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Animal Figures in the Works of Pajtim Statovci

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Anotacija

Šis darbas analizuoja Pajtimo Statovci romanus „Mano katė Jugoslavija" (suomiškai *Kissani Jugoslavia*, 2014), „Tiranos širdis" (*Tiranan sydän*, 2016) ir „Bola" (*Bolla*, 2019) iš literatūrinių gyvūnų studijų (*Literary Animal Studies*) perspektyvos. Pasitelkiant Frederikės Middelhoff'o, Sebastiano Schönbeck'o, Rolando Borgardso ir Catrinos Gersdorf išskirtais gyvūnų ir literatūrinės aplinkos nagrinėjimo tipais Zoopoetikos (*Zoopoetics*) plotmėje, analizė siekia atskleisti gyvūnų funkcijas ir įvaizdžius bei kaip jie dalyvauja teksto kūrimo procese. Ši perspektyva teigia, kad gyvūnai nėra tik simboliai ar metaforos, kaip būtų įprasta mąstyti tradicinėse literatūrologinėse analizėse. Jie taip pat yra teksto „kūrėjai" autoriui rašant tekstą. Siekis „išsilaisvinti" iš tradicinių interpretacijų – vienas iš šio darbo tikslų, norint praplėsti Statovci'o kūrybos recepciją.

Raktiniai žodžiai: Pajtimas Statovci, Literatūrinių gyvūnų studijos, Zoopoetika, Suomijos literatūra.

Annotation

This thesis analyzes Pajtim Statovci's novels *My Cat Yugoslavia* (in Finnish, *Kissani Jugoslavia*, 2014), *Crossing* (*Tiranan Sydän*, 2016), and *Bolla* (2019) from a Literary Animal Studies point of view. Using Frederike Middelhoff's, Sebastian Schönbeck's, Roland Borgards', and Catrin Gersdorf's categorized approach of Zoopoetics, the analysis aims to investigate the function, behavior, and appearances of animals, and how they are taking part in the creation of a literary text. As this approach states, animals are not symbols or metaphors, as would be in the case of a traditional literary analysis, but rather "makers" of the text in the author's creative process. It explores these non-humans' character features and their relationship with the literary environment. Going "beyond" the traditional interpretation is one of the aims of this analysis in order to widen the reception of the author's work and to gain more insights on it.

Keywords: Pajtim Statovci, Literary Animal Studies, Zoopoetics, Finnish Literature.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background & Research Problem

Pajtim Statovci is one of the most recent authors to have gained significant attention in the Finnish literary field over the past decade. His novels are acclaimed in his home country: in 2019, he won his first *Finlandia* literature prize for his book *Bolla* (published the same year), making him the youngest award winner. In 2024, he was awarded the prize a second time for his novel *A Cow Gives Birth at Night* (in Finnish, *Lehmä synnyttää yöllä*, 2024). At the same time, Statovci's works have been noticed in the international market, with more than 20 translation rights sold to other publishers (according to his website[1]). His literary career started with the novel *My Cat Yugoslavia* (*Kissani Yugoslavia*, 2014), which critics in Finland instantly acclaimed – it won the "Helsingin Sanomat" (the leading daily newspaper) literature prize the same year. The English translation, published in 2017, gained mixed but hopeful reviews about the author (see Michael Schaub's review at NPR). Other novels, such as *Crossing* (*Tiranan sydän*, 2016), and earlier mentioned *Bolla* (2019), also gained positive overall reviews in their home country and the international market.

While Statovci's work is getting more recognition throughout the literary field, the demand for academic research about the author's books is increasing. While looking into what researches have previously explored, the Finnish- and English-speaking academia offers satisfactory knowledge. Although Statovci's different themes were explored both by individual researchers (Riitta Jytilä or Hanna-Leena Nissilä) and in collaboration (Belfjore Qose & Christian Voß; Van Amelsvoort & Dal Bosco), in other writings, one can at most find either a mention of the author (Inkeri Hakamies, Kaarna Tuomenvirta) or explore a specific question in a limited frame analysis (Ewelina Bator, Ellen Nieminen). Moreover, most of them do not go further from a biographical comparison and mention the author's migrant background, since he fled with his parents from Kosovo to Finland when he was a baby. Even the author himself has noticed that he is being labeled "migrant author", and in one interview has stated that,

> When people call me an immigrant or when my books are classified as immigrant literature, I feel like I'm closed out of my community and society. It's as if I were examining Finland through the eyes of a stranger, which is not true. (Statovci, 2018).

[1] Available at: https://pajtimstatovci.wordpress.com/

In order to go further from the presented notions, I will introduce an aspect that researchers have slightly overlooked in Statovci's oeuvre – recurring animals and their figures. There is little research done on them, or if it has been, the explorations tend to stay on an anthropomorphic level. Having noticed that the author himself has explored the themes of animality in his academic work (his master's thesis "Animal Representations in Ernest Hemingway's and Franz Kafka's Short Stories", in Finnish *Eläinrepresentaatioista Ernest Hemingwayn ja Franz Kafkan lyhyissä kertomuksissa*, 2017), one can notice the similar recurring themes in the author's work.

This thesis however does not examine Statovci's academic achievements. Touching upon the question of the animal seems necessary and beneficial to develop new insights into the author's work and look deeply into the concepts neglected earlier by other researchers. It is one of the essential motives and literary means he explores and uses throughout his books. Hence, I will answer the following questions:

1) In what ways do the animals appear, act, and behave in Pajtim Statovci's texts?

2) What is the animals' meaning and interpretative function in *My Cat Yugoslavia*, *Crossing*, and *Bolla*?

1.2. Aim & Purpose

This thesis investigates the literary animal figures and their functions in the works of Pajtim Statovci, particularly in his three books: *My Cat Yugoslavia*, *Crossing*, and *Bolla*. I will take upon the theoretical framework of Literary Animal Studies, which is briefly explained by Roland Borgards (2012), Karen L. Edwards (along with Derek Ryan and Jane Spencer, 2020[2]), Erika Fudge (2004), Susan McHugh (2009), and Mario Ortiz-Robles (2016). As for the method of analyzing the texts, I will use the approach of Zoopoetics, presented by Jacques Derrida (1997/2008), Aaron M. Moe (2013), and the offered "tools" by Frederike Middelhoff (along with Sebastian Schönbeck, Roland Borgards, and Catrin Gersdorf, 2019[3]). In order to better understand how one can analyze literary animals from such a perspective, I will also take upon examples from Merle Marianne Feddersen, who analyzed Leslie Allan

[2] Henceforth – Edwards et al., 2020.
[3] Henceforth – Middelhoff et al., 2019.

Murray's (a.k.a. Les Murray) poetry, and Claire Cazajous-Augé's study of zoopoetics in Rick Bass' short story "Antlers".

This investigation aims to further the research on Statovci's works by changing the perspective of how one observes his novels. For instance, more research has been done on the themes of war, migration, identity, and sexuality than on the earlier mentioned literary motif. But now, applying the theory of Literary Animal Studies and tools of Zoopoetics, one can demonstrate that interesting conclusions can arise while emphasizing non-human species in order to uncover unnoticed layers of meaning in his texts. In this case, Literary Animal Studies were chosen not only because of the lack of research on literary means in Statovci's texts, but also to gain attention on figures usually regarded as anthropomorphic – animals.

2. Material

The material that I will use to conduct my analysis revolves around three books published from 2014 to 2019: *My Cat Yugoslavia* (in Finnish, *Kissani Jugoslavia*, 2014), *Crossing* (*Tiranan sydän*, 2016), and *Bolla* (2019). For my research, I will use the English versions of these books, which were all translated by David Hackston.

My Cat Yugoslavia is a multi-narrative novel that follows the life of a mother named Emine in the 1980s Yugoslavia, and her first child, Bekim, who lives in Finland in the 2000s. Both of the characters are telling their stories from a first-person perspective. Emine is forcefully married to a man she hardly knows, named Bajram. She seeks to accept her new role as a wife and wants to live a happy married life. At the same time, however, the Yugoslavian state is on the verge of collapsing, war and fights are breaking out, and thus, she has to flee with her husband and children to another country. Bekim, the first child of Emine, lives between two cultures and sees himself as an outcast in the present-day Finland. He hardly socializes, criticizes the welfare state and its political and educational stances, and lives his life without control or interest.

The main animal representations in this novel are the cat and the snake. Bekim meets the charming and manipulative cat at a gay bar. Later, he starts an intense and sporadic relationship with it, and after breaking up, he returns to his former country of Kosovo. The snake is bought from a pet shop in an effort to make him a free animal. Later in the novel, the snake tries to suffocate Bekim but is unsuccessful since the creature is killed.

Crossing (literal novel's translation from Finnish would be *The Heart of Tirana.*[4]It tells the story of a young man named Bujar and his life in different parts of the world: Albania, Italy, Spain, Germany, the United States, and Finland. After experiencing his father's death during the fall of the communist regime in Albania in the 1990s (for context, see Bideleux and Jeffries, 2007, pp. 16–19, 72), he decides to leave his hometown, Tirana, with his best friend, Agim. One of them, however, tragically dies while crossing the Italian border.

The story is depicted from a first-person perspective with an unreliable narrator. Bujar changes his gender from a man to a woman, as well as his nationality (from Albanian or Turkish to Spanish) and biographical facts about himself. Furthermore, the story is depicted in a fragmentary order: it starts with Bujar pondering death, and after reaching the middle of the book, the reader understands that his best friend, Agim, died while they were leaving Albania. From there, Bujar starts a new life, constantly changing his identity, name, gender, nationality, and place where he lives. Thus, the topic of identity is the key point of the novel.

The animals that are depicted in *Crossing* are an eagle and a horse. Most of them function in the stories and fairytales Bujar's father has told, which the boy remembers while travelling around the world. Ultimately, these motives affirm his Albanian roots (Qosi and Voß, 2021, pp. 68–69). Moreover, other animals function in the story, such as a lion, cats, giraffes, etc. They only however function as comparisons or metaphors, not expanded in the novel. Thus, I will not go into detail about them.

Bolla is a story about a young man named Arsim. He is a 22-year-old Albanian student at Pristina University, recently married, expecting a child, and wanting to become a writer. One day, while crossing the street near a café, he meets Miloš—a Serbian medicine student—and falls in love with him. After their encounter, they start seeing each other more and more until they tragically break up just before the outbreak of the Yugoslav Wars.

The novel is divided into three parts, each commencing with a short story about God's quest to remove the snake from his Paradise and the deal made by him and the Devil.

[4] Translator David Hackston has stated that he changed the name because there would be associations with another book that the author would not have intended – Joseph Conrad's novel "Heart of Darkness". For more information, see Hackston's explanation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cJVAG7ObQo [accessed May 10, 2025]

The main storyline has two first-person perspectives: Miloš's diary entries, starting from January 2000, and Arsim's side of the story, beginning in 1995.

