

A Bear Is Watching a Man in Tawada Yōko's *Yuki no renshūsei*

These days, when racism, sexism and animals' discrimination are being successfully eliminated from academic discourse through granting various rights to women, national and sexual minorities, and animals, when animal studies including many aspects are being developed there arises a new question. Namely the question, what should the supreme form of equality in rights – subjectivity, look like in the case of animals? In her essay *A Report on the Animal Turn* Kari Weil asks: “But unlike in women’s studies or ethnic studies, those who constitute the objects of animal studies cannot speak for themselves, or at least they cannot speak the languages that the academy recognizes as necessary for such self-representation. Must they then be forever condemned to the status of objects?”¹. The answer shall probably be, unfortunately, yes.

But the inability of self-expression in language recognized by the academy cannot, and does not, restrict literary imagination. Therefore, the Japanese writer Tawada Yōko (1960-) invited three (in fact four) polar bears of different generations, living in different circumstances, having different characters and playing different roles, to her trilogy *Yuki no renshūsei* [the trainees of snow] (2011) and allowed them to do some research on human beings or – to be more precise – on non-bear animals. We can then call the trilogy a report on human studies carried out by animals. The bears tell their stories describing and judging the men and women involved. Unlike Red Peter from Kafka’s *A Report to an Academy* (1917), who is unable to describe his past life as an ape once he turned human², Tawada’s bears do not have any problem with their animal identity. Moreover, the Grandmother Bear says: “Describing how one became a human is disgusting,

¹ Weil 2010:1.

² Red Peter starts his report with: *You have done me the honor of inviting me to give your Academy an account of the life I formerly led as an ape. I regret that I cannot comply with your request to the extent you desire. It is now nearly five years since I was an ape (...).*

it's an ape's way of doing it"³. She does not like the very fact of becoming a human. She claims her right to speak for herself as a bear.

Yuki no renshūsei deals with many aspects: political, social and ecological problems. However, I am going to focus on bear heroes' observation of human beings.

Composition, narration and heroes of *Yuki no renshūsei*

The narration in the trilogy differs depending on its part. In the case of the 1st part, *Sobo no taikaron* [grandmother: theory of devolution] the story is told by the bear, Grandmother herself, in the first person.

The narrator of the second story called *Shi no seppun* [the kiss of death] seems to be a human woman, Ursula. She was a circus acrobat and Tosca's trainer. Tosca was a she-bear. But in the end it turns out that the story is told by Tosca the 2nd on behalf of Ursula. Tosca the 2nd is an incarnation of the above-mentioned Tosca (thus 4 heroes).

And in the 3rd part, called *Hokkyoku o omou hi* [says of dreaming of the North Pole], we have yet another solution of narration. The story is told by a bear from his point of view but in the third person, as children often do, until the moment he is admonished by a Malaysian bear that he should speak of himself using the first person.

The hero of the 1st story is a female polar bear caught soon after birth and brought up by human beings. She merely remembers her mother being killed by a man, but longs for snow and cold. Tawada endowed her (and the other three) with self-consciousness, the capacity for rational thought and its manifestation in language. They can understand human words; however, quite often misinterpret their meaning, some of them can even speak, read and write in human language. It means they are "fully equipped" to observe and judge the world around them and communicate their opinion to men. Grandmother, the hero of the 1st part is a circus artist but she reads Kafka and Heine, writes an autobiography and has probably never heard of "a Bear of Very Little Brain".

The second part *Shi no seppun* has three main characters: the trainer Ursula and her two partners, two Toscas. Ursula is not a typical trainer using the punishment and reward method. She is a model trainer, whose approach seems to be close to what Vicki Hearne, a poet, philosopher and animal trainer, believes essential to training. "Training, for Hearne – says Weil – is a means to begin to penetrate [that] consciousness [of animal], but only to the extent that we humans can relinquish the stance of impenetrability that we claim for ourselves and with which

³ Tawada 2011:53. In Japanese: *Jibun ga ika ni shite ningen ni natta ka ni tsuite kaku to iu hassō ga saruteki de iya datta*. All quotations from this book translated by the author of the article.

we protect ourselves from being known by the animals we live with”⁴. Ursula completely relinquished the stance of impenetrability. She and her trainees understood each other without a (spoken out-loud) word. Tosca the 2nd inherited Tosca the 1st's consciousness, she knows her own and Ursula's past and through “the kiss of death” she swallowed Ursula's soul, which enabled her to tell the story.

