

Childhood

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Research Background

My recent research concentrates on ficto-criticism, the use of fiction as academic discourse, and the use of fictional techniques to explore animal rights and ecology. 'Childhood' reinforces a fundamental Utilitarian argument outlined by Peter Singer ('All Animals are Equal' in Tom Regan & Peter Singer [eds.], *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, New Jersey, 1989, pp. 148-162) that a non-human animal has the same rights as humans to suffer as little pain as possible.

Research Contribution

'Childhood' uses the form of memoir to explore eco-critical issues, non-human animal empathy and deep ecology, and the damaged relationship between non-human and human animals. The protagonist, by virtue of his age and ideology is an oppressed, voiceless advocate for animal rights. He rescues birds injured by arbitrary human cruelty, and protests the killing of cane toads. The protagonist also makes the central argument of the piece that 'Humans are the invasive pests who destroy the environment' and endeavours to reinforce the intellectual argument with the pathos of emotional empathy.

Research Significance

This story is part of a series of ficto-critical pieces that explore animal suffering, and the relationship between human and non-human. It complements my critical work which argues the same issues in more conventionally critical ways (for example, my latest paper, 'Hunting Animals in J.M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*', forthcoming, *Social Alternatives* 2014). 'Childhood' is also the embryo for a larger project, a series of Young Adult speculative fiction novels that deal with social issues, *Parallax* (commissioned by Zharmae Publishing, USA 2014).