The animal figure is a snake-like creature bolla. It is a mythical animal, appearing intensely in Albanian mythology. Here, the creature's figure appears rarely in the storyline but rather in the book's structure—obviously, as the name in the title and as a lexeme, explained in a dictionary entry. Furthermore, the story about the creature appears in Arsim's efforts to seek literary success (ibid., p. 70–71).

3. Previous Research

Despite Statovci's growing literary success both internationally and at home, his work has been viewed in a framework of migrant literature, which the notion tends to repeat in scholars' work. Jesse van Amelsvoort and Enrico Dal Bosco analyze his first two novels, *My Cat Yugoslavia* and *Crossing*, to extend the migratory identity and explore the geographical opposition between Europe and the Balkans. They state that characters seek a better life elsewhere than in their home country due to the ongoing war, accustomed family traditions, and the created idea of a safe and liberal Europe (Van Amelsvoort & Dal Bosco, 2024, p. 465–466). To briefly add to this contribution, similar problems are analyzed and dealt with in Statovci's third novel, *Bolla*, and it is one of the key motives of literary spacing in his work.

Geographical notions tend to persist in Hanna-Leena Nissilä's essay "Transnational Signs: Pajtim Statovci's *My Cat Yugoslavia*" (*Ylirajaiset merkit: Pajtim Statovcin Kissani Jugoslavia*). Transnationalism – the concept, taken from the works of anthropologist Steven Vertovec – explains the notions of a mobile and always moving reality, which was always the case in terms of people, culture, and literature. Nissilä points out that this theme has gained attention over the past decades in literature, since it "depicts the globalizing, changing world" (Nissilä, 2017, pp. 275–277). She contributes to Statovci's research, stating that the novel can be categorized as "transnational"; hence, it seeks to explore cultural, gender-related, linguistic, ethnic, and religious boundaries that enrich the storyline.

Trauma is also one of the subjects present in Statovci's work. In the book "Traumatic Memory in Contemporary Fiction" (*Traumaattinen muisti nykyproosassa*), Riitta Jytilä notices that subjects, such as gendered violence and sexual violence, appear as one of

the main spheres of traumatic experiences in contemporary literature. Statovci's example is no exception – *My Cat Yugoslavia* and *Crossing* similarly deal with the shame of gender or sexual orientation expression that coincide with experiences of otherness, and the presence of death (Jytilä, 2022, p. 17).

Queerness is another crucial aspect of Statovci's novels. Belfjore Qose and Christian Voß shortly summarize this subject and the writer's works overall:

> All the novels have queer heroes who stumble through the world - carrying with them the ethnocentric discourse of a proud, small nation [...] which quickly wears away at the racist reality and the extreme forms of social deprivation and stigmatization in Western Europe and turns into the opposite, namely mimicry and denial of one's own Albanian-ness…" (Qose and Voß, 2021, p. 64).[5]

The article however tends to juxtapose the author's biographical facts with his written oeuvre. Researchers discuss what level one novel is "autobiographically authentic" compared to the other. Although the same novels are chosen here to explore in this thesis, there will be no discussion of Statovci's background.

Other researchers, such as Ewelina Bator, use the perspective of deconstruction to analyze different national traditions in Statovci's first novel, *My Cat Yugoslavia*. She takes an anthropological approach to analyzing representations of Albanian society, discussing honour, the role of women, and the importance of family values (Bator, 2021, p. 78; 85; 89). Ellen Nieminen makes a small comparative analysis of Statovci's and Négar Djavadi's novels that deal with sexual orientation, identity, and gender fluidity.

As we can see, many scholars have reflected on different aspects of Statovci's literary works, both in terms of individual novels and as a whole unity. Most of them however tend to view his work in the context of migration, and in some cases, they even label him a "migrant author."

This thesis will go in the opposite direction from the migration and literary geography questions. It will provide a narrower insight into Statovci's novels, *My Cat Yugoslavia*, *Crossing*, and *Bolla*, from a perspective of Literary Animal Studies. These non-human figures have not been analyzed thoroughly before; if they were, it usually tended to be

[5] Translated from German by the thesis' author. Original quote: "Alle Romane haben queere Helden, die durch die Welt stolpern – im Gepäck den ethnozentrischen Diskurs einer stolzen, kleinen Nation [...] der sich an der rassistischen Realität und den Extremformen sozialer Deprivation und Stigmatisierung in Westeuropa rasch abnutzt und ins Gegenteil umschlägt, nämlich in Mimikry und Leugnung des eigenen Albanertums..."

read anthropomorphically. Thus, deep diving into this question will be an effort to go beyond the traditional readings of animals, explore their world, and seek to understand how they are constructed in terms of literary elements.

4. Theoretical Framework and Method

4.1. Literary Animal Studies

In this chapter, I will outline the theoretical framework for approaching my chosen subjects. Of course, there are many ways to analyze literature. Still, taking the research questions into account, the analysis in this thesis will be based on the writings of Claire Cazajous-Augé, Roland Borgards, Jacques Derrida, Merle Marianne Feddersen, Erika Fudge, Karen L. Edwards et al., Susan McHugh, and Mario Ortiz-Robles. I will also mention other researchers who will construct the context of the theory's basis, but I will not solely base my whole analysis on them.

Animals have appeared in literature throughout the ages with many different functions: for example, in Aesop's fables from classical antiquity, folk tales about animals, in prose (such as in Henry David Thoreau's or Franz Kafka's writings), or poetry (a specific example – John Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*). Moreover, children's literature has many examples: Anna Sewell's autobiography of a horse – *Black Beauty* (1877) or Hans Christian Andersen's fairytales, such as *Thumbelina* (in Danish, *Tommelise*, 1835), *The Ugly Duckling* (*Den grimme ælling*, 1843), *The Nightingale* (*Nattergalen*, 1843) and others. Their interpretations however have been traditionally studied from an anthropomorphic stance, meaning that animal representations in different genres of literature convey only human-related themes and problems. In other words, since literary animals – and literature in general – are a product of human mind and labor, the meanings and motives will be connected only with the human world.

Animals and their rights have been discussed since Aristotle, who famously stated that they lack reason and are instruments for humans by nature. Moreover, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, a growing number of animal rights groups, such as the anti-vivisection movement, advocated against their use in scientific research. The early 1970s in contrast marked a fundamental shift in society, during which these new perspectives started emerging in the academic fields that question the presence of animals and their role in culture (McHugh, 2009b, p. 24). These outlooks have also been related to different environmental movements, one of which was the Oxford Group in England, comprising philosophy students

Stanley and Roslind Godlovitch, John Harris, David Wood, and Michael Peters. Other authors, such as psychologist and animal rights advocate Richard Ryder or philosopher Peter Singer, spoke against harsh animal use and factory farming. In his book Animal Liberation (1975), Singer argues that the human race is superior to other animal species. This is where the term "speciesism" comes from, defined as the understanding that one biological species is superior to the other.

Jacques Derrida was one of the leading philosophers in the humanitarian field who considered new perspectives in defining humanity and animality through language. In 1997, he gave lectures on this topic at the Cerisy Conference; these ideas later were published in the book *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (*L'Animal que donc je suis,* 2006). It is considered one of the foundational texts in Animal Studies that examines new ways of observing other species and appraises the change in perspective. Moving on to the 21st century, contemporary philosophers such as Giorgio Agamben, Rosi Braidotti or Cary Wolfe write about the notions of posthumanism – "a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitant of this planet" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 2–3). To put it another way, the idea is that humans are not the center of planet Earth anymore and that the era of the Anthropocene is shifting. This switch in perspective gives new ways to look at the relationship between humans and non-humans in the sciences, humanities, and arts.

Looking particularly at literature, Literary Animal Studies is a narrower field that problematizes and manifests different ways of looking at animals in written texts. It emphasizes their existence, usage, and highlights their aesthetic value in literature (Borgards, 2015, p. 156). These Studies have gained more attention in the past several decades, especially in the human sciences (DeMello, 2021, p. 7). The reason is that animals, though used for centuries in literary texts, have been marginalized, primarily in order to show superiority and difference between humans and non-humans (Ortiz-Robles, 2016, p. 2). Moreover, an obvious fact is that animals are not able to speak in the language that humans would understand, and this is also one of the reasons why they were modestly analyzed, presenting a challenge to humans (Fudge, 2004, p. 7; see also C. Baker, 2019, p. 10). Thus, Literary Animal Studies are a way of challenging anthropocentric notions and putting non-human presence into question in order to discuss other species apart from humans in written texts (Garrard, 2004, p. 140).

One of the ways in which Literary Animal Studies challenge these anthropocentric notions is, first and foremost, in terms of language. The last paragraph (and other sentences) mentioned the term "non-human animal". Many researchers in the Anglo-Saxon tradition use it in order to emphasize the similarities between humans and animals. For instance, Aaron M. Moe in his book *Zoopoetics: Animals and the Making of Poetry* (2013) states that,

> "Phrases such as "nonhuman animals" attempt to address the HUMAN/animal bias as they foreground that humans, too, are animals. However, the phrase still marks animals by something they are not. They are not human. <...>" (Moe, 2014, p. ix).

Despite the awareness of the binary opposition between these terms, Moe acknowledges their deficiency, and seeks to bridge these worlds in the making of literary texts: "In what follows, I use the terms "animal" and "human" full knowing the categories are inadequate—but I use them in the context of continuity and fluidity shared across and amongst ANIMAL↔HUMAN spheres. Animals are makers, too." (ibid.)[6].

A further move is made on the question of gender. In English, it is common to call a non-human with the pronoun "it", since they usually have a neuter gender. However, Moe uses gendered pronouns instead, stating that,

> "Calling an animal an "it" reflects a long history of Western thinking that perceives the animal as an instinct-driven machine, but as will be demonstrated, many animals have agency in the ways they undergo a bodily *poiesis*. Whereas an "it" possesses no more agency than a stone, a "she" or a "he" acts within an environment with conscious intention. I, along with many others, argue that animals have earned the robust title of gendered pronouns. In a small but significant way, the shift to the pronouns he and she points to the continuity shared across species in ways I find lacking in the term "nonhuman animal." (ibid.).

Another challenge for Literary Animal Studies is distinguishing between the "real" animal and its literary representation in the book. Logically speaking, the latter cannot be an absolute counterpart of the creature in the real world, i.e., the wolf in the fable *Little Red Riding Hood* or Jack London's *White Fang* (1906). They are not real wolves, since "literary animals are created by words [and] cannot bite us and in turn we as readers cannot kill them." (Borgards, 2015, p. 155). Every literary animal however displays features corresponding to its real-life counterpart. These characteristics are usually interwoven in the

[6] In this thesis, I will use the terms "animal" and "non-human" as synonyms, acknowledging their intricate relation with the opposition of the binary – "human".

literary text, and these combinations are problematized and analyzed by Literary Animal Studies (ibid., p. 156).

