you leave to eate/Safe bloode abd flesh bothe in feare (131.335-37). For McLaughlin,

nevertheless, this permission to eat animal meat is accompanied by “fear and dread” (150). God tells Noah and his sons in *Genesis* 9:1-3:

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. (qtd. in 150)

On one hand, apparently, it is God who licensed the humans to subjugate the earth and to make use of it as their warehouse, which is one of the building blocks that paved the way for the anthropocentric approach in Western philosophy. On the other hand, this kind of domination by humans is characterised as “fear[ful] and dread[ful]” (150). McLaughlin, in his effort to explicate those lines above, regards God’s words here only “as a concession of God to a violent world, not as a benevolent design for the wellbeing of the human creature” (151). That is why Noe in Towneley version of *Noah* mourns for the death of the animals rather than exalt the consumption of his nonhuman companions’ meat:

Behald on this greyn! Nowder cart ne plough  
Is left, as I weyn, nowder ter then bogh,  
No other thing,  
Bot all is away;  
Many castles, I say,  
Grete twnes of array  
Flitt has this flowing. (117.534-40)

Noe, in this scene, grieves over the animals that died during the Flood as much as he is sorry for his children. The sacrifice in Chester version contradicts with the sorrow in the Towneley version, which supports the idea that the permission to eat animal flesh may have been accompanied by “fear and dread” (*Genesis* 9:1-3 qtd. in McLaughlin 150). Since humans, before the Flood, could not eat the flesh of their animal companions, it became a painful and dreadful activity for them to eat their friends’ meat after the Flood.

## Conclusion

As is clear in the arguments by Alaimo, Barad, Fox and McLean, and Merleau-Ponty, human and nonhuman beings live in a common topological space, their worlds are not disconnected from each other, and they continuously intra-act with one another. This fact is illustrated in this study through the Paradise which is shared by humans together with their nonhuman companions in *The Creation, Adam and Eve*. Moreover, as asserted by Alaimo, human and nonhuman animals are made of the same material, a fact which debars humans from the claims of first-rateness in terms of creation. Yet still, human being, specifically the European white man, excludes the other beings who do not have the reason and

perfection illustrated by the Vertruvian model. Braidotti and Barad oppose the idea that being a rational European man is the first and foremost criteria of being worthy. In addition, the recent studies in cognitive science and phenomenology propose that rational capacity cannot be reduced to human brain since reasoning also includes the acts of body. Moreover, the requirement to possess a human brain is unacceptable in ethical terms as suggested by Singer. Even if human brain was assumed to be the rigid criterion to have superior rights, nonhuman animals could get ahead of humans as exemplified by the witty Serpens in *The Creation*.

It is not only the human brain but also the human language that represents his rational capacity and “natural” superiority. This notion is repelled by the critics like Singer and Wolfe and by many other recent studies conducted in this field. Nonhuman animals have their own linguistic systems and, also, they are observed to be able to use human language if they are educated. The supposition that they cannot reason or talk about their suffering does not mean that they can be killed or harmed. In this context, we can give ear to an ass, Asina in *Balaam, Balak and the Prophets*. Its voice is coming from the Middle Ages and it talks, with the support of divine forces, in the name of all the animals at all times. As for in today’s world, the sufferings of the animals can be perceived through affection as proposed by Fox and McLean or through adopting their points of view as suggested by Nagel. It is also through his own self, man can develop an understanding about the fact that animals do suffer and die just as humans do, as Derrida and Singer put forward. For instance, the audience attending *Abraham and Isaac* experience the suffering of a dying animal in an empathetic and affective manner only through the suffering of a human being, Isaac. Moreover, if a kind of religious reading is employed, using a lamb instead of a ram in the Chester version of the play exalts the animal as it represents Jesus. The notion of the sacrificed and, in a way, exalted animal is present not only in *Abraham and Isaac* but also in *Noah*. While the Chester Noe sacrifices the animals to please God and as a source of food for humans, the Towneley Noe mourns for the animals that died during the flood. Depending upon the evidence in the Towneley version of the play as well as upon McLaughlin’s interpretations of the related parts in *Genesis*, it can be stated that neither the medieval mystery plays nor the Old Testament approve of or recommend slaughtering animals.

Animals have a physical world to lead their lives with us, animals can reason, animals can talk in their own way, animals can suffer, animals can reason about their reasoning, animals can die... In fact, animals do not have to own these abilities in order to get their intrinsic rights, rights whose possession is not to be determined according to humans’ consent or will. Even if religion and religious teachings are blamed to have caused people to deny animals certain rights, even if Deus in mystery plays bestows upon humans the right to govern animals; those plays have a number of representations of rational, talking, living, respected animals and animals mournfully commemorated when killed or lost. The proposal

of vegetarianism and the requirement of respect to animals has not started with the modern academic discipline of animal studies but it goes back to the medieval mystery plays and even to the *Genesis*. Hence, animal representations on medieval stage will inspire the modern readers to realise that humans share a common world with animals and that it is of vital importance to accede to animals' maintaining their lives without suffering, which is the very intrinsic right they own since the birth.

### **Acknowledgement**

An earlier version of this study was presented by the author with the title of "Exploring animals' right to live in relation to their rationality and their capability to use human language as represented on medieval stage of mystery plays," at the conference entitled "Four-Footed Actors: Live Animals on the Stage," Universitat de València, Valencia, Spain, 12 - 14 Dec. 2012.

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