Relations
BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

12.1
June 2024

Decolonial Animal Ethics and Indigenous Philosophies

Edited by Francesco Allegri

Studies and Research Contributions

Decolonial Animal Ethic in Eden Robinson's *Trickster Trilogy* 9
Denisa Krásná

Non-anthropocentrism as Participation alongside Perspective: Indigenous Philosophers and Dynamics of Inter-species Kinship 29
Kat Wehrheim

Popular and Decolonial Veganism: Animal Rights, Racialized and Indigenous Subjectivities in Latin America 49
Juan José Ponce León

Profitization: Ignoring the Ones Who Came First 69
Alyssa Maria D'Ambrosio

Comments, Debates, Reports and Interviews

Singer and the New *Animal Liberation* 85
Francesco Allegri

Author Guidelines 97

Decolonial Animal Ethic in Eden Robinson's *Trickster Trilogy**

Denisa Krásná

Palacký University Olomouc (Czechia)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.7358/rela-2024-01-krad

den.krasna@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Indigenous epistemologies are full of warnings against human destructiveness and many contemporary Indigenous authors write provocative Anthropocene stories that question the centrality of humans in the world. In her latest work "Trickster Trilogy" (2017, 2018, 2021), the award-winning "Haisla/Heiltsuk" writer Eden Robinson disrupts traditional anthropocentric narratives by giving agency to her nonhuman characters. While she gives voice to silenced groups, she does not speak for but rather with nonhuman animals by connecting their ongoing oppression in the settler-colonial context to the position of Indigenous peoples, echoing Billy-Ray Belcourt (Driftpile Cree) and his decolonial animal ethic that sees colonization of Indigenous peoples and nonhuman animals as interconnected. Robinson sheds light on the precarious lives nonhuman animals lead in the Anthropocene and condemns environmental destruction and injustice that she links to expansive colonialism and thirst for profit, power, and status. "Trickster Trilogy" offers hope to both human and nonhuman animals as it enriches the conversation on decolonization and, as such, it constitutes an important addition to decolonial narratives that challenge the traditional colonial anthropocentric worldview.

Keywords: Anthropocene; Canadian literature; decolonial animal ethic; decolonization; Eden Robinson; environmental justice; indigenous literature; indigenous resurgence; interconnectedness; Trickster Trilogy.

1. INTRODUCTION

> *"Human," she said. "We're dying because you're killing us." – "I'm not killing anyone." – "You're killing the world and you have the nerve to wonder why we hate you."*
>
> Eden Robinson, *Son of a Trickster* (2017, 335)

* The work on this paper was supported by the project JP_2024_028 implemented within the framework of the Palacky' University Young Researcher Grant.

In the 21st century, humanity stands at a crossroads, confronted by the profound consequences of its actions on the natural world. Climate change, the defining challenge of our era, looms large, pushing the boundaries of our planet's climate and ecosystems to the brink. This dramatic transformation of Earth's environment, driven by the relentless pursuits of industrialization and capitalism, has ushered in what some scholars term the Anthropocene – a geological epoch characterized by the unprecedented influence of human activities on the planet. Yet, this influence extends beyond the ecological realm into the very fabric of human societies, their values, and their relationships with the nonhuman world. This article explores how these themes resonate in Eden Robinson's *Trickster Trilogy*, with special attention paid to the complexity of human-animal relations and the challenges and possibilities that lie at the heart of this contemporary epoch.

In her paper, Norma R.A. Romm underscores the significance of recognizing Indigenous perspectives on interconnected knowledge systems. These perspectives view individuals as inherently linked to one another and all aspects of the natural world. Romm contends that many discussions on the Anthropocene fail to sufficiently emphasize how human impact is deeply rooted in Western-oriented rational paradigms that have historically dominated. In contrast, Indigenous philosophies prioritize the interconnectedness of all life, emphasizing humanity's responsibility to care for both one another and the Earth. This approach acknowledges that our existence is interdependent, requiring mutual support with both living and non-living entities. Romm further suggests a critical examination of past power dynamics and prevailing worldviews that have driven manipulative approaches. This introspection leads to a reconsideration of the values guiding the Anthropocene, with a deliberate incorporation of Indigenous perspectives and principles of stewardship at its forefront (Romm 2018, 1-18).

It is only in recent times that postcolonial scholarship has begun this introspection and started to acknowledge the pivotal, albeit involuntary and lamentable, role that nonhuman animals have played within the context of colonialism. In his paper "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)Locating Animality in Decolonial Thought" (2014), the Driftpile Cree Nation scholar Billy-Ray Belcourt introduces what he calls "decolonial animal ethic" that acknowledges nonhuman animals as subjects of colonization, thus integrating them into decolonial discourse. Belcourt's work contends that white supremacy, neoliberal capitalism, and colonialism are sustained through the simultaneous exploitation and erasure of both nonhuman animal and Indigenous bodies. He employs the concept

of a "politics of space" to show how westward expansion and planned relocation affected both groups, pushing nonhuman animals and Indigenous peoples beyond the frontier, segregating them from settler society, and confining them within demarcated spaces.