The hero's story in the 3rd part is based on the life of a real he-bear from the Berlin zoo born in 2006. Rejected by his mother, Tosca, Knut was taken by human beings, taught some art of acrobatics, then became a star, admired by people but also used by them to promote ecological ideas and so on. He died in 2011, he collapsed into the pool while suffering from encephalitis and drowned because of a heart attack. Knut was a subject of many controversial discussions among animal rights' defenders, animal acrobats' lovers and people who just got to like him⁵.

Bears' Life Stories: how did they manage to survive in the human beings' world?

1. The Ancestor: a circus star and cosmopolitan writer

Grandmother Bear was born in the Arctic zone but was soon taken away to the Soviet Union. She was brought up by a man, trained and “employed” in a Kiev circus. She became a circus star and was quite happy about her life. But one day she over trained and got confused and this was the end of her stage career and the beginning of the literary one.

Once she started writing she began to consider and judge the world around her. And from that time her self-consciousness is able to develop. She recognizes and names differences between her and human beings.

Becoming a writer changed her life. She understood that writing was more dangerous and unpredictable than balancing a ball. She compared writing to hunting and circus art to a worker's job on a production line. Following advice from Fur Seal, the editor-in-chief of a literary magazine, the Bear avoids political themes in her writing.

She became famous when her story was published in one of the above-mentioned Fur Seal's, her ex-fan whose proposal she once rejected, literary magazines. He started to publish her autobiography, neither informing her nor sending a copy of the magazine or offering gratuity. Even the title *The Tears of Applause* was not consulted with the author. The Bear's only benefits from publishing her own life

⁴ Weil 2010:7.

⁵ See *Knut (polar bear)*. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knut_\(polar_bear\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knut_(polar_bear)) [Accessed 30 October 2015].

story were chocolates (probably illegally received from the West) and notebooks difficult to get in the Soviet Union.

The Grandmother Bear's autobiography was translated into German and praised for its criticism of animal exploitation in the circuses taking place in the communist countries. But becoming famous in the West ended her career in the Soviet Union. More than that, she was invited to take part in the project called *Orange Cultivation in Siberia*. However, she was lucky to avoid it thanks to the West Berlin editors who paid ten thousand dollars to the Soviet Union Writers Association. And so the Bear became a national minority in West Berlin.

As an immigrant writer the Bear got an apartment with a full (according to people) fridge. In fact, she becomes a hungry Bear-Writer with a bankcard. Feeling lonely she has a problem with writing. To overcome the creative crisis she starts to visit a bookshop and gets acquainted with Kafka's *A Report to an Academy* and Haine's *Atta Troll*. But her caretakers push her to write quicker, instead of reading books, and not in German but in Russian, which she, unlike them, does not believe to be her mother tongue. She suspects they want to change the contents of her book in translation.

While living in West Berlin Grandmother Bear dreams of Canada, a cold place, so she's heard.

Her dream came true after an incident with a group of young neo-Nazis who attacked her because she was from the Soviet Union. Her German protectors, under the pretext of fearing the Nazis, got rid of the writer who ate too much salmon and wrote too few words. They arranged her emigration to Canada, which turned out a bit disappointing, too similar to Germany. Overheated classes with very small chairs and the necessity to learn one more language discouraged her but finally she managed to find her way in Canada. Not for long. She met a Danish immigrant. They got married and had a daughter. Her husband was a communist who wanted to immigrate to a communist country where their daughter Tosca could learn ballet or skating without paying tuition fees. And so they moved to East Germany.

2. Tosca: a ballet school graduate working in circus

The narrator "I" of this story is Ursula, an East German circus acrobat and a trainer who became famous for her kiss with the polar bear, which is Tosca, an immigrant from Canada. Ursula loves wild animals and treats them as partners, not objects. She is convinced there is mutual understanding between her and them. Especially between her and Tosca, a ballet school graduate who became a circus artist after some experiences of unfair treatment in theaters.