In traditional literary analyses, animals are mainly approached as metaphors, symbols, or other literary means that conceal human-related problems. A dog may symbolize friendship and companionship; a spider or a snake may be associated with fear or anxiety. In the latter case, it could even have biblical connotations (the snake that tempts Eve to eat the forbidden fruit). However, if the representation of the non-human is only used as a metaphor for naming human-related problems, then the relationship with it becomes pushed away; one only sees the oppressed human, but not the animal (Edwards et al., 2020, p.7). At the same time, understanding the text becomes reduced to an anthropocentric interpretation. Susan McHugh compares this situation to a magic trick: "Reading animals as metaphors, always as figures of and for the human, is a process that likewise ends with the human alone on the stage. Now you see the animal in the text, now you don't." (McHugh, 2009, p. 24). Other researchers even state that this delusion harms the animals in real life and the poetic-aesthetic worlds since they can be mistreated or misinterpreted (see Waldau, 2013, p. 4).

A case of such misinterpretation can be observed in the field of photography. In her book *Animal* (2004), Erika Fudge gives an example of a smiling chimpanzee named Ham, which had travelled to space with NASA during the 1960s. While there, Ham experienced eight minutes of weightlessness and was photographed by human pilots. One of the photographs of it, smiling while receiving an apple, became popular among people. Some even stated this as evidence that animals and humans have little differences and are much more alike (Fudge, 2004, p. 25).

However, if one would refuse the notion of anthropomorphism – the 'appliance' of human features and emotions to non-humans – the meaning changes drastically. According to Richard Ryder, the smile that we, as humans, interpret as happiness becomes the expression of pain and fear, as the chimpanzee is put under a lot of pressure (Ryder, 1983, p. 65). Having that in mind, Fudge also mentions that the animal had experienced many malfunctions during the missions: flight delays, oxygen breakdowns, and pouring water into the space capsule after landing in the ocean. No matter how much humans want to paraphrase the non-humans as having the same emotions as them in similar situations, Fudge opposes:

> “The animal becomes what we want it to be, and a reading that challenges this interpretation is also a challenge to many of the assumptions we have about how we should live with animals” (Fudge, 2004, p. 27).

Nevertheless, Literary Animal Studies do not oppose earlier and traditional literary interpretations of animals, viewing them as inadequate or unacceptable. It acknowledges that the author is trying to give the animal independence and a voice in the literary field. Unfortunately, "transferring" the animal on paper and into a novel does not *per se* become a "revelation", but rather only a creation for the animal voice (Edwards et al., 2020, p. 6). In this way, literature functions as a medium or a tool that problematizes animals' presence, records their complexity, social practices, and dramatizes their meaning in order to push the reader beyond the anthropocentric interpretation (McHugh et al., 2021, p. 7). Or, as Anna Barcz would say, animal-centered fiction can "<… > silence the human voice to hear those of the animal world" (Barcz, 2017, p. 96).

Roland Borgards summarizes three objectives of Literary Animal Studies. The first aim is to present the animal as an independent subject of study in literature, because, as discussed earlier, there is a wide variety of a bestiary out there. Secondly, there is a need to reflect and challenge dichotomies, such as human/animal, nature/culture, etc. These ways of thinking, according to Borgards, separate humans from non-humans because they lack mutual characteristics. Furthermore, the disjunction of "nature" and "culture" is a more anthropocentric approach, noting the superiority of the human species over animals and their culture. The last objective of these Studies is to reflect on the methods used to analyze literary animals. At the same time, the aim combines the re-evaluation of the relationship between a man and an animal and what indications and meanings can be grasped of the literary animal (Borgards, 2015, pp. 156–157).

Considering the theory of Literary Animal Studies is helpful in going beyond the traditional notions of literary animal analyses. Without this, as Bogards states, the analysis would head in one of two directions. The literary aspects would be more emphasized, and the animal would be marginalized, or it would only understand the literary as a "container for animal content" (ibid., pp. 157–158).

4.2. Zoopoetics as a Tool to Understand Literary Animals

The introduced theoretical framework of Literary Animal Studies outlines the possibilities and challenges while seeking to surpass the traditional anthropomorphic reading of animals. However, as there can be many interpretations of analyzing literature, these Studies do not offer a solitary method of interpreting literary texts, i.e., what one has to look for in literary texts. Thus, I will present a narrower field that is strongly related to Literary

Animal Studies and can possibly provide valuable tools for viewing animals in text—Zopoetics.

Since animals can do whatever they want in literature – speak (i.e. Elwyn Brooks White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952)), discuss, have opinions (George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945)), kill other species (Peter Benchley's *Jaws* (1974)), or even transform into human beings (Franz Kafka's *A Report to an Academy* (1917) – there are also many ways of approaching them. Animals can be understood as agents (McHugh, 2009a, p. 487); as cultural hybrids (Borgards: 2012, notes from a webinar by Dr. Anu Pande (2020)); active subjects of a community (Haraway, 2005, p. 205), etc.), and every text can be an individual case for choosing the reading strategy (Lönngren, 2021, p. 39), this thesis will use the guidelines of Zoopoetics to touch upon Statovci's animality oeuvre.

The term itself comes from the earlier-mentioned lectures of Jacques Derrida, later published as a book, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Used unintentionally, without any further elaboration on "Kafka's vast Zoopoetics" (Derrida, 2008, p. 6), it became one of the foundational terms of the broader field of Animal Studies. In his lectures, Derrida discussed his encounter with a cat, and wanted to emphasize that the cat he was describing was "real":

> I must immediately make it clear, the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, a little cat. It isn't the figure of a cat. It doesn't silently enter the bedroom as an allegory for all the cats on the earth, the felines that traverse our myths and religions, literature and fables. There are so many of them. (Derrida, 2008, p. 6)

This repetition that the cat is real and not literary displays an interlaced perspective between reality and literature. This does not mean that they are alike, but neither the "real" nor the "literary" can be understood as independent elements from one another in that sense (Middelhoff et al., 2019, p. 18).

Aaron M. Moe goes a step further and defines the term "Zoopoetics" by its etymology:

> [It] recognizes that nonhuman animals (*zoion*) are makers (*poiesis*), and they have agency in that making. The etymology also suggests that when a poet undergoes the making process of poiesis in harmony with the gestures and vocalizations of nonhuman animals, a multispecies event occurs. It is a co-making. A joint venture. (Moe, 2013, p. 2)

Moe emphasizes that non-human animals also participate in the creation process since they have the condition of influencing it. He uses the term *poiesis*, borrowed from Greek, which means "to make". Although he mostly gives examples of animals in poetry (such as in Edward Estlin Cummings' and William Stanley Merwin's poems), this is also relevant for prose. To express this shortly, since animals have agency, they can contribute to and be part of making textual fabrics.

Another aspect of Zoopoetics is the use and division of language. We mentioned earlier that Derrida also touches upon this question in defining humanity and animality, but does not explain the term used further. Hence, Kári Driscoll touches upon this question more briefly, stating that,

> In a sense, zoopoetics may be regarded as the most fundamental form of poetics, in that it incorporates the primary distinction between human and animal on the basis of language. (Driscoll, 2015, p. 223).

This means that zoopoetics seeks to reveal the fragmented nature of the division between the human and non-human in the aspect of language. This view explores anthropological differences between humans and non-humans and the limitations that occur between those relations in terms of language (Middelhoff et al., 2019, p. 19).

Lastly, Driscoll, alongside Eva Hoffmann, take up the question of "real" and "literary" in terms of representation. They state that the primary duty of zoopoetics is to ask questions about who or what is being represented by whom or what. In what way is it happening? What does it mean if animals "are themselves" in literary theory and critique? (Driscoll & Hoffmann, 2018, p. 6). These questions, as they assert, are essential, since animals are not able to speak themselves in a language that "the academy recognizes as necessary for such self-representation" (Driscoll & Hoffmann, 2018, p. 6; see also Weil, 2012, p. 4).

To briefly summarize, there are different approaches to the term "Zoopoetics", which complement each other. Derrida, Driscoll, and Hoffmann emphasized that the "real" and "literary" animal cannot be distinguished or separated from one another. Moe focused not only on the etymology of the word, but also highlighted animal agency as an essential factor in the process of creative writing. Driscoll alone regarded the term that raised questions about the operating manners of language, and sought to address it as a method and an object of study (Middelhoff et al., 2019, pp. 19–20).

Literary animals and environments can function in three different ways in texts. Firstly, they can function as main characters or protagonists with agency in fiction. They can have the capacity to make choices and act within the narrative. Examples include the whale in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) or the weather in Adalbert Stifter's *Indian Summer* (Der Nachsommer, 1857). Secondly, they can appear as metaphors or semiotic agents in idiomatic expressions, such as "to kill two birds with one stone" or "man is a wolf to a man" (in Latin, *homo homini lupus*). Thirdly, they can appear as narrative elements within the story or poetic field, such as a monkey to illustrate mimesis, or "nature" as a constant motif in Romantic poetry. (Middelhoff et al., 2019, p. 15).

Apart from analyzing animals and the environment as separate figures that influence literary texts, Zoopoetics considers their connection, since it is a two-way relationship: "animals cannot be fully grasped without their environments, whereas, in turn, environments cannot be conceived without the animals living in and affecting them." (ibid, p. 14). There are also three points to emphasize here.

First, animals can be a part of the environment described in the text. A simple example would be Realistic literature of the 19th century, where animals appeared as elements of a specific area, such as seagulls alongside the stormy sea in Theodor Storm's novella *The Rider on the White Horse* ("Der Schimmelreiter", 1888). This concept shows that humans take part in the literary environments and ecological contexts when writing and reading, alongside the non-humans (Middelhoff et al., 2019, p. 26).

Secondly, animals and environments can be each other's signifiers. This relation is usually described as metonymical.[7]. Animals and their environments are always in touch, in a "contact zone" (Haraway, 2008, p. 4) on a literal and semiotic basis. Even though the text hesitates to report the relation between the two, animals and environments remain related, explicitly described or implicitly referenced. This is expressed by a synecdoche, both as a part of the whole (*pars pro toto*) or vice versa (*toto pro pars*).

[7] Although Middelhoff and others do not go further and explain why this relationship is more metonymical rather than metaphorical, Ann-Sofie Lönngren, in her article *Metaphor, Metonymy, More-Than-Anthropocentric, the Animal That Therefore I Read (and Follow)* could have the answer.

While proposing "following" as a reading strategy for crossing beyond anthropocentric interpretations, she analyzes the symptomatic tradition that references the animal as a metaphor which *hides* the meaning, and the alternative – "surface readings" – that visualize literature as a map of different meanings. "Whereas metaphor functions according to principles of difference, substitution, and distance, metonymy is characterized by similarity, presence, and closeness, and the latter is thus particularly apt for readings of animal figures as "actual animals" (Lönngren, 2018, p.41)

For instance, in Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "The Panther" ("Der Panther", 1902–1903), the animal is linked to the Parisian Zoo environment. The traditional way of reading would be that the animal's figure is a metaphor, symbolizing a lack of freedom and oppression. If one considers the panther's natural environment, which is usually the wild and free nature, but not the zoo, the anthropocentric reading of the poem shifts to an environmental one. In that way, the panther is detached from its natural habitat, and the relation between the zoo and the animal indicates notions of colonialism and the domination of European power among the "exotic" species (Middelhoff et al., 2019, p. 27).