To challenge anthropocentric views of nonhuman animals, Belcourt advocates for "re-centering of animality through Indigenous cosmologies and epistemologies" (2014, 8), which envision new human-animal relationships and assign sacred roles to nonhuman animals. Similarly, in his seminal work *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* the Cherokee Nation scholar Daniel Heath Justice underscores the potential of art and literature in fostering curiosity and eliciting "the empathy required for healthy, respectful, and sustainable relationships with a whole host of beings and peoples" (2018, 77). Indigenous knowledge systems are replete with cautionary tales about human destructiveness, and many contemporary Indigenous authors are crafting thought-provoking narratives set in the Anthropocene era that challenge the conventional notion of humans as the central figures in the world.

This paper will demonstrate how the acclaimed *Haisla/Heiltsuk* writer Eden Robinson reflects Belcourt's decolonial animal ethic in her *Trickster Trilogy* (2017, 2018, 2021). In this literary series, Robinson disrupts traditional anthropocentric narratives by highlighting the agency of her nonhuman characters. Robinson's narrative amplifies the voices of marginalized groups and engages in dialogue with nonhuman animals, connecting their ongoing oppression in the settler-colonial context to the colonization of Indigenous peoples, thereby echoing the principles underpinning Belcourt's decolonial animal ethic. The trilogy denounces the profit-driven fur trade that has driven many species to near-extinction and illuminates the ongoing precarious existence of nonhuman animals in the Anthropocene era while condemning environmental degradation linked to expansive colonialism and the relentless pursuit of profit, power, and prestige.

In the *Trilogy*, nonhuman animal characters play active roles in shaping human identities and cultures, while their relationships with humans serve as a mode of resistance against colonialism. Through the portrayal of diverse interspecies kinships, Robinson challenges the Western notion of speciesism, which rigidly classifies nonhuman animals as either "wild" or "domesticated". This binary categorization not only establishes hierarchies among nonhuman animals based on their assigned status by humans but also artificially constructs interspecies connections by limiting human interactions to specific species and imposing a standardized model of human-animal relationships determined by species. By envi-

sioning alterNative, egalitarian kinship ties with nonhuman animals, the *Trilogy* actively contributes to the process of decolonization for all.

2. Animal colonialism in North America

"Animal colonialism" is an expression used by postcolonial animal studies scholars that encompasses two main fundamental dimensions. Firstly, it refers to the utilization of domesticated animals as unwilling tools of colonization, enabling European conquest, territorial expansion, and the eradication of both free-roaming animals and Indigenous societies. Secondly, animal colonialism is exemplified by the imposition of the Western anthropocentric worldview, which hierarchically places humans at the top of and as separate from all animal species, thereby justifying their exploitation for human benefit, frequently leading to substantial environmental changes (Cohen 2013, 268).

At the heart of animal colonialism lies the exploitation of domesticated animals as involuntary instruments of colonization. This exploitation played a pivotal role in enabling European invasion, expansion, and the erasure of both free-living animals and Indigenous communities. Domesticated animals, such as cattle, horses, and pigs, were pressed into service by colonizers, serving dual roles in the grand colonial project. They served as invaluable tools for colonization while alive, assisting in tasks like agriculture, transportation, and labor-intensive construction projects, but also while dead, as their bodies became sources of animal-derived products like meat, milk, and hides, further fuelling the colonial enterprise. This dual usefulness hierarchically positioned domesticated animals above their free-roaming counterparts, perpetuating the belief that the latter needed to vanish from the landscape to make way for Western "civilization".

The echoes of animal colonialism reverberate in the treatment of Indigenous communities as well. Indigenous peoples, deeply connected to the land and its inhabitants, were considered "wild", "animal-like" obstacles in the North American landscape by European colonizers. As such, they were forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands, which were reimagined as suitable only for European agricultural systems. Indigenous peoples, who often lacked domesticated animals, were assigned animal status, dehumanized, and categorized as "savage" much like their free-roaming animal counterparts. This dehumanization was used to justify both physical and cultural genocide based on the principles of anthropocentrism and speciesism (Brown 2016, 21).

Beyond the exploitation of nonhuman animals, animal colonialism is also embodied in the imposition of the Western anthropocentric worldview, a paradigm that places humans hierarchically above all other animals. This worldview, grounded in the belief of human exceptionalism, justifies the exploitation of nonhuman animals for human benefit, often resulting in profound environmental transformations. This anthropocentric lens not only sanctions the exploitation of nonhuman animals but also limits human interaction with certain species, artificially constructing norms for relationships with nonhuman animals. Today, the animalizing discourse is also wielded against various other minority groups. The act of "dehumanizing" racialized communities has detrimental effects for both human and nonhuman animals, perpetuating violence and denying "animality its own subjectivity", transforming it into a mode of existence that can be equated with racial and ethnic identity (Belcourt 2014, 5).