Ursula is more engaged in training Tosca than in bringing up her own daughter, left at her mother's place. She tries to prepare an extraordinary turn around for

the bear and as a result they create the “kiss of death” which is Tosca using her mouth to take a cube of sugar from Ursula’s tongue. The kiss is not included in the official program. They decided to do so through beyond-language communication, without informing anybody.

From the very beginning Tosca and Ursula have a special kind of communication. They meet in their dreams. For the trainer who never had anybody to talk to about her feelings, these meetings are like psychotherapy: she recalls her childhood nightmares, her family life, her previous jobs as a post-woman and in a military factory, and her unhappy love.

Ursula decided to write down Tosca’s life story but because she herself did not know how to write, as an exercise she tried to tell her own story which finally would be retold by Tosca the 2nd. Unfortunately, Ursula could not read Tosca’s mother’s autobiography since it had been sold out.

Ursula, as a trainer, believes that it is essential to know when to give up before it becomes dangerous and that courage is good for nothing. It is a kind of respect for animals.

“The kiss of death” became famous and was shown abroad. In America it was criticized as pornography and as behavior against hygienic rules. In Japan, especially children who found it funny admired it, but nobody believed that she was a real bear. People expressed their sympathy, believing she suffered from heat while wearing a bear’s skin.

Tosca and Ursula visited foreign countries but did not do any sightseeing, neither did they taste local cuisine. As Tosca put it, “a circus is an island”.

All that happened in the ‘60s and ‘70s of the 20th century. In the ‘90s Ursula, though quite old, still performed “the kiss of death” with Tosca the 2nd, who was also born in Canada. She immigrated to East Germany just before the reunification of the country after which Ursula lost her job and Tosca was sold to the zoo. They kept in e-mail contact for the rest of Ursula’s life until she died at the age of 83. Tosca wrote down her bitter memoirs. In the zoo Tosca fell in love with Lars and gave birth to twins. One of them died soon. The other, Knut, the hero of the 3rd part of the trilogy, was rejected by his mother and brought up by human beings.

3. Knut: dreaming of snow far and wide in the Berlin zoo

Two men – a zoo caretaker, Matias, and a doctor named Kristian brought up Knut. These two were the first animals for the little bear, rejected by his mother, so he watched them carefully.

Matias was involved very much in taking care of Knut and he spent a lot of time playing with the bear, but he did not like the journalists who appeared at Knut’s place since the bear grew to be famous. The bear became attached to him

and even got jealous. Knut was frightened that maybe Matias had a wife and children and imagined that one day he would leave Knut like the hero in a love story that Matias had once read to him. Knut got acquainted with the writings of Wilde, Genet and Mishima and with music of Emilio Pujol and Manuel de Falla. In the beginning he discovered the world outside using his sense of hearing and sense of smell, all the time dreaming of leaving the cage.

When Knut got bigger people started to take advantage of him. They made him appear on TV in campaigns against global warming. His appearance would help the zoo to survive so the director invited the Environment Minister and TV teams from all over the world. That day, Knut could play outside for the first time, enchanting the audience. Soon he realized he had a talent for entertaining people, probably inherited from his ancestors.

Knut started to walk inside the zoo and this was the chance to know what other animals look like, so far known only as voices and smells. The bear was surprised by the variety of sizes, colors, shapes and behavior of the animals. And Matias taught him about the places they are from and the customs of various species. With some species Knut was able to talk and learn a lot from them but this new knowledge sometimes made him suffer. He was often scolded or criticized.

The bear becomes famous but does not like the signs of admiration such as letters, gifts from fans or numerous articles in newspapers. Instead, his interest towards animals grows. The zoo inhabitants, too, show interest towards Knut, especially she-bears would not mind to become his lovers. But he has decided: once he grows up he will marry Matias. Unconsciously, Knut shows a very liberal attitude towards inter-species relations and gender issues. But Matias left one day. He simply died from heart attack.

Knut starts to think of getting outside of the zoo once he knows from a newspaper that some corrupt criminal managed to leave prison for ten thousand dollars.