Another example is Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865). The Dodo bird signifies an entire biosphere that has gone extinct or has the potential to go extinct.

Descriptions of environments that do not specifically mention animals function as *toto pro pars* ("the whole for a part"). For example, passages of city parks can create associations with pigeons or bird feeding. Explanations of riversides can compel the reader to "see" birds, fish, and other life forms around it. (Middelhoff et al., 2019, p. 27). Thus, animals and environments can appear as a collective or metonymically connected establishment in the realm of signification.

Finally, animals and environments can be treated as ambassadors for each other. They are able to raise awareness about the environmental issues and ethical problems because of their agential features. To touch upon literary animals means to put in an effort to change the anthropocentric perspective and understand non-human worlds. To experience the literary environment functions as a reminder for readers about the existing "real" animals in their habitats and the problems they face: whether that would be deforestation, such as in Annie Proulx's novel *Barkskins* (2016), oil spills, as in Joye Emmens' *She's Gone* (2015), or the use of pesticides. The earlier-mentioned example of Moby-Dick can also be treated as an ambassador, which raises questions about animal welfare, their rights, and ecological concerns related to hunting and overfishing. Therefore, literary animals and environments as ambassadors raise the readers' responsibility to approach animal-related texts compassionately and seek to go beyond the human-related problems (ibid., 27–28).

In conclusion, literary animals may serve as main characters or protagonists within a text. They can function as metaphors or semiotic expressions, or emerge as narrative devices that enhance the storyline. Their relationship with the environment is equally significant: animals can constitute an integral part of the environment, act as signifiers, or

ambassadors between different narrative spheres. Moreover, the environment reciprocally shapes the role and meaning of animals within the text.

5. Analysis

5.1. My Cat Yugoslavia

Small Comment on the Epigraph

The epigraph of the first part opens with the encounter with the cat: “The first time I met the cat was something so utterly mind-boggling, like seeing the bodies of a hundred handsome men all at once, that I painted it on a thick sheet of watercolor paper <…>." (p. 9). The reader is neither aware of the place nor the circumstances of the experience. Thus, this part seems as if it were a small comment before the story. The rendezvous is intensely overwhelming to the character, seeing it as a situation of painting bodies of men on paper. Although there is no mention of which body parts are painted (head, shoulders, legs, etc.), and whether these bodies are fully clothed or naked, the choice of adjective could imply the answer. To view something as "mind-boggling" implies that the body is nude, and the character admires the structure of how it is built. Moreover, watercolor painting – the technique or the media through which the naked body is seen – not only creates a possibility of specific gazing at the cat, but also implies an intertextual reference.

Although this is not apparent, and is mainly viewed from an anthropomorphic perspective, the epigraph resembles Rainer Maria Rilke's sonnet *Archaic Torso of Apollo* (*Archaïscher Torso Apollos*, 1908), since both of them view the body through a materialized art product. In Rilke’s case, that would be a torso through sculpture (“Otherwise this stone would seem defaced.[8]”), whereas in Statovci’s situation – several bodies through watercolor painting.

Both texts function as possibilities for viewing/imagining the body *in absentia* through art, whether that would be a sculpture with a missing head and legs (in Rilke's situation) or an abstract mention of "the body" (in Statovci's situation). This viewing of the other will be important later in the novel, as Rilke's poem ends with the famous lines, "You must change your life."[9], Bekim also changes during the course of the novel.

[8] Translated by Stephen Mitchell. Original: *Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz*.
[9] Translated by Stephen Mitchell Original: *Du mußt dein Leben ändern.*

The Homophobic Cat

Chapter four opens up with Bekim's encounter with the cat[10] In a gay bar. From the start, he is mesmerized by the cat's aesthetic appearance, describing it with expressions such as "so enchanting, so alluring" (p. 52). This is repeated in the novel many times: "The cat was such a wonderful, beautiful, gifted interpreter <…> (p. 53); "I felt like saying what a beautiful cat he was, a truly wonderful kitty cat." (p. 53). The repetition of the adjective "beautiful" and "amazing" in various modal tones expresses a strong emotion that Bekim has on the cat. Furthermore, the descriptions of the cat feel multisensory and sensible: "[its] silky smooth fur smelled good and that [its] body was muscular from top to tail." (p. 53); "The tender, soft touch of [its] paws made my skin tighten into goose bumps <…> (p. 55). These instances evoke the sense of Bekim's idealization: he has yet to meet the cat and talk to it, but he gazes at it from a distance (cf. the earlier analyzed epigraph). He is captivated and shocked by the cat's "magnificent, arched back appeared from round a corner, his long black tail wagged up and down" (p. 53), and he repeats these notions several times.

From these "idealized" descriptions, it is possible to point out the features of the non-human, which are important to Zoopoetics. The figure is an anthropomorphic character with features associated with a human being and an animal with uncontrollable instincts. The cat resembles a person, since it is able to stand on two feet ("[the cat] was standing, firm and upright, on his two muscular back legs." p. 52), it wears clothes ("then [it] raised his front paw to the top button of [its] shirt, unbuttoned it <…>", ibid.), sings songs ("[the cat] was singing along to songs by Tina Turner and Cher.", p. 52), trims itself its claws ("his badly trimmed claws, which he could no longer reach to cut by himself." (p. 100)), and overall, has the agency to speak and hold on various opinions. At the same time, there are features related to the animal world: the cat does not have a name in the whole text and relies on prey instincts regarding food and drink: *I'm a cat; I can't help my basic instincts. I'll eat whenever there's food available and drink when there is something to drink*. (ibid., author's italics). We are naturally taught that animals are not aware of themselves, of their animalistic being – only humans are. However, here, the cat understands its being on a metaphysical level – it is not just an animal, but an animal that thinks like a human being. Thus, the cat's inner identity is

[10] It is essential to point out here that the English translation of the book makes the cat a male-gendered character, since it is addressed with the pronoun *he*. In the original, the cat is addressed with the pronoun *se*, meaning *it* in English.
In this thesis, however, I will address the cat in its proper form to distinguish it from the male character Bekim and modify all the used quotes accordingly.

shifting between a realized human agency that has not developed fully, which one could call "human", and instincts that relate to hunting and hunger.

To dive deep into the relationship with the literary environment, the cat's thoughts and expressions give strong hints. Returning to the same bar scene, one can notice that Bekim's expectations of the cat are different from its actual behavior and nature. This changes when they start to know each other better: "Well, well," [it] quipped, nonchalantly scratching [its] chin. Suddenly [it] was wearing glasses, of course. "And who have we here?" (p. 54). The cat starts the conversation with Bekim in a posh, aggressive manner, which later makes the whole conversation uncomfortable. It seems that the cat tries to legitimize its authority by brutally talking to Bekim: the cat calls him "A brute like you." (p. 54), a "Sourpuss" (p. 55). Furthermore, while he tells the story about himself, the cat insults his name: "Bekim. It's such a dreadful name <…>" (p. 54), and expresses its boredom in a candid way: ("The cat didn't seem to think my story sufficiently interesting <…>", (p. 55); "Good grief, you certainly know how to bore a person so completely and utterly!" (p. 57).

However, the cat justifies its behavior by saying it is only joking. After being shocked by the cat's "judgmental manner", the cat says to Bekim: "Come on, *ha ha*—that was a joke, you idiot!" (p. 54, author's italics). A similar situation happens when Bekim confronts the cat to think about its hurtful nature: <…> Isn't that a little impolite?" I said, trying to affect a mature, adult tone of voice. <…> "Oh, do forgive me, *monsieur*," [it] began <…> "Or should I say, *mademoiselle, ha ha*," he continued. "I didn't realize I wasn't allowed to joke about your name. This is all deadly serious, *meow*!" (p. 55, author's italics). Such behavior and the choice of words challenge the boundaries between appropriateness and aggressiveness, thus creating an awkward atmosphere to grasp whether the cat is honestly joking or just making ironic comments about human-related problems.

Cat's playfulness and pursuit of pleasure contrast with its seriousness and expressed opinions about different topics. Especially when the cat calms down and listens to Bekim's unpleasant story: "You have to decide whether you're a man or a woman," (p. 56); "<…> some people can be so black-and-white about things." (p. 61). It becomes harder to understand whether the cat is telling something it believes in or randomly changing opinions, however it wants, depending on the topic. While discussing homosexuality, the cat differentiates the phenomenon and the people that represent it: "When I asked the cat why [it] didn't like gays, [it] explained [it] had nothing against homosexuality per se, just gays." p. 56). Later, it explains an uncomfortable encounter it had had with two gay men: "[The cat]

had been backcombing [its] luxuriant fur in the bathroom of a local restaurant when two gay men had cornered [it]. According to the cat, the men marched up to [it], stood on either side of [it], and began pointing at [its] handsome flanks and shiny tail as they might a piece of meat, and the cat had felt so objectified that [it'd] been forced to stop [its] preening and cover up [its] sweet curvature." (p. 56–57).

The cat's sense of being looked at, as if to an object, pushes up different emotional reactions. By using tactile and sensible descriptions of the non-human, the so called animal gaze is constructed – a sense of looking to it as an object or something that is "other" from the human society (cf. Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" or John Berger's essay "Why We Look at Animals?"). It is indirectly compared to the cat's previous experience with the two gay men in the bathroom. In this case, the cat is aware of its "otherness", but feels vulnerable to those who are other to it: "I asked where [it] had come from, what [its] family was like, whether [its] mother had similar black-and-white stripes, but the cat refused to tell me anything." (p. 61). The cat reasons this, "because there were so many incorrect preconceptions about cats that should be addressed first. For a start, the idea that cats aren't really independent, they're just lonely." (ibid.). Furthermore, since the cat is a different species from the human, no one seeks to listen it: "The only problem was that nobody listened to what [it] had to say, for what could a cat possibly know about politics, economics, or other sociological issues." (p. 63).

The Struggles of Living with the Cat

As the physical distance between the characters decreases (from the talks in the bar to sleeping together, and finally sharing the apartment for some time), the dialogue becomes a problematic interaction space. Although Bekim and the cat share similar human-like features, they can hardly understand each other, especially when they start living together.

As the cat starts living with Bekim, its sense of aggressiveness and commandment strengthen. As they wake up in the morning, the animal wants to engage in activity: "Get up," [it] said curtly. "Up, right now," [it] continued when I didn't obey him. "I want to wake up and eat and bathe and take a walk and do things!" (p. 74). The animal feels as if it is the ruler of the house: "I'm not eating fucking porridge," [it'd] said, demanded to be given a clean towel, and disappeared into the bathroom. (p. 75), or by demanding its reading

glasses: “Bring me my glasses,” he said. “This minute.” (p. 78). The cat is also an influence of Bekim, making him ponder his lifestyle choices: “I took a container of yogurt from the fridge, joined the cat, and wondered whether I should give up being a vegetarian and start eating meat.” (ibid.); “I would spend too long thinking about our encounter, mulling over the things I’d told him, and that would mean I’d never have the courage to pick up the phone and ask him out.” (p. 79).