Moreover, the environmental consequences of animal colonialism are starkly evident. The large-scale slaughter of buffalo, an iconic example, decimated populations and altered ecosystems irreversibly. As ranching spread across the continent, free-roaming animals faced habitat destruction and hunting, leading to the endangerment of numerous species and destruction of the environment (LaDuke 2017, 146). Ranchers waged war on nonhuman animals that were perceived as hindrances to their enterprise, with wolves becoming prime targets. The relentless violence against wolves reached brutal extremes, as ranchers employed horrific tactics like burning wolf pups alive in their dens and offering bounties for captured wolves, often subjecting them to public torture (Nibert 2013, 109). This violent hateful rhetoric not only justified violence against wolves but also against Indigenous populations who were seen as "more akin to wolves than to European peoples", further blurring the lines between the colonization of nonhuman animals and Indigenous communities (Montford and Taylor 2020, 141).

The initial manifestation of animal colonialism in North America involved the hunting of free-living animals for their skins and furs, which were then exported to Europe. The fur trade that swept across North America during the colonial period brought about profound and far-reaching consequences for both nonhuman animals and the environment, leaving a lasting impact on ecosystems and wildlife populations. Some species, such as beavers and otters, were relentlessly hunted for their valuable fur, prized for its warmth and beauty. Consequently, these animals were driven to the brink of extinction. Beyond beavers and otters, the fur trade also contributed to the severe decline of various other animal species, including

elk, rabbits, bears, squirrels, wolves, wild cats, minks, and geese, resulting in a significant loss of biodiversity in many areas (Nibert 2013, 73).

Furthermore, the fur trade disrupted ecosystems in significant ways. For example, beavers, which were heavily trapped for their fur, are known for their dam-building activities, creating wetlands that serve as crucial habitats for various species. The extensive trapping of beavers disrupted these wetland ecosystems, leading to alterations in water flow, vegetation, and the overall balance of the ecosystem. The mass killing of beavers also resulted in the loss of riparian zones along rivers and streams. These zones play a vital role in filtering water, reducing erosion, and providing habitat for aquatic life. Additionally, the decline in predator populations, such as wolves, due to the fur trade had cascading effects on prey populations and vegetation, profoundly affecting the structure and functioning of ecosystems (Nibert 2013, 71).

The fur trade also had a significant impact on Indigenous communities whose traditional practices and relationships with other animals were disrupted. In her paper, "Veganism and Mik'maq Legends", the Mik'maq scholar Margaret Robinson explains that Indigenous communities, in order to participate in the fur trade, fishing industry, and factory farming, were compelled to adapt their practices and philosophies, perceiving nonhuman animals as "the other" or mere objects rather than kin. This detachment from nonhuman animals also translated to a disconnection from traditional spirituality. Today, the fur trade stands as a stark example of the shortsighted exploitation of nature, underscoring the repercussions of prioritizing profit over ecological sustainability and the well-being of both human and nonhuman animals. This historical precedent is notably relevant in the context of the Anthropocene, where contemporary practices often mirror the same prioritization of short-term gains at the expense of long-term environmental stability and the harmony of all living beings.

3. Decolonial animal ethic in "Trickster Trilogy"

> *Maybe you can't feel it yet. The end of us all. Like a wildfire on the horizon. We can see the end glowing brighter every day. We can hear other voices going silent.*
>
> Eden Robinson, *Return of the Trickster* (2021, Loc. 3800)

Eden Robinson's most recent work, *Trickster Trilogy*, aligns with what Daniel Heath Justice calls a "wonderwork". According to Justice's defini-

tion, wonderworks serve as reminders that alternative worlds and realities coexist alongside and within our own. These artistic creations, whether in literature, film, or other forms, "centre this possibility within Indigenous values and toward Indigenous, decolonial purposes" (Justice 2018, 153). For Western readers, *Trickster Trilogy* can be described as a supernatural coming-of-age narrative imbued with elements of thriller and Gothic genres, consistently infused with dark humor. The story revolves around the protagonist, Jared Martin, a Heiltsuk teenager hailing from Kitimat in Northern British Columbia. Jared faces a multitude of challenges in his life, including navigating his mother's unpredictable emotional outbursts and her abusive boyfriend's violence. He also contends with the pressures of drug-addicted peers, an on-and-off activist girlfriend named Sarah, his own battle with alcohol addiction, and a perplexing ability to perceive supernatural beings of various kinds. These beings range from ape-men, ghosts, and magical fireflies to otters possessing supernatural powers, floating heads in the wall, and even dolphin people, among others.

Son of a Trickster (2017), the first book of the trilogy, unfolds in the town of Kitimat and primarily revolves around Jared's tumultuous high school years. During this period, he engages in selling pot-infused cookies at wild parties, grapples with alcohol abuse, and navigates dysfunctional relationships. In *Trickster Drift* (2018), the narrative shifts to Vancouver as Jared embarks on a new chapter in his life. He pursues higher education, resides with his progressive academic aunt, and diligently attends AA meetings to confront and overcome his addiction, a pivotal journey for his survival and personal growth. The final novel in the series, *Return of the Trickster* (2021) stands out as the darkest of the three. It introduces a wealth of supernatural elements while delving into the protagonist's profound existential and identity struggles. This book discusses complex themes, including guilt, grief, and social responsibility, providing a gripping exploration of Jared's transformation and the challenges he faces throughout the series.