At a party given by the mayor, Knut makes friends with another human being, Michael who tells him about his mother Tosca who was forced to do things against her nature in the circus. This probably changed her character and became the reason for rejecting him. Michael informs him that a meeting with her is planned. From Michael he also learns the story of a young sloth bear's euthanasia. It was declared righteous, as a way to avoid bringing up the sloth bear by human beings who can change an animal's character. It makes Knut think that being raised by humans is a kind of crime, including his own case.

In the Berlin zoo, Knut continually dreams of a day when he will go to the North Pole, cold and white, far and wide. And on one snowy day he dies.

A Bear Is Watching a Man

Tawada's bears find human beings naive, weak and selfish creatures believing that they are strong and generous and it makes them self-satisfied. Their behavior is usually aimed at profit but they pretend to do everything for the sake of others in order to feel comfortable. They are silly enough to believe they are successful in convincing those concerned that it is true.

Humans also have inclinations to radical behaviors and an overestimation of their own power. Proud of their power they try to prove their domination over other animals thus exposing themselves to danger. But when a human being sees a helpless animal he can sacrifice even his own family and spend a lot of time to help the one to survive.

And what did the bears discover about a man's soul? Tosca says: "The human soul is not as romantic as I heard it was. It is mostly built of words, not only ordinary words we can understand but also of many shreds of broken words, words' shadows and visions which failed to become words"⁶. For the bears, human beings seem imprisoned in language.

Let us have a look at what people did to the Ancestor, Grandmother Bear. Iwan brought her up but he was motivated by future profits from her circus career. The editor-in-chief of a literary magazine helped her to become a writer but he put all the royalties paid in dollars into his pocket. He claimed to be a benefactor, just because he gave the author chocolates and notebooks. (In fact he was a fur seal but he adopted people's ways of doing things perfectly). The West Berlin intellectuals saved the Bear from exile to Siberia but it was because they wanted some proof of the cruel treatment of animals in circuses in communist countries. In fact they were more engaged in criticizing the Soviet Union than in protecting animals. They were more interested in having her as an author of what they could modify in translation than in knowing the truth from her writings. So they treated her as a slave, restricted her freedom, forced her to write in Russian and forbade intellectual development by reading books. And because she did not act like a slave they got rid of her by sending her to Canada, of course, under the pretext of helping her.

And what did the humans do to Tosca? Tosca experienced more good from people than her mother. Tosca had a trainer who treated her as a partner and was her beyond-words friend but again she was exploited in the circus and deprived of the chance to become a theater actress, not only because she was a bear but because she was a bear with her own opinion. Namely, an opinion about the contents of the play in which she would appear. Tosca was offered a role in Heine's

⁶ Tawada 2011:162. In Japanese: *Ningen no tamashii to iu no wa uwasa ni kiita hodo romanchikku na mono de wa naku, hotondo kotoba de dekite iru. Futsū ni wakaru kotoba dake de naku, kowareta kotoba no hahen ya kotoba ni narisokonatta eizō ya kotoba no kage nado mo ōi.*

Atta Troll but did not want to become a bear criticized for rejecting freedom and choosing the life of a street performer thus earning her living. Why do people condemn animal entertainers in spite of the fact that they themselves act on the stage for money? Tosca discovered that humans had a double moral standard. “I hated the suggestion that Munma’s refusal of freedom was contemptible. What’s wrong with selling one’s art on the street? Is that contemptible? And what about a prima donna from the Leningrad National Ballet who dances with a big part of her body naked, isn’t she contemptible?”⁷ – asks Tosca.

And as for Knut, he experienced human good will for quite a big part of his short life. He was brought up by a man who did not count on profits. He was rather anxious when the zoo management and ecologic activists started to take advantage of Knut. But he was not strong enough to prevent it. Knut experienced contact with a human being worthy of love but also the bitterness of being rejected by the one he loved (unconscious that his friend had died). And like his mother and grandmother he was exploited: entertaining people in the zoo and supporting people’s ideology. Profits went to the zoo and turned out to be big enough to become a source of conflict between his zoo and the zoo his father lived in. Beside human studies, Knut also did a lot of non-bear animal studies. But this is a theme for another paper.