The Lone and Silent Snake

Chapter one starts with Bekim buying a snake at a pet shop. The circumstances of his purchase are not evident to the reader from the beginning, although he seems embarrassed and anxious about it: "<…> as though I wasn’t quite sure what I was looking for.”; “I could feel their presence in the soles of my feet, which were tense and clenched.” (both quotes, p. 15). However, later we find out from Emine’s part of the narrative, in chapter *The Snakes*, that Bekim had a fear of snakes when he was a child: “One night my younger son Bekim started having nightmares that wouldn’t go away." (p. 146); "He began telling me about his nightmare, about the snake dangling from the light fixture on the ceiling that was so long and powerful it only had to wrap itself round the lampshade once, then it could stretch out the rest of its body to reach him.” (ibid.).

The atmosphere of the story is expanded when Bekim goes to the basement with the pet shop owner, where the snakes are held: “They were kept in a darkened cellar space because the air was damper and the conditions imitated their natural habitat.” (p. 16). "Natural" is the word that can be understood as an ironic statement, because their living circumstances are far from that, as Bekim talks about their breeding circumstances: "I’d seen videos on the Internet of the factories in which they were bred. They looked like the back rooms at fast-food joints: full of tall shelving units, stacked tightly with black, lidded boxes where the snakes lived until they grew large enough to be sold.” (p. 16).

The temperament of these animals (“snakes generally enjoy being left to their own devices“, p. 16) and the artificiality of their living conditions (“They had never seen daylight or felt the touch of the earth“, ibid.) go hand in hand not only to address the novel’s dark atmosphere, but also into creating emotional attachment to the creature. It is to say that one should not go into panic while encountering a snake, because, in Bekim’s words “Their mere shape was enough to drive many people into a panic.” (p.16), but rather to have a sense

of sympathy for these animals which have been detached from their natural environment. He expresses it by relating to the snakes in his own life and asking, "Do they ever learn that all lives are not equal?" (p. 17).

The bough snake – specifically, a boa constrictor – is an ambassador for others of its kind (Middelhoff et al., 2019, p. 27). The explanations about animal breeding and captivity give way to understanding that it is not an individual snake that experiences these conditions, but a whole bunch of them. It could look like Bekim seeks to help these snakes become free from the artificial conditions that human institutions create. However, he could not buy all the snakes in the world, so he bought one and met it with curiosity, anxiety, and empathy.

After arriving at Bekim's apartment, the snake is left in the middle of the living room. Again, the earlier explained animal gaze comes into play on a smaller scale. The animal is gazed upon by Bekim, described as having a "lazy, clammy body" (ibid.), and its skin "rattled like a broken amplifier" (ibid.). Since it is the snake's first time in the new environment, it feels afraid and worried: "It hissed faintly and moved cautiously as I prized open the lid, <…>"; "I'd imagined it would be somehow different, stronger, noisier, and bigger. But it seemed more afraid of me than I was of it." (ibid.).

The relationship between the snake and Bekim is established in several ways: by the absence of language, exaggerating physicality, and misinterpreting the animal's intentions.

Compared to the cat, the snake lacks the human agency of language, since it cannot speak: "It was a living creature for which I was now responsible, a creature that didn't speak a language I could understand." (p. 18). Nevertheless, this never occurs as a problem, as Bekim is willing to learn everything about it: "I will learn to understand it so well that it won't have to say a single word <…>" (ibid.).

In this case, physicality becomes the component for the snake to get to know the environment and seek contact with other creatures. It is established via slithering, which is repeated throughout the novel. It is one of the ways that the snake can hold on to an object. Also, it is one of the techniques they use to kill their prey, suffocating them. In the novel, the twisting motif is one of the key elements of the snake's identity: from the moment it meets Bekim and wraps around him ("And eventually it unraveled itself and slithered up to my feet, sniffed my toes, and finally twined itself round my legs. Then it raised its head into my lap,

pressed it into my groin, under my armpit, and behind my back. Everywhere" (p. 18), to the point when he is almost killed by it ("It was holding me so tightly that at one point I wasn't sure I would make it. Then I gripped the fruit knife and stuck it into the snake's head." p. 215). The same motif occurs when Bekim tries to feed the snake: "<…> thawed mice from the freezer didn't arouse the slightest reaction <…> though it was far more interested in wrapping itself around my arms or my body. It did this from morning to night; it was following me." (p. 32),

However, it seems that Bekim misinterprets the snake's intentions when wrapping around him as seeking love and affection: "We will be together forever, I thought, me and it. We would never stop loving each other." (p. 18). The human feels firmly attached to the creature that it is something other ought not to know about: "*Nobody must ever find out about this. I will guard this like I do my own life*, I thought." (p. 18, author's italics). Bekim feels responsible for the snake's livelihood not only by fulfilling the everyday needs ("sinking all my savings into a snake, a terrarium, a climbing tree, a heated mat, a water bowl, and frozen mice was a sensible decision <…>" p. 32), but also letting it roam around the apartment creating a sense of freedom, in comparison to the circumstances in the pet shop or at breeding facilities. This sense of empathy is exaggerated: "I will give it a home, everything it needs, and it will be content with me, because I know what it wants. <…> I will feed it and watch as it digests its food, watch as it grows and grows and grows." (p. 18).

Whether Bekim knows how to keep a snake and understand its behavior is uncertain. He states that he got the information about how to maintain it but has not yet had the experience of it: "I had received detailed instructions on how to look after it: a happy snake requires love, calm, and above all boundaries. But no amount of love and calm, no amount of boundaries could make the snake what it was destined to become." (p. 32). What is this "destined to become"? Does he already know that the snake aims to kill him or would seek another prey in the apartment?

The snake seems to depend on its animal instincts: it wraps around warm objects, like Bekim or the cat; it bites Bekim probably to show that it does not like being held in hands; it always stays at home. The strongest demonstration of animal instincts appears when the cat confronts Bekim about his parents and siblings, and attacks him by grabbing his throat ("<…> grabbed my throat, and pressed [its] paws so tightly that they almost stopped the blood circulating in my body." (p. 108). Their fight is documented fully by Bekim, after he recovered consciousness: "When I came to a moment later, the cat and the snake were

sizing each other up." (p. 110). Both of their animal instincts are activated, and they seek to kill each other. The scene is identically described as almost an action film or thriller: The toppled chair, my body, the wall, and the sofa formed a battleground in which they were about to fight it out. (p. 110). This is the first time that the snake wraps around its prey in order to kill it-in this case, the cat: "Before I even realized what was happening, the snake had wrapped itself round the cat three times. The cat was completely buried within the snake." (p. 111).

Conclusions

To summarize, *My Cat Yugoslavia* incorporates a cat and a snake as independent, separate characters that influence other human characters' decisions and motives. The cat resembles, in a way, a typical human being, since it can talk, wears clothes, expresses opinions, and socializes with people. However, it is also aware of its otherness – it still expresses animal instincts regarding feeding or aggression. Its description is exaggerated by Bekim, mentioning how beautiful it is many times, and in that way, the cat seems to be objectified.

The contrasting animal to the cat is the snake. At the beginning of the novel, it incorporates an ambassadorship of other tamed animals, since the creature is mentioned in the context of breeding and awful dwelling circumstances. Bekim ensures that the snake gets what it wants – he acts as a responsible and sensible owner. However, from the snake's point of view, these roles shift: from a pet to a predator (snake), and the owner of the hunted. This is why the snake seems interested in wrapping around Bekim's body, since it always seeks to kill him, but he misinterprets the intention.

5.2. Crossing

The "Richer" Text of Animals

At first glance, "Crossing" incorporates a broader variety of literary animals in the story: the readers can find birds, roasted chickens (p. 66), "shoals of fish" (p. 69) giraffes (p. 199), cats (p. 249), zebras (p. 250), and so on. Moreover, there are small intertexts to other novels related to animal reinterpretation. The most obvious ones are Ernest Hemingway's *The Fish and the Sea* ("One of his favorite stories tells the tale of an old man who goes on a long fishing trip and who, after encountering many misfortunes, is forced to return home without a catch, powerless", p. 27), and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: "In another of his favorites,

animals begin taking control of a farm they have commandeered from a drunken old farmer" (p. 27–28).

However, most of these literary animals are used in a sense of a metaphor or slimily: for instance, when Bujar compares people living in New York with birds ("In New York, man is a bird <…> p. 116), bustling life in the center of Tirana with a group of fish ("Agim and I went to Skanderbeg Square, where people had gathered in great, bustling crowds like scattered shoals of fish." p. 69) or when talking with Agim about poorly behaving Italian men ("You can see for yourself how badly the Italians here behave. They drink and harass the girls. They're pigs." (p. 177).

However, two animals are present not only as metaphors, but also as means of exploring the themes of memory, nationality, identity, and sexuality. The horse and the eagle mostly come from Bujar's father's stories and legends about the Albanian nation. Since these non-humans exist in the metatext, and not physically in front of the characters, their viewing becomes challenging regarding symbolic, anthropomorphic reading. Furthermore, there is a small part where a lion appears in the chapter about the zoo (*The Lion's Breath*), but its representation is not developed further in the novel, as also the earlier mentioned literature intertexts of Hemingway and Orwell.

The Different Meanings of the Horse

Part one starts with a 14-year-old teenager, Bujar, who goes to a Tirana national history museum with his father. Besides mentioning an intriguing animal that a museum can be compared to ("<…> the Skanderbeg museum standing like a gigantic cow, and we start walking toward it." (p. 17), one of the artifacts that Bujar's father talks about is Skanderbeg and his horse: "My father also mentions Skanderbeg's wise and heroic horse <…> (p. 18). Since the father tells a small story in a novel, the literary animal places itself in the metatext. The story has fairytale and legend elements, since the horse has been personified as "wise and heroic". The feature that makes the most impression on Bujar is the horse's loyalty to the owner: "<…> after Skanderbeg's death the horse would not allow anyone else on its back, and for some reason this part of the story makes the greatest impression upon me. Perhaps the horse could see into the future and knew it had borne a man like no other, a man who will never die." (p. 19).

The literary space in which the horse presents itself and acts is in Bujar's father's stories. Most of the content is related to the development of the Albanian nation and representations or retellings of different Albanian mythology elements and fairy tales. However, in most of these stories, the horse is mentioned as a story element, and someone owns it. For instance, in the story of a clumsy boy, named Ilir Jakupi, the horse is only an asset of the family, measuring wealth: “Once the offended family had set the price of the debt at five strong horses or the life of Ilir Jakupi, the head of Ilir’s family, the esteemed Arian Jakupi, began weighing up the possibilities this situation offered. For days he walked around the garden outside his house like a fish swimming at the bottom of a pail.” (p. 42).