Moreover, Robinson grants agency to her nonhuman characters and thus disrupts anthropocentric narratives. She also draws a compelling parallel to the histories and current circumstances of Indigenous peoples. Possibly the strongest female characters in the novels who rise up to revenge their genocide and ongoing abuse include otters with supernatural abilities. Even though at first Jared perceives the otters as bloodthirsty villains, gradually he comes to sympathize with the otters as he uncovers the reasons for their grudge against humans. While not being slaughtered

in mass for their fur anymore, they are still endangered by human activity that is causing climate change:

> "Human," she said. "We're dying because you're killing us." – "I'm not killing anyone." – "You're killing the world and you have the nerve to wonder why we hate you." (Robinson 2017, 335)

Environmental degradation ultimately affects all species but it does not affect everyone in the same way and at the same time. Human and non-human animals in the North are facing enormous challenges and their traditional way of life is nearing extinction due to the accelerated impacts of climate change. Indigenous peoples face environmental racism on reserves as wild animal species go extinct after having had their ecosystems destroyed by agriculture and resource extraction industries.

In Haida culture and other West Coast First Nations, otters are believed to be powerful agents and play a crucial role in many stories. Land otters are distinguished from sea otters who are generally considered more peaceful and amiable despite having been extensively hunted for their pelts after Captain Cook started "*the fur trade that wiped out sea otter populations from Alaska to California* [...] Extirpation *is the dry, scientific word for the absolute destruction of a local population. A mini-extinction, if you will"* (Robinson 2021, Loc. 1974; emphasis in original). In *Trickster Drift*, a shapeshifting sea otter Neeka assures frightened Jared about the difference between land and sea otters: "'Those were river otters [...].' 'How are you different?' [...] 'We want to be your friends'" (Robinson 2018, Loc. 410-416). Land, or river, otters are generally feared as they are believed to "use trickery to capsize *canoes* and acquire the souls of the drowned travelers, carrying them off to the *spirit world* and transforming them gradually to Land Otter people, destined only to cause harm, wander disconsolately and prey on human souls" (Shearar 2008, 67; emphasis in original). The contrasting beliefs and behaviors associated with land otters and sea otters in Haida culture and other West Coast First Nations highlight the complex and nuanced relationship between humans and these powerful animal agents in their stories and traditions.

Land Otter people also appear in *Trickster Trilogy* and can be read as an outcome of Western expansion. Robinson clarifies that land otters were driven to their violent behavior by humans whom they "loathe [...] for the genocide they perpetrated and [therefore] will take human form to lure the unsuspecting to their death" (Robinson 2018, Loc. 542). In contrast to land otters, sea otters are less revengeful but they also use violence

in defense as well as to protect their families and friends, and their rights. Their somewhat violent behavior and approach to liberation can be assigned to protectiveness and paralleled to several Indigenous resurgence movements around the world that have been generally unjustly perceived and portrayed as violent by the dominant culture (e.g., the Zapatistas[1], Kurds[2], Hawaiian sovereignty movement[3], DAPL protests[4], Idle No More[5], etc.). Jared's aunt Georgina reminds her nephew of the genocidal European colonization that left many Indigenous people and nonhuman animals indignant: "The river otters that tortured you were deranged with grief [...]. You can't use them as a yardstick for all animals. It's not fair" (Robinson 2018, Loc. 72). Hence, the contrasting behaviors of land otters and sea otters in *The Trilogy* reflect both the consequences of Western expansion and the complexities of Indigenous resurgence movements, challenging unfair portrayals and emphasizing the multifaceted nature of their actions.

To confirm Georgina's words and show that not all animals/Indigenous people are resentful and seek revenge, Robinson introduces beavers and juxtaposes them to otters. In a chapter dedicated only to beavers, Robinson recounts the history of the fur trade that drove beavers to extinction in most places in Europe and to a near extinction in North America: "*From 1550 to 1850, felt hats made from beaver fur were valuable status symbols that told the wearer's story of wealth, rank and privilege to the casual viewing eye, much the same way a luxury car does these days*" (Robinson 2018, Loc. 395,5; emphasis in original). Robinson denounces

[1] The Zapatistas (EZLN) are Indigenous communities (mainly of Maya descent) residing in autonomous territories in Chiapas. They are one of the largest and most successful contemporary Indigenous movements against capitalism.

[2] The Kurds in Rojava (AANES), like the Zapatistas, practice sustainable agriculture that earned them such denominations as "radical eco-anarchist experiment" (Shilton). Around five million people of all backgrounds, genders, religions, classes, and nations united in 2012 in Rojava to create a multi-ethnic egalitarian, cooperative, and environmentally conscious society with decentralized self-governance and direct democracy that stands against capitalism and patriarchy (Allard *et al.* 2019).

[3] A grassroots political and cultural campaign advocating for sovereignty, self-determination and self-governance for Native Hawaiians in an independent nation.

[4] Environmental and human rights Indigenous-led protests at Standing Rock in 2016 and 2017 against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. See Nicolescu 2018.

[5] One of the most prominent and largest contemporary Indigenous environmental decolonial movements in Canada that has spread into other parts of the world, including Hawaii. See Nicolescu 2018.

killing driven by lust and power and ridicules the settler-colonial construct of status and hierarchy that continues to motivate many settlers' actions now just as it did a few centuries ago. Comparison to a luxury car that generally features leather seats draws attention to the continued exploitation of nonhuman animals for the culturally constructed ideas about power.