Conclusion

Tawada’s bears’ judgment of the humans does not differ so much from our own critical opinion of ourselves. Once we admitted that we were cruel towards animals and realized that killing them may lead to catastrophe we decided to grant the animals rights, similar to the rights we had, that is, human rights. But how could nonhuman animals possibly believe they are the object of human rights? How to persuade them to believe so? And first of all: do human rights fit the animals’ way of living? Maybe they need animal rights. One day a bookseller, an acquaintance of Grandmother said: “If all the people have human rights, all the animals should have animal rights. So what should I think of the steak I ate yesterday? (...) My older brother became a vegetarian for that reason”⁸. Hearing this the bear did not hesi-

⁷ Tawada 20011:89. In Japanese: *Sore de wa maru de jiyū o motomenakatta Munma ga hiretsu to demo iitage na fukumi ga ki ni iranai. Rojō de gei o utte okane o morau koto ga sore hodo hiretsu darō ka? (...) Anna ni takusan hada o misete odoru Reningurādo Kokuritsu Barēdan no purima donna wa hiretsu de wa nai no ka.*

⁸ Tawada 2011:57, 58. In Japanese: *Moshi mo subete no ningen ni jinken ga aru nara, subete no dōbutsu ni dōbutsuken ga aru. Boku ga kinō tabeta sutēki wa dō naru no ka. (...) Ani wa sore de saishokushugisha ni natta.*

tate. “I can’t become a vegetarian”⁹ – she said. Through this spontaneous statement she refused to obey human or animal rights, simply because she was not able to.

Tawada’s consideration could be read as a question about the limit of equalizing human and nonhuman animal rights. Do we, people, have the right to impose on the animals responsibility for their deeds, responsibility in our human understanding? If not, what should the subjectivity of the animals look like? We have to answer, at least try to answer this question since it is beyond any doubt that bears and other nonhuman animals feel and think. And let us not forget that they are watching us. We are not impenetrable. We never were. Once the Grandmother said: “Who and what for created an animal as foolish as a man? Some people claim that a man resembles God but it is very impolite towards God. In the North there are still tribes remembering that God was more like a bear than like a man”¹⁰. Let us try to change her opinion of us. For sure, animal studies and literature could help us do it.

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⁹ Tawada 2011:58. In Japanese: *Watashi wa saishokushugisha ni naremasen*.

¹⁰ Tawada 2011:67. In Japanese: *Ningen hodo oroka na dōbutsu o nan no tame ni dare ga tsukutta no ka. Ningen ga kamisama no nisugata da nado to iu hito ga iru ga, sore wa kamisama ni taishite taihen shitsurei de aru. Kamisama wa dochira ka to iu to ningen yori mo kuma ni nite ita to iu koto o ima demo oboete iru minzoku ga hoppō ni wa tenzai shite iru sō da*.

English Summary of the Article

Barbara Słomka

Nowadays, as animal studies are being developed, there arises a question of the supreme form of equality in rights, that is subjectivity, in the case of animals.

Since art and literature make possible what is impossible for scholars, Tawada is trying to look at human beings with the bear's eye, granting her heroes subjectivity and the capacity for rational thought; therefore, they are able to judge human beings.

Today, when men's cruelty is criticized and more or less effectively reduced, but the human being still believes that he is impenetrable for the animals. Tawada says: 'That is our great fault. We can learn a lot about ourselves from them.'

Key words: human beings, bears, non-bear animals, equality in rights, self-consciousness, writer, circus

論文概要

「熊は人間を見ている – 多和田葉子『雪の練習生』」

近年アニマル・スタディーズが台頭し、主観性という平等権の究極の形が問われるようになった。

芸術と文学は科学者にとって不可能なことを可能にするが、多和田は人間を熊の目で見ることに挑み、そのヒーローたちに主観性と論理的思考を与えた。そのおかげで彼らは人間に対して審判を下すことができるのである。

人間の残酷さが批判され、それらが事実上多かれ少なかれ減少している今日においてもなお、動物達にとって人間は理解できないものだと言われ続けている。多和田は、それは私達の大きな誤りで、私達は彼らに私達自身の多くのことを教えてもらえると述べているのである。

キーワード：人間、熊、「非熊動物」、平等権、自我意識、作家、サーカス