Another example of horses’ presence is in the retold legend of Doruntina and Konstandini. The horse is only described in a few words: black and frightening. Konstandini owns it – Dorutina’s brother, who died with the other twelve brothers at war (“all the family’s sons die one after the other, from the eldest to the youngest just like in a poem <…>” p. 113). As she rides the horse on the back and later jumps off from it, her dress becomes dirty: “<…> she shivers on the back of the horse Doruntina’s white dress turns the same color as the dry earth and the dust that cover Konstandini and his mighty steed." (p. 114). Since the horse's back is mentioned a couple of times here, it indicates its strong connection to the wildness, since with domesticated horses, there would be a saddle for the rider. Naturally, these legends have also a moral which is always related to the anthropomorphic notions; here, this can be seen: "When the story ends, the reader will understand the essence of the Albanian spirit: that a mother's grief has the power to waken a child from the dead and that the Albanians will rise from their graves to keep their promises." (p. 115).

The last story that Bujar recalls is about a girl who transforms into a boy. This story is different from all the other stories because of the fantasy element: "there were flying dragons and flashing swords, the girl wore men's clothing, and animals could speak to humans and humans to animals, and it was so alive that I could almost feel the dragon's scales between my toes, the tip of the snake's forked tongue in my ear canal." (p. 133). The war broke out in the kingdom, and the girl was the only offspring of the king, who could not fight. However, she thought otherwise: "Prepare me a uniform and cut my hair so I don't look like a girl. Give me a horse and weapons, and I will fight as your son." (p. 133).

The girl (who has transformed from Aldona to Don in the story) was the one who fought the kulshedra – “a long, scaly, fire-breathing, silver-eyed, four-legged dragon that crawled out of its cave inside the mountain once a year to savage the people it saw, and it

bellowed at the citizens from the skies above." (p. 134). For this achievement, she got a promise that she would be granted a horse: "In return for slaying the kulshedra, my father will offer you one of his kingdoms, but ask him instead for his horse, for his horse is one of a kind, the wisest creature on earth. It can think and speak like a man, and with that horse you shall be invincible," the king's son told Don <…> (p. 134–135).

The Patriotic and Suicidal Eagle

In addition to the horse, the eagle is another animal that dominates the text. Most of the animal's appearance is followed by nationalistic and patriotic notions. For instance, when Bujar's father talks about the earlier mentioned leader at the museum: "Skanderbeg raised a flag bearing his family's crest, a two-headed eagle, above the fortress at Krujë, I feel a profound sense of pride in my homeland and in Skanderbeg, and when my father tells me that we Albanians are the descendants of Skanderbeg and the ancient Illyrians, I give him my proudest smile." (p. 18–19). Later, this notion is continued, connecting the country's sovereignty and heraldics with the animal representation: "Albania, the heart of an immortal man beats in the breast of the black two-headed eagle on the flag, and the red surrounding the eagle is the color of the endlessly shed blood of an immortal people." (p. 19). Of course, this representation of the animal bears a more metonymical meaning, since eagles cannot be double-headed in real nature. Many empires and countries use this symbol in heraldry, especially in the Islamic and Slavic worlds.

Similar circumstances appear in the chapter *The Eagle*, when Bujar tries to kill himself by imagining himself flying: "I'm standing on a mountainside in a pair of high heels, a set of white wings growing from my back, and I imagine this is what it must be like to be dead" (p. 79). Later it is revealed that is a dream and that he jumped in front of a van: "As I open my eyes, my field of vision is flooded with bright, searing light." (p. 80); "He wants to know why I wanted to kill myself by jumping in front of a van." (p. 83)".

The motif of the eagle is repeated, when Bujar, back when he was a small child, wonders the origins of his country: Albanian word for "Albanian" is *shqipëtar*, the son of the eagle, and why Albania was called *Shqipëria*, the land of the eagle, and why there was a two-headed eagle on the Albanian flag. (author's cursive, p. 85). The story is told in a fairytale manner, since it begins with the words "All this happened thousands of years ago" (p. 85). The animals can speak with humans in nature. As the father told him, the story goes about a

boy who gave back a small eagle's egg, in return for the animal's ability to fly and see sharply: "Let's make a deal," the eagle began, solemnly spreading its wings. "Give back my child and you shall have everything I own, my ability to fly, and the power of my vision. You will become invincible, and from then on you shall bear my name." (p. 86). Here, the eagle also has the agency to speak: "Why have you taken my child?" asked the eagle <…>" (p. 86).

Small Part of the Lion

Although the earlier-mentioned motif of the lion is not further developed in the novel, it is still interesting to mention the motif, since its presence may resemble another of Rilke's intertexts.

The appearance of the lion is caught in the chapter *The Lion's Breath*. While Bujar and Agim are walking around and thinking about their life situation in Albania, Bujar recalls a story about the animal in the zoo: "Before my eyes closed I recalled the story my father had told me about a lion that was brought to a zoo in the middle of an old city." (p. 156). The relationship between the human and the animal seems unequal, in terms of humans intruding in the animal's natural environment and seeking to catch it: "A group of men had gone to the lion's home, captured it by shooting a tranquilizer dart into its neck, and transported it to a part of the world where the lion had no chance of survival without help from humans." (p. 156). The animal has become an object of imagined fear and of the gaze. The people of the old city "were terrified of its gigantic jaws, of its saber teeth that tore apart hunks of pork as though they were soft cheese <…>" (p. 157). Moreover, it has become an object of the gaze until the end of the story: "The lion became an attraction; people wanted to see it while they still had the chance." (p. 157).

The quote "group of men had gone to the lion's home" indicates a strong bond between the lion and its unmentioned natural habitat. Furthermore, spectators wanted to see the lion "while they still had the chance," which indicates a temporary timeframe for a look at the lion. Why is that? Was there a notion or a feeling that it would run out? We will not be aware of it, because "Nobody could tell how the lion had managed to do this, neither the zoo's staff nor the townsfolk." (p. 157). The thoughts about it are described as wild animals, making it the object of fear: "*What if the lion finds our children and eats them?* they wondered. *It is a wild beast, after all, a creature that thinks of nothing but how to satiate its hunger. The lion surely can't have gone far*, they thought." (ibid., author's cursive).

However, after returning weaker and hungrier, the lion becomes an object of laughter: "That isn't the lion we know, people said disdainfully, and they mocked the lion's slovenly steps, its sagging hide and protruding ribs, its dirty tangled mane. They laughed at it." (p. 158). Although there was no direct reasoning about the lion's decrepit health (did another animal attack it, was it starving, etc.), the change of nature here plays a key role in understanding the animal.

However, this story does not fit the "mythological/fairytale" paradigm in Bujar's father's stories. The lion has more ties to the real animal and the environment in which it dwells, and has been detached from. The scene is not developed further; thus, this can only act as a mention of the literary animal in the text.

Conclusions

In conclusion, *Crossing* has a variety of animal representations in the text. However, most appear as comparisons, similes, or metaphors with other associations. The most distinct animals exist in the metatext – in the stories of Bujar's father that the boy remembers after his death. They are placed in a mythological world, where they can talk and get along with or fight humans. Different representations of the horse are present in three stories, in which it is either a means of transport or a display of wealth. In most cases, the eagle is attached to the idea of nationality and patriotism. Not only is it an object of display in Albanian heraldry, but it is also depicted in legends about the creation of Albania. The motives of these two animals are repeated in the text, making the passage of the lion in the chapter *The Lion's Breath* out of the ordinary from the whole text's paradigm.

5.3. Bolla

As in the novel *Crossing*, here too, one can find a "richer" variety of literary animals, such as dogs (p. 79 and 204–205), water animals (p. 129; 146), lizards, insects, and snakes (p. 79). Most of them function as comparisons that create the literary world and atmosphere, but do not seek to be interpreted beyond their meaning.

The most distinct animal that functions in this novel, however, is a snake-like creature called bolla (cf. the similar story in *Crossing*). It is included in the book's name, at the start of the novel with a dictionary entry, explaining what bolla is, and at the beginning of every part of the book with a short story about God and the devil. Thus, the importance of this animal is proposed to the reader via these elements. However, as the reading process

starts, the animal becomes unnoticeable during most of the book: the characters do not speak about or observe it. Thus, I would argue that under these literary means of the name, dictionary entry, and the short story, the animal "hides" and is an invisible force to the characters' decisions and freedom. Moreover, Arsim's short story about the blind girl and the demon snake, as well as his dreams about snakes, seeks to uncover an unobtrusive force that drives the characters' intentions to seek independence and identity.

The Dictionary Entries About Bolla

Although the novel's atmosphere and storyline are chaotic and intense (from the book's first pages, Arsim meets Miloš and starts an affair with him), the book's structure remains firm and consistent. Right before the storyline begins, there is an explanation of the word "bolla" in the form of a dictionary entry. The meanings are: 1) ghost, beast, fiend; 2) unknown animal species, snake-like creature; 3) alien, invisible (p. 3). These definitions correlate with the three segments of the novel, forming a bond between the structured, mostly one-word definitions and the unraveling storyline. Moreover, it expresses both the book's characters' relationships and the changeable nature of their moral and ethical choices.

The book's first part explores the blooming relationship between the Albanian student Arsim and the Serb student Miloš. Both get more attracted to each other and start spending more time together. However, their relationship has to be hidden from other people: "Our time together is mostly silent, and the curtains are always closed. We never go anywhere, not even for a walk, we don't harbor thoughts of any kind of life outside this apartment because such a life simply doesn't exist." (p. 29–30). One can say that they are like "ghosts" to other people that cannot exist. Moreover, Arsim's changed nature with his wife Ajshe makes him seem as a ghost. For instance, when he comes back home after nights and weeks with Miloš: "I go home sporadically"; "I try to be quick about my business and to say as little as possible <…>" (p. 42).

Thus, Arsim's and Miloš's relationship is like a "beast" to them that other people must not feel or see. In the book, Arsim feels he is being watched: "<…> I feel frightened, as though the entire city can hear my thoughts, as if everyone knows where we are going and why". (p. 22); "At times, I feel guilty and dirty about what we do, and I get nervous and don't want to see anyone, even him." (p. 30); "Doesn't he [Miloš] understand that if someone had seen him touch me like that, it would be the end of us?" (p. 62).

Moreover, this relationship is expressed as a fiend – a fanatic or an addiction that Arsim and Miloš cannot stop feeling for each other. “We spend more time together than we do apart." (p. 29); "I want him over and over and he wants me" (p. 30). The notion of the relationship feels destructive and uncontrollable. Throughout the novel it ends abruptly, when Arsim has to flee from his country to Western Europe to seek asylum, leaving both Miloš and other family relatives: “For some reason, he starts to get on my nerves" (p. 51); "I notice I find hard to conceal my annoyance" (ibid.); "I kiss him and say I'm sorry, I'm sorry I can't stay here any longer, I would stay if I could <…>" (p. 70).

The second part of the dictionary, which means "unknown animal species, snake-like creature," associates more with the animal world. However, the text does not directly indicate the animal's existence. Arsim lives in an unnamed European city, working a usual job in a factory and living in an apartment with Ajshe and their children. He mourns for his relationship with Miloš, and indirectly expresses his wish to come back home: "<…> whenever I am hidden from people’s eyes, because that is when he appears to me, one way or another, as memories that trample across my retina, sounds that burst through my mind, smells carrying a hint of him [Miloš].” (p. 81–82). He does not feel like himself to his family members, as an “unknown animal species” in the society with traditional family values.