Despite having enough reasons to seek revenge and having supernatural abilities like otters, beavers "*have no interest in shape-shifting to exact guerrilla retribution*" (Robinson 2018, Loc. 396,5; emphasis in original). Just like Jared's girlfried Sarah continually complains that Jared and her grandmother, Mrs Jaks, have "unthinkingly accepted [their] oppression" (Robinson 2017, 244), otters wonder: "*How can they* [beavers] *forgive? How do they continue to live as if nothing happened after so much wrong has been done to them? How are they not consumed by hate like everyone else?*" (Robinson 2018. Loc. 396,5; emphasis in original). One of the main focal points in *The Trilogy* appears to be highlighting the intricate nature of confronting ongoing colonization in North America as it follows Jared's metaphorical transformation from a "politically vacant", apathetic, and peaceful beaver to a strong and determined otter seeking decolonial justice. This conversion is symbolically accentuated by Jared's literal shape-shift to a supernatural flying creature at the very end of the second book and his first killing of a few innocent beings in order to save his own family.

The animal and literary studies scholar Timothy C. Baker claims that the body's ability to transform implies that cultural beliefs, values, and ideologies projected onto it can also transform. He argues that "metamorphosis is not a replacement of one identity for another, but a wholly new perspective" (2019, 86). Baker examines the transformation of female foxes in literature as a means of challenging gender roles and rethinking species, building upon the ideas of Braidotti, Deleuze, and Guattari, who propose that "becoming-animal" challenges the stability of given identities rather than a process of transitioning between stable states (Baker 2019, 80). By analyzing literary portrayals of physical and psychological transformation, Baker demonstrates the ongoing interconnectedness between embodiment and the environment.

The lethal violence that Jared perpetrates in defense of his family after his metamorphosis provokes feelings of strong guilt in Jared. In the final book of the trilogy, he is having guilt-ridden nightmares and spends his days worrying about "what [he's] become" (Robinson 2021, Loc. 639) because he let a pack of coy wolves die instead of interfering. Jared's introspective reaction shows that seeing suffering with one's own eyes can have transformative effect on one's behavior as opposed to being

simply aware of a distanced suffering. Institutions inducing violence are based on this simple logic; for example slaughterhouses are strategically located to hide the state-induced suffering as capitalist system is dependent on the consumers' passive acceptance of state-sanctioned violence.

But Robinson wonders about the practicality of guilt: "guilt is a useless emotion. What does it do, really? Makes you feel bad and that makes you feel virtuous because you feel bad" (Robinson 2021, Loc. 523). Here Robinson echoes those studies in affect theory that see guilt alone as inadequate in addressing the structural nature of colonialism and the complexities of social justice. For example, in her article "Complicity, Critique, and Methodology", Fiona Probyn suggests that guilt and attempts at expiation may not fully capture the depth and systemic nature of oppressive structures. Instead, she presents complicity as a more comprehensive concept that recognizes the ongoing presence and responsibility associated with historical and contemporary links (Probyn 2007, 78).

Jared is trying to alleviate his feelings of guilt by evoking the coy wolves' otherness: "They weren't even human, he told himself" (Robinson 2021, Loc. 355). But using animalizing discourse means adopting the Western humanist mindset that justifies not only speciesism but also white supremacy. The trope of animality has been weaponized to advance the colonial project. By rendering other animals as inferior, as objects, and resources for human ends, the abuse and killing of animalized others is seen as necessary to the advancement of human "civilization". Following this logic, different groups of humans have been minoritized over the course of history by ascribing them with the animal status (Montford and Taylor 2020, 135). As Justice writes "to be 'treated like an animal' is, in North America, to be the target of sadistic cruelty. This phrase says everything about how animals – and some humans – are understood in broader consciousness" (2018, 91). But animalizing discourse is also harmful to other animals as it "performs an epistemic violence that denies animality its own subjectivity" (Belcourt 2014, 5). Dehumanization of certain human beings is only possible if anthropocentrism and speciesism are deployed as normative institutions and frameworks. Their disruption is thus crucial to decolonization.

Jared's guilt confirms that he knows that the coy wolves' "otherness" cannot legitimize their murder. Indigenous cosmologies re-conceptualize the Western understanding of "difference" where "difference isn't deficiency – it's simply difference" (Justice 2018, 76). But living in a settler-colonial state that operates as a human supremacist institution inevitably affects how Jared feels about his own nonhumanness: "[he] didn't want

to admit he was something other than a regular human" (Robinson 2021, Loc. 102). His initial refusal of his otherness is a natural self-defence mechanism in a society that does not value difference and that criminalizes animality. When he admits his difference to himself, he starts to wonder: "How much did it matter that he wasn't the same kind of human as everyone else in this apartment building? This country? This world?" (Loc. 646). In a decolonized society free of anthropocentrism, Jared would be spared of this conundrum.

Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate) reminds us that Western dualisms such as human/animal, man/woman, civilization/nature, good/evil, rational/emotional, real/supernatural are "stubborn binaries [...] that underlie violent hierarchies in our world" (qtd. in Montford and Taylor 2020, 135). Often, these binaries are grouped together into two main hierarchical binary categories. This categorization then determines how those who fit into one or another group are treated. Ecofeminist scholarship deconstructs these dualisms to explain the concurrent abuse of women and nature, as well as people of color and nature. Simplistic associations between those who fall into the subordinate category, such as women, minoritized people, nature, other animals, etc., explain similarities in their treatment and perception in the settler-colonial context which sees them as "a servant to the dominant (not subordinate) population" (Gaard 2001, 161).

Robinson mocks these simplistic dualisms by creating a whole range of characters who cannot be so easily categorized and by blending what the Western binary sees as "natural/real" with "supernatural/unreal". By creating a protagonist who does not fall into any traditional Western category, Robinson urges the reader who follows Jared's journey to transform together with him and start questioning their own flawed assumptions and binary ways of thinking. Jared does not "feel inhuman. Unhuman. Nonhuman. Whatever the term was for being not the same kind of human as everyone else. He still felt like himself, more or less" (Robinson 2021, Loc. 214). Jared's identity issues spring from the Western society's emphasis on rigid categorization that has especially harmed queer people who have been denied self-identification for millennia.

Robinson also seems to mock the Western society's need to categorize and label while at the same time highlighting the power of language. This is visible in a witty exchange where Jared is being corrected by whom he previously called "magical fireflies": "Just to be clear, fireflies are beetles with luminescent organs [...]. As we've told you many, many times, *we* are *ultradimensional* beings [...] Polymorphic-Being-in-Human-Form Jared"

(Robinson 2021, Loc. 2224). While Robinson may be ridiculing excessive political correctness, she also shows that "FYI, words hurt" (Loc. 1231). Her own deliberate choice of words further serves to highlight the sexism and speciesism inherent in our common language.

Language plays a major role in the construction of the world and contributes to the maintenance of status quo that it can, however, also challenge. Critical Discourse Analysis provides an account of the role of language in power relations and examines how language reproduces dominance and inequality. Arran Stibbe applies Critical Discourse Analysis to explain how language specifically constructs other animals as objects for human use and thus contributes to their exploitation. His article unmasks how other animals are represented in language as inferior, be it via conventional metaphors that are overwhelmingly negative to some animals or via animal names that are used as insults. Carol Adams also affirms that "a subject first is viewed, or objectified, through metaphor" (1990, 153). Stibbe reveals a clear pattern: "the closer the relation of dominance of a particular species by humans, the more negative the stereotypes" (2001, 150). In *Trickster Trilogy*, Eden Robinson makes this pattern evident. For example, "chicken" is repeatedly used as an insult in the novels when Jared is called a "brainless chicken" by Georgina, his main nemesis (Robinson 2021, Loc. 222, 397). In another instance, "chicken" is used as a negative metaphor for fear when someone is referred to as being "a chicken" (Loc. 3987). Robinson also criticizes the use of terms that mask violence: "Extirpation *is the dry, scientific word for the absolute destruction of a local population. A mini-extinction, if you will"* (Loc. 1974; emphasis in original). Robinson's use of language in *The Trilogy* vividly illustrates how linguistic representations perpetuate power dynamics and reinforce the objectification and exploitation of animals, highlighting the importance of critical discourse analysis in uncovering and challenging these harmful patterns.

In contrast to this colonial discourse, Jared's Indigenous activist girlfriend Sarah who repeatedly resolutely condemns settler-colonial agriculture chooses the word "flesh" over "meat" when she speaks of dead animals killed for human consumption: "Let's bake the flesh of an intelligent animal that spent its life shackled in its own feces" (Robinson 2017, 250). Both Adams and Stibbe consider the word "meat" an absent referent as it was invented together with the terms "beef" or "pork" to discursively create distance between the consumer and the living animal in order "to keep *something* (like hamburger) from being seen as having been some*one* (a cow, a lamb, a once-alive being, a subject)" (Adams 2014, 23; emphasis

in original). By using the same expressions that would be used for humans, Robinson disrupts the speciesist bias inherent in our everyday language.

The trilogy also points out the absurd tendency of humans to group all other animal species into one category. When Eliza, Jared's neighbor's young daughter asks him "Do you think it's a squid monster or an octopus monster?", Jared simply replies "It's just a monster", which he gets scolded for by Eliza's dead father whom Jared sees as a ghost: "It's an octopus, dumb-ass" (Robinson 2021, Loc. 2368). This scene underscores the absurdity of homogenizing diverse animal species and highlights the importance of recognizing and respecting their individuality. Ortiz-Robles calls the binary category of humans and other animals (us-and-them) "a figment of our imagination, [...] [that] denies difference on a larger scale" (2016, 4). This linguistic denial of difference between individual other-than-human species does two things: it denies animal subjectivities and it perpetuates the imagined binary category of humans on the one hand and other animals on the other. This is linguistically accentuated by the use of the term "animal" to encompass all species except for humans. This semantic exclusion further perpetuates anthropocentrism and the socially constructed human supremacy over other animals.

