



## *The Animal Eye and Refugee Vulnerability in Wajdi Mouawad's Anima<sup>1</sup>*

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**ABSTRACT:** *Anima*, by Lebanese-born Canadian-raised author Wajdi Mouawad, is a road novel that takes the reader through different locations on the North American continent in order to explore the darkest side of humankind. This approach will focus on the provocative narrative technique used by Mouawad, filtered through the eyes of a significant number of animals and insects, in order to consider the different representations of vulnerability that articulate the text. In the novel, animals and insects are not only the narrators but also fundamental characters. As this analysis will show, their vulnerability represents the uncertainty of fate in contemporary society, being in the hands of those apparently superior creatures that decide when they can live and when they have to die. As an example of a vulnerable text, *Anima* relies on the theatricality of this animal Greek chorus to represent the need for humans to undergo a process of animalization. The protagonist, Wahhch Debch, reaches a stage of symbiosis with his animal side that allows him to transcend his vulnerability as a child refugee and as an adult who lost his wife, and this new sense of animal self serves him as an empowering element to break ties with his past.

**KEY WORDS:** Animality; Trauma; Memory; Vulnerability; Performing Arts; Diaspora

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Wajdi Mouawad's road novel *Anima*, first published in 2012, takes the reader into a journey both through different parts of the North American continent and through the darkest side of humankind. Written originally in French, translated into English,<sup>2</sup> Spanish and German, among other languages, and awarded numerous literary prizes, the novel follows the obsession of protagonist Wahhch Debch with seeing the face of the man who brutally murdered his wife and their unborn baby. Mouawad's thought-provoking narrative technique, a story narrated from the point of view of a diverse range of domestic and wild animals, succeeds in portraying the monstrous side of human nature. There is an obvious parallel between the author and the protagonist that cannot be ignored. Mouawad was born in Lebanon to a Maronite Christian family. The family left the country as refugees due to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). After living in France for a short period of time, they all moved onwards to Montreal whilst Mouawad was still a teenager. This is the exact same route that took Debch from Shatila,<sup>3</sup> a Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut, to Quebec where he settles down after spending some years in France with his adopted family. This approach will consider the implications of using the animal eye in representing traumatic memories as a stimulating narrative strategy to explore Middle Eastern conflicts from the perspective of the Canadian literary canon. Accordingly, this article will focus on, firstly, exploring the role of traumatic vulnerability and the process of unfolding hidden memories found in the text, and, secondly, examining the implications of the choral narrative technique used by the author and the dramatic dimension of it. The aim of this analysis is to question the very notion of vulnerability and grief (Butler 2009) as a disempowering element in fiction through a novel that opens up the text to new creative possibilities related to issues of dislocation, colonialism, memory and the idealization of Canadian society. The dynamics of memory and the concepts of latency and return reveal a trauma that goes beyond the simple representation of painful experiences to suggest that humans are the most atrocious creatures in the animal world.

The text is divided into two different sections: firstly, the first three chapters ("*Bestiae verae*", "*Bestiae fabulosae*" and "*Canis lupus lupus*") are narrated by different animals; and secondly, the final chapter ("*Homo sapiens sapiens*") is narrated by Aubert Chagnon, the coroner<sup>4</sup> who investigates the crime that opens the novel. These different parts permit the reader to have access to the wealth of information from differing perspectives, whether animal or human. For the most part, the narration develops naturally from the point of view of a diverse range of animals and insects who witness the action, until the final chapter where, through a technique similar to Aristotelian anagnorisis, the reader discovers that the whole text was written by Wahhch Debch himself before being forwarded to Chagnon. He creates, so to say, his own story; that is,

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<sup>2</sup> This article will quote the English translation included in the bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> References to Shatila are based on the massacre that took place from 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> September 1982 when, with the complacency of the Israeli Defence Forces, an estimate number of 3,500 Palestinian and Lebanese Shiite civilians were killed in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, in Beirut, by a militia adjacent to the right-wing Kataeb Party after the assassination of their leader, Bachir Gemayel.

<sup>4</sup> In Canada, the term 'coroner' refers to the medical examiner responsible for the investigation of the causes of a death.



an autofiction in which he presents—or represents—the events that followed the murder of his wife. It is here where the main theatrical characteristic of the text is found, showcasing Mouawad's playwriting background which, unsurprisingly, impregnates the novel. First it is Debch who writes the text through this animal eye, then Chagnon receives the manuscript and, finally, the readers have access to this story. The animal chorus and the use of animal eye imply that these animals are the audience of a tragedy that is being represented, in the dramatic sense of that term.

At the beginning of the story, Debch leads a seemingly ordinary life in Montreal with his pregnant wife, Léonie, until the day he arrives home and finds her lying in a pool of her own blood. He then begins his search for the beast that killed her, which represents, as we will later find out, the beast that all humans carry inherently. The extremely violent way in which Léonie is killed in Canada mirrors the brutality with which the protagonist's own family were killed in Shatila. Debch's vulnerability as a man who lost his wife and as a child who lost his family offers, as Butler et al. would claim, "alternative resources for self-empowerment" (2). Thanks to this murder, Debch starts a journey of self-discovery to eventually find out that his adoptive father, whom he had considered a hero for having saved him from death after he was buried alive in Shatila, is also the one who gave the order to bury him alive after killing his whole family in the most unfathomably atrocious manner. Although the reader does not know much about the protagonist initially, there is more clarity after he starts his quest. He is "toughened by anger" (26), he is transformed into a "powerful, infallible" (27) creature that will not stop until he has achieved his goal, as one of the animals he finds acknowledges.) It is when he realizes that his life seems trapped in a historical loop that Debch starts