However, his family has made a living here and, as the years pass by, he does not think of coming back home: “At first I thought we would only be here temporarily, that the situation in Kosovo would calm down and we would return home” (p. 84); “And so time passed, the years having given up on us.” (ibid.). He is getting more frustrated about not seeing Miloš, living in another country, and the inability to fulfill his sexual desires. That way, he becomes aggressive towards his family: "Just like Ajshe, my children are afraid of me these days. <…> I am a distant, strange man." (p. 86). Although no animal is mentioned in this part, one can think of the absence of bolla as an expression of his behavior and violence towards his family.

The last definition of the word – “alien, invisible” – could be applied to all of the characters in this book. After breaking up with Arsim, Miloš gets badly injured in a fight: “Patient found battered near Mitrovica" (p. 188). Because of his Serbian nationality, he gets treated poorly in the hospital, and is not able to continue his everyday life and understand reality. After returning from prison and seeking to start a new life, Arsim is looking for Miloš, since he wants to be with him. After noticing the former lover on television, he seeks to take him out of the mental hospital and take care of Miloš. However, after seeing him

slowly coming towards him in a corridor, his mood and reaction change: "<…> I'm looking at these things and not his face <…> I still feel the urge to run, not toward him, but in the opposite direction." (p. 187). Arsim tries to help Miloš, but he is too big of a burden due to his alienation from the environment: "<…> our lives should have ended that day, the last time we saw each other, it really would have been better for us not to see the next dawn." p.199). Thus, he is left on the street by Arsim, making him "invisible": "I have seen him hunched outside the house <…> I've always wondered what kind of person ends up on the streets <…>" (p. 215).

Ajshe no longer sees the future with Arsim after his prison sentence and his release. The same goes for the children, who do not want to come in contact with Arsim: "*They don't want to see you, they said they don't have a father, and I have no need or desire to correct them*" (p. 205, author's cursive).

The mythological story of the snake bolla and the narrative lead the novel into chaos and destruction and express the characters' inability to make decisions. The influence of the mythological story is immersed in the characters' mental space, firstly in Arsim's since he is the one who writes the mysterious story about the relationship between the blind girl and the snake.

In the symbolic paradigm, the snake is the creature that carries the light to Arsim's world. He wishes to live his life as his true self, without hiding his sexual identity from others. However, reaching this has a considerable cost and consequences: he sporadically leaves his family, his relatives, and he breaks up with Miloš and leaves him stranded on the street, only due to his search for his true self. The snake is a metaphor for his wish for people to leave him alone, on his own devices.

Moreover, the snake's symbolism cannot be taken out of account since the biblical story about the serpent runs throughout the novel. It is possible to argue that the book alludes to the biblical story of Eve and the serpent (The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" Genesis 3:2-3) and Albanian mythology. Both of them are connected and incorporated.

The Story of the God and the Devil

Every part starts with a short story about God and the devil. The first part explains God's desire to remove the snake from his created Paradise: "*There's a snake in my Paradise," said God.* (p. 3, author's cursive). Although there is no explanation about why he wants to throw it out, nor is there a description of the snake, one could see the created dichotomy between the holy world and the animal world. The snake is one of the most cunning creatures God created, which made Eve eat the forbidden fruit in Paradise, and thus He wants to get rid of it from there.

This is strongly implicated in the beginning of the second part, in which there is a broader description of devil's living conditions: "*There the Devil resided, with his chimeras, inside the glacial mountain, and the subterranean tunnel that led to the Devil was full of poisonous lizards with spikes on their skin, ravens and craws that never slept but constantly flew on the spot, without permission to land, and along the walls were mummified insects, petrified clusters of gnats, crickets pressed against one another*" (p. 79, author's cursive). Since God stated that he does not want the snake in his Paradise (in turn, no animals in the garden), the listed animals in this short story seem to appear as the devil's creations, intensifying the text's fearful atmosphere.

The third part tells about the locked God's daughter, the snake, and their submergence in a cave inside a mountain. Here, the devil instructs the snake to eat other animals and share the food with the girl: "First eat the cockroaches, the moths, the spiders, and the scorpions, then the rats, and baths, the foxes and wolves, and give half of each meal to the girl" (p. 151). Although these animals are only mentioned sequentially, starting from the least pleasant and aesthetical to the human eye, it serves as food for the other, in some sense, more respectful animal for the devil – the snake.

There is a biblical moment that connects these small texts to the whole narrative of the story. The devil explains that he will check on the snake yearly: "I will come to you once on Saint George's Day, to make sure you are doing as I have advised you" (ibid.). St. George's Day is traditionally celebrated in April, and according to different stories, he fights with a dragon and slays it. The beginning of part in Arsim's story describes the timeline when the story begins, and it is repeated a couple of times: "It is early April, and I cannot take my eyes off him." (p. 12); "It is early April, and I desire another man unmistakably <…>" (p. 15).

The beginning story of God and the devil is connected with Arsim's and Miloš's storylines by mentioning the biblical saint and the month when his feast day is celebrated. It incorporates the unwanted animal—the snake in Paradise—into their literary world, creating a sense of chaos, desire, and incapability of control.

Conclusions

Bolla incorporates the snake-like creature as a hidden animal in the narrative structure. It is present in the book's name and explained as a dictionary entry, with three meanings correlating with the novel's three parts. In that way, the snake is invisible primarily on the textual level, but all the time, its presence seem to be present on the symbolic level, only rising to the novel's surface when Arsim reads his short story about the blind girl and the snake. The mention of Saint George contextualizes the snake's presence in seeking to interpret the story in a biblical paradigm, but does not exclude other possible interpretations of the animal, since the same story is loosely based on different legends. The short stories about the God and the Devil at the beginning of each part as well incorporate animals which function as Devil's associates, adding a layer of chaos to the whole story.

6. Discussion

As the analysis of the material at hand has been finished, it is time to discuss the results and findings based on the research questions of the thesis. Since the research tries to analyze literary animal representations in Statovci's novel *My Cat Yugoslavia, Crossing*, and *Bolla* by using the approach of Zoopoetics, it is vital to sum up how the method and the theory give new and interesting insights into Statovci's literary world and his animal figures. These issues will be discussed in the following chapters.

6.1. Statovci's Zoopoetics – A New Opportunity?

As was mentioned earlier, the term "zoopoetics" resulted as a sporadic utterance from Jacques Derrida, who mentioned "Kafka's vast zoopoetics". However, this *lapsus linguae* may be no accident after all – Kafka was fascinated by animals and sought to understand them through his work. As he wrote in the letter to his fiancé Felice Bauer: "I strive to know the entire human and animal community, to recognize their fundamental

preferences, desires, and moral ideals, to reduce them to simple rules, and as quickly as possible to adopt these rules" (Kafka, 1988, p. 545).

In her book "Kafka's Zoopoetics: Beyond the Human-Animal Barrier," Naama Harel explores Kafka's work, emphasizing non-human animals as the main point of Kafka's literary world. She states that one of the problems with interpreting Kafka's animals is the traditional allegorization of his stories, making them more about human beings than animals (Harel, 2020, p. 6). For instance, she asks what if the ape Red Peter from the novel "A Report to an Academy" (in German, *Ein Bericht für eine Akademie*) would be read not as an allegory of Jewish assimilation, colonization or human history of slavery, but rather about a living being that is self-assertive and independent from other species (Harel, 2020, pp. 7, 13, 162; see also Starthausen, 2021, pp. 611–612). Although there were discussions about Kafka's literature and animality in his literature from early on (take, for instance, Walter Benjamin's essay *Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death* or Deleuze's and Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*), this book is one of the first attempts to approach the works of Kafka from a zoopoetic perspective systematically.

A similar position can be taken here, in the case of Pajtim Statovci. By exploring his created literary world in the novels *My Cat Yugoslavia*, *Crossing*, and *Bolla*, in which humans and non-humans have a strenuous and intricate relationship with one another and the environment, a new field has been established for exploring these figures – Statovci's zoopoetics. It seems that animals, such as the snake, appearing in all of the analyzed novels, the cat, the eagle, and others are an essential part of every novel, no matter how much the writer tires to retreat from any labeling that he would be named an "animal writer": "Placing myself in the discussion as a writer of animal characters (as I am in my novel *My Cat Yugoslavia*) is extremely difficult." (Statovci, 2017, *The Guardian*).

6.2. The Question of Disappearance

In another article in *The Guardian*, children's writer Piers Torday has stated that animals have been vanishing from fiction at an alarming rate (Torday, 2021, *The Guardian*). He refers to a study by the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity in Leipzig, which researched 16,000 books by 4,000 authors (*Animal Human* website). They concluded that during 300 years, animal appearances in fiction have become less and less noticeable, i.e.,

authors have written less about nature. This means that readers are becoming less aware of nature and biodiversity in everyday life.

Despite a few fervent remarks about his books and boastings about his effort and research into understanding hares, Torday (2021) makes a relevant point: "<…> not because animals have been written out of novels. They've just been written in the wrong way". I would not state that animals have been "written in the wrong way", but rather that literature seeks both to reflect the disappearances of animals and to find a non-human voice to raise awareness for environmental problems. Statovci can be one of the examples in contemporary fiction that reflects animal disappearances, aims to give them a voice, and seeks to creatively speak about modern society's problems.

During my analysis, I have depicted a pattern in the animal appearances in Statovci's novels. They "disappear" as physical creatures from the three novels, becoming a narrative element with which the author plays. The cat and the snake in *My Cat Yugoslavia* appear to Bekim as animals with distinct and apparent physical forms that one can feel and touch. The cat is indulged in the human world, which differs from the feline's by having various social standards, rules, and morals. The eagle and the horse in *Crossing* differ from the cat and the snake in the previous book because they are not physically present in Bujar's world – they appear in his father's stories and only in his imagination and memory. In this case, the animals lose their distinct appearance to Bujar: he does not see them physically, but only mentally. *Bolla* is the most extreme example where the animal as a physical creature vanishes from the story. There is no physical appearance of the snake-like creature in the story. It is a construction in Arsim's short story. The animal is integrated into the novel's elements, such as its title and the beginnings of every part of the book, but does not express any notions of physicality.

There are two points to be made here. First, as the animal loses its physical appearance in the storyline, its interpretation becomes more metaphorical and symbolic. Particularly, the animals in *Crossing* and *Bolla* tend to require a more metaphorical approach because they function by a *mise en abyme* construction—whether that would be in Bujar's father's stories of the Albanian nation or Arsim's unexpressed interest in mythology and snakes.

The second point is that the literary animal in Statovci's works always exists between the anthropomorphic reading and seeking to "go beyond" this circumstance. In most

parts, the literary animal is expressed as a character; in this way, it is easier to treat it as "going beyond" the anthropomorphic reading. If the creature exists in a mythological sphere only, there are challenges in not interpreting the animal as a symbol or a metaphor. Of course, in most cases, it depends on the reader whether the challenge of looking deeper into the interpretation is worthwhile.