But both Justice and Ortiz-Robles highlight the many attributes that humans lack in contrast to other animal species who are thus capable of things that humans could not accomplish or excel at without the use of technology, such as flying, fast and long-distance swimming, running, surviving in what humans call "wilderness", etc. Many other animal species also have much more developed senses, be it hearing, smelling, or seeing. Justice points out that humans "might well be considered quite stupid and barely sentient if bird sense was the standard against which we were measured" (2018, 38). *Trickster Trilogy* unmasks various human weaknesses throughout the novels by having several nonhuman characters literally wear the human skin. In this way, Robinson sharply contrasts human abilities to other animals' much more developed senses. For example, this is captured in a conversation between a raven and a wee'git who shapeshifted into a human form but is usually in a raven body. As a human, he is unable to recognize his raven friend for which he apologizes: "It's hard to tell with these human noses" (Robinson 2021, Loc. 3727); "Human eyes are so limited. Your feathers are all one colour to human eyes" (Loc. 495). The novels thus stress the need to consider "perspective" as necessarily and always situated. This exploration of perspective serves as a reminder that our understanding of the world is inherently situated, human-centric, and influenced by our own limitations.

It encourages readers to adopt a more humble and inclusive approach, recognizing the vast diversity of experiences and perspectives that exist beyond the human realm.

By putting other animals into human skin, Robinson reverses traditional roles. Like other animals who are exploited for their skin and hidden as absent referents under the words "leather" and "fur", human bodies here serve as mere resources. Moreover, the deficiency of human body in contrast to the better adapted other animals' bodies is accentuated: "*This human skin. So easily cold*" (Robinson 2021, Loc. 1955; emphasis in original). In this way, Robinson echoes Justice's question "And why do we even ask why animals aren't more like humans?" (2018, 38). If Justice writes that humans' unique ability is "wilful, self-deluding destruction" (*ibid*.), Robinson concurs with this proposition in *Trickster Trilogy*, which is replete with themes and motifs that critically engage with the concept of the Anthropocene, both hidden and evident (the word "anthropocene" is even included in a chapter's title).

Robinson employs coywolves in *Trickster Trilogy* as tangible manifestations of the Anthropocene, resulting from the profound environmental impact and excessive violence inflicted by humans upon their surroundings. Descendants of wolves, coyotes, and dogs, coy wolves emerged as a hybrid new species as a consequence of human destruction of natural habitats of wolves and coyotes who started to interbreed as a survival strategy (Ortiz-Robles 2016, 8). Coy wolves are more adapted for life in the Anthropocene as they are omnivorous and use urban and suburban areas as their territories. As such, they can be considered what humans pejoratively term "invasive species" but as Ortiz-Robles explains "invasive species typically become invasive through human agency, irreversibly altering the ecosystems into which they enter and often causing the displacement or extinction of native species" (*ibid*.). Coy wolves' existence is also the result of human activity.

In *The Trilogy*, "supernatural" coy wolves use human organs that Georgina, the trilogy's main nemesis, provides for them in order to mask them as humans: "The wolves surrounding her were bred with coyotes and probably dogs. Mutts with attitude. Alert. Ready to pounce. The familiar giggling buildup to cruelty" (Robinson 2021, Loc. 590). By casting Georgina into the role of the organ provider, Robinson shifts the blame onto humans whose actions drive coy wolves to violence as they "just want to keep [their] pack alive" (Loc. 3800). Coy wolves also serve as an "alert" in the trilogy, as a result and embodiment of climate change that will eventually destroy the planet, including humans who caused it.

Violent as they may be, it is noteworthy that even coy wolves condemn slaughterhouses as the most atrocious unnatural spaces of colonial violence: "Torture like it happens in those places ruins the flavor. Gives the flesh a texture like that weird thing with the bits of brain in aspic [...]. The apocalypse can't start soon enough" (Robinson 2017, 3727). The wolves' yearning for the apocalypse to commence reflects their deep desire for a radical transformation of the existing system. It suggests their recognition of the destructive and exploitative nature of colonial violence, of which slaughterhouses are seen as an embodiment. Their wish for the apocalypse can be understood as a metaphorical longing for a radical shift in the prevailing power dynamics, one that dismantles oppressive structures and allows for a reimagining of relationships between humans and other beings. By critiquing the Western meat production via a broad range of characters, including those who themselves kill for food, Robinson highlights the violence of industrial farming that generates immense suffering. By linking climate change to animal agriculture and colonization, *The Trilogy* provokes the readers to reconsider their own consumption habits that might be contributing to violence against both human and nonhuman animals and to environmental destruction.

The Trilogy explores the significance of food in character development, socio-cultural backgrounds, and political ideologies, revealing the connection between meat and milk consumption, colonization, and patriarchy. Indigenous characters aligned with decolonization adopt plant-based diets as a protest against colonial patriarchal violence. Robinson emphasizes food decolonization as a means of healing from trauma and challenging consumption-centered capitalism. Indigenous veganism is presented as a possible way to contest speciesism and decolonize interspecies relationships. The protagonist's transformative journey encourages readers to challenge their own assumptions and adopt a more critical perspective. As such, *Trickster Trilogy* offers hope for a better future and contributes to decolonial narratives.

4. Conclusion

In her *Trickster Trilogy*, Eden Robinson effectively echoes Billy-Ray Belcourt's decolonial animal ethic, weaving together (de)colonization of Indigenous peoples with that of nonhuman animals, thus challenging traditional anthropocentric narratives that historically disregard the agency and voices of nonhuman animals. Through the introduction of

various nonhuman characters, Robinson not only provides a platform for silenced groups but also emphasizes a crucial distinction: she does not speak *for* these nonhuman animals but rather endeavors to speak *with* them. This approach aligns with the principles of decolonial animal ethic, which recognizes nonhuman animals as subjects and partners in the decolonization process, rather than objects to be acted upon. In doing so, she also challenges the Western colonial normative constructions of interspecies relationships, which often limit interactions to specific species deemed worthy by dominant cultures. Instead, the trilogy re-imagines and celebrates alterNative, horizontal kinship relations with other animals, thereby contesting the deeply ingrained Western concept of speciesism.

The trilogy serves as a poignant commentary on the era of the Anthropocene. It underscores how anthropocentrism, speciesism, and colonialism have played a pivotal role in shaping this epoch, leading to widespread environmental degradation. Robinson portrays a world where species extinction is intricately linked to habitat loss, which, in turn, is driven by the relentless pursuit of profit, power, and status – a hallmark of expansive colonialism. This portrayal highlights the profound environmental injustices perpetrated against both human and nonhuman beings in the name of progress and exploitation. Robinson's work invites readers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world and challenges the dominant worldview that has fueled the destructive forces of industrialization and capitalism. By disrupting traditional narratives, Robinson highlights the agency of nonhuman animals and advocates for a more inclusive and equitable approach to interspecies relationships. In doing so, the trilogy actively engages in the decolonization of both human and nonhuman lives, fostering a deeper understanding of our mutual interconnectedness.

References

Adams, Carol J. 1990. *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Adams, Carol J. 2014. *The Pornography of Meat*. New York: Lantern Books.

Allard, La Donna Brave Bull, *et al.* 2019. "We Stand in Solidarity with Rojava, an Example to the World – Letter". *The Guardian*, November 1. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/01/we-stand-in-solidarity-with-rojava-an-example-to-the-world

Baker, Timothy C. 2019. *Writing Animals : Language, Suffering, and Animality in Twenty-First-Century Fiction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Belcourt, Billy-Ray. 2014. "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)Locating Animality in Decolonial Thought". *Societies* 5 (1): 1-11. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc5010001.

Brown, Frederick L. 2016. *The City Is More than Human*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Cohen, Mathilde. 2013. "Animal Colonialism: The Case of Milk". *AJIL Unbound* 111: 267-271. https://doi.org/10.1017/aju.2017.66.

Gaard, Greta. 2001. "Women, Water, Energy". *Organization & Environment* 14 (2): 157-72. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026601142002.

Justice, Daniel Heath. 2018. *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Waterloo (Ontario, Canada): Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Laduke, Winona, and Hoopla Digital. 2017. *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Montford Struthers, Kelly, and Chloë Taylor. 2020. *Colonialism and Animality*. New York: Routledge.

Nibert, David Alan. 2013. *Animal Oppression and Human Violence: Domesecration, Capitalism, and Global Conflict*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Nicolescu, Ionut. 2018. "Cases of Equality: Idle No More and the Protests at Standing Rock". *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 27 (2): 1-13. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26542032

Ortiz-Robles, Mario. 2016. *Literature and Animal Studies*. New York: Routledge.

Probyn-Rapsey, Fiona. 2007. "Complicity, Critique, and Methodology". *ARIEL* 38 (2): 65-82.

Robinson, Eden. 2017. *Son of a Trickster*. Toronto: Vintage Canada.

Robinson, Eden. 2018. *Trickster Drift*. Toronto: Knopf Canada.

Robinson, Eden. 2021. *Return of the Trickster*. Toronto: Knopf Canada.

Robinson, Margaret. 2013. "Veganism and Mi'kmaq Legends ". *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* XXXIII (1): 189-196.

Romm, Norma R.A. 2018. "Foregrounding Critical Systemic and Indigenous Ways of Collective Knowing toward (Re)Directing the Anthropocene". In *Balancing Individualism and Collectivism: Social and Environmental Justice*, 1-17. Cham (Switzerland): Springer International Publishing.

Shearar, Cheryl. 2008. *Understanding Northwest Coast Art: A Guide to Crests, Beings and Symbols*. Vancouver - Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre.

Shilton, Dor. 2019. "Rojava: The Radical Eco-Anarchist Experiment Betrayed by the West, and Bludgeoned by Turkey". *Ecologise*, October 26. https://ecologise.in/2019/10/27/rojava-the-eco-anarchist-experiment/

Stibbe, Arran. 2001. "Language, Power and the Social Construction of Animals". *Society & Animals* 9 (2): 145-61. https://doi.org/10.1163/156853001753639251.

How to cite this paper: Krásná, Denisa. 2024. "Decolonial Animal Ethic in Eden Robinson's *Trickster Trilogy*". *Relations. Beyond Anthropocentrism* 12 (1): 9-27. https://doi.org/10.7358/rela-2024-01-krad