7. Concluding Summary

The growth of Statovci's popularity in the literary field begs the question of how much of his work has been analyzed by scholars. The researchers and critics presented at the beginning, such as Hanna-Leena Nissilä, Van Amesvoort & Dal Bosco, and others, suggested that the author has gained attention in academia, but only on a small scale. Researchers focused more on other topics, mainly in the context of migrant literature, to examine the author's oeuvre. Thus, the non-human portrayals have been neglected or analyzed on a small scale. Therefore, one of this thesis's aims was to provide new insights into Statovci's research by specifically problematizing the question of the animal in his novels *My Cat Yugoslavia*, *Crossing*, and *Bolla*.

To investigate these questions, Frederike Middelhoff, Sebastian Schönbeck, Roland Borgards, and Catrin Gersdorf offer a zoopoetical approach to exploring animals' characteristics and the relationship with the literary environment. They distinguished three categories for analyzing them in the text, and three for characterizing the literary domain in which they function. The chosen theory of Literary Animal Studies, explained by Borgards, Derrida, Fudge, Driscoll, Hoffmann, and others, enabled the problematization of Statovci's animal representations, viewing them in detail, and making new assumptions and conclusions regarding these novels mentioned above. The examples of other researchers' insights in poetry (Merle Marianne Feddersen's analysis of Les Murray's poems) and prose (Claire Cazajous-Augé's analysis of Rick Bass' short story "Antlers") also helped to notice how the question of animal could be approached in different genres.

During the research of Statovci's novels, exploring animals' presence and identifying their behavior, choices, and characteristics, several interesting assumptions were made. Using the abovementioned instruments, I noticed how differently animals appear in the author's texts. Some are independent characters with human-like agency, such as the cat and the snake in *My Cat Yugoslavia.* Others seem to lack a physical body or function in the

metatext, such as the eagle and the horse in *Crossing*, mostly in Bujar's memory and father's fairytales. Moreover, animals, such as the snake-like creature bolla in the eponymous novel, were absent from the whole text. Instead, it was used as a literary means to construct the invisible force that drove the narrative further and impacted characters' behavior and decisions.

Secondly, most animals that take part in the text act as abettors to seek different objectives. One of the recurring motives in these novels is coming back home from exile or finding one's true roots, in terms of culture, language, and identity. In *My Cat Yugoslavia*, the gay cat wants to meet Bekim's family, but the man lies about them to the cat, saying they are dead. However, the non-human finds that out, and immediately seeks to end the relationship. After that, Bekim decides to come back to his family's home country after several years. In *Crossing*, Agim and Bujar seek a better life, outside the Balkans, but one tragically dies. Bujar manipulates his identity, gender, and nationality. Still, the memories of his father's stories, mostly fairytales or legends with eagles and horses, indirectly help to flourish his Albanian roots and return to them after running around the world. In *Bolla*, the mythological story of a snake-like creature is interpreted as an animal that hides behind the narrative: Arsim only writes a short story about it, and dreams of it once, but the influence on him is intense and dramatic.

Of course, some minor points were briefly touched upon whilst conducting this research. Naturally, the biggest challenge was to "go beyond" the human-like reading, since we are used to interpreting different figures as symbols, metaphors, or intertexts in literature. These were the first thoughts when reading *My Cat Yugoslavia* and *Crossing*, as some scenes from the novels are familiar to Rainer Maria Rilke's poems *The Panther* or *Archaic Torso of Apollo*. To continue on this path would mean to search for intertextual connection in these novels, which no doubt they have. It would be interesting to see and compare how the question of the animal appears and reappears in literature from different centuries, or even on the local level – in Finnish literature. Moreover, there were thoughts on limitations of the chosen perspective, since in the cases where the animal's motif is not further developed; issues go beyond the metaphorical or symbolic perspective. Nevertheless, the insights help take on Statovci's work from other aspects.

This thesis could be a starting point for using Zoopoetics for other Statovci's texts. As mentioned earlier, the author is also interested in the subject, having n written a thesis on it. However, the findings in this thesis suggest that such an approach has not yet

been established in the Finnish academic discourse, which can potentially have a specific naming – *Statovci's Zoopoetics*. Nevertheless, the ideas from this thesis can be considered and extended in future research when taking different aspects of animality into account, i.e., anthropological, literary geography related, or political implications, that would make a broader picture in answering the problematic questions that Statovci raises for his readers.

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9. Santrauka

Vienas iš labiausiai populiarėjančių šiuolaikinės Suomijos literatūros vardų – Pajtimas Statovci. Nepaisant to, kad jo kūryba plačiai skaitoma ir aptarinėjama įvairiuose kultūros žurnaluose ar knygų festivaliuose, akademinių tyrimų kiekis išlieka dar ganėtinai mažas. Kartu, tyrėjai retai renkasi taikyti specifines literatūros teorijas jo tekstams analizuoti ir žvelgia į jo kūrybą migrantų literatūros kontekste.

Šis magistro darbas analizuoja Statovci‘o pirmąsias tris knygas iš literatūrinių gyvūnų studijų (*Literary Animal Studies*) perspektyvos. Į šią analizę įeina romanai „Mano katė Jugoslavija“ (suomiškai *Kissani Jugoslavia*, 2014), „Tiranos širdis“ (*Tiranan sydän,* 2016) ir „Bola” (*Bolla,* 2019). Šiuo tyrimu siekiama ištirti literatūrinių gyvūnų charakteristikas, jų elgesį ir funkcijas šiuose tekstuose, stengiantis atsitraukti nuo tradicinių literatūrologinių interpretacijų.

Pasinaudojant Frederikės Middelhoffo, Sebastiano Schönbecko, Rolando Borgardso, Catrinos Gersdorf‘os išskirtais zoopoetinės perspektyvos gyvūnų funkcijų ir jų santykio su literatūrine aplinka tipais, kartu su literatūrinių gyvūnų studijų (*Literary Animal Studies*) idėjomis, šios analizės tikslas yra ištirti Statovci‘o kūryboje atsirandančius literatūrinių gyvūnų motyvus, jų savybes, elgesį pasitelkiant literatūrinės analizės priemonėmis.

Šių romanų analizė atskleidžia, kad literatūriniai gyvūnai Statovci‘o kūryboje įgauna įvairius būvius ir formas: nuo tokių, kurie veikia kaip veikėjai, turintys panašių savybių į žmones, iki tokių, kurie mažai pasirodo romano tekste, bet egzistuoja jo naratyvinėje struktūroje. Romane „Mano katė Jugoslavija“ katinas didele dalimi veikia žmonių pasaulyje, kadangi jis geba kalbėti, reikšti savo nuomonę, dainuoti, dėvi žmogaus rūbus; tuo pat metu, jo katiniška išvaizda, laukinis elgesys neleidžia jo traktuoti kaip visiškai priklausomo žmonių rūšiai. Tame pačiame romane veikianti gyvatė pagal Zoopoetikos prieigą traktuojama kaip ambasadorė kitiems gyvūnams, kadangi didelė dalis pasakojimo apie ją užima prastos veisimo ir gyvenimo sąlygos. Romane „Tiranos širdis“ esantys gyvūnai – arklys, erelis, maža apimtimi liūtas – veikia metatekste – Bujaro tėčio pasakojimuose, pasakose ir legendose. Dažniausiai gyvūnų vaizdiniai iškyla vaikinui keliaujant po pasaulį ir vis netiesiogiai prisimenant savo šalį bei gyvenimą iki tėčio mirties, todėl gyvūnai gali būti laikomi kaip pagalbininkai ieškant savo identiteto. Romane „Bola“ gyvatės išvaizdos pabaisa tuo pačiu pavadinimu veikia ne pačiame tekste, o jo struktūroje: pavadinime, žodyno įraše

prieš romano pradžią ir trumpuose pasakojimuose apie Dievą ir Velnią. Šiuo atveju, mitologinė gyvatė veikia kaip nematoma jėga, daranti įtaką romano personažų sprendimams ir tapatybės paieškoms.

Rezultatai atskleidžia, kad įvairūs gyvūnai Statovci kūryboje gali turėti ne tik tradicines, antropomorfiškas interpretacijas. Siekis juos analizuoti „už“ tokių ribų parodo, kaip jie prisideda ir dalyvauja rašytojo kūrybiniame procese. Tuo pat metu jų bandymas kategorizuoti tam pasirinktoje tipologijoje kelia iššūkių, kadangi vieni gyvūnai gali lengvai pasiduoti kitokioms interpretacijomis, o kiti visgi lieka metaforos ar simbolio lygmenyje, ypač kai jų reikšmė nėra toliau plėtojama.

10. Summary

One of the most popular authors in contemporary Finnish literature is Pajtim Statovci. Although his work is widely read and discussed in various cultural magazines and book festivals, the amount of academic research done on his oeuvre remains small. At the same time, scholars rarely choose to apply specific literary theories to his texts and tend to view his works in the context of migrant literature.

This Master's thesis analyses Statovci's first three books from the perspective of Literary Animal Studies. This analysis includes the novels: *My Cat Yugoslavia* (in Finnish, *Kissani Yugoslavia*, 2014), *Crossing* (*Tiranan sydän*, 2016), and *Bolla* (2019). This study aims to investigate literary animals' characteristics, behavior, and functions in these texts, attempting to move away from traditional literary interpretations.

Using the types of animal functions and their relation to the literary environment identified by Frederike Middelhoff, Sebastian Schönbeck, Roland Borgards, and Catrina Gersdorf from a Zoopoetic perspective, together with the ideas of Literary Animal Studies, the aim of this analysis was to investigate the motifs of the literary animals, their characteristics, and their behavior that appear in the work of Statovci, utilizing the literary analysis tools.

The analysis of these novels reveals that literary animals in Statovci's work take various forms and shapes: from those that act as characters with similar characteristics to humans, to those that do not appear much in the text of the novel, but exist within its narrative structure. In *My Cat Yugoslavia*, the cat operates to a large extent in the human

world, as it is able to speak, express itself, sing, and wear human clothes; at the same time, its feline appearance and wild behavior prevent it from being treated as a fully human species. In the same novel, the snake is treated as an ambassador for other animals in a Zoopoetic approach, since a large part of the narrative is concerned with the poor breeding and living conditions. The animals in the novel *Crossing* – the horse, the eagle, and, to a small extent, the lion - are present in the metatext, in the stories, tales, and legends of Bujar's dad. Most often, animal imagery comes up as the boy travels around the world, with ever-implicit memories of his country and his life before his father's death so that animals can be seen as helpers in the search for identity. In the novel *Bolla*, the snake-like monster of the same name does not appear in the text itself, but in the structure of the text: in the title, in the vocabulary entry before the beginning of the novel, and the short stories about God and the Devil. In this case, the mythological serpent acts as an invisible force influencing the decisions and search for identity of the characters in the novel.

The results reveal that various animals in Statovci's work can have different interpretations from traditional anthropomorphic ones. The aim of analyzing them "beyond" such boundaries shows how they participate and contribute to the writer's creative process. At the same time, the attempt to categorize them within a chosen typology poses challenges, as some animals can easily succumb to other interpretations. In contrast, others remain at the level of metaphor or symbol, especially when their meaning is not further developed in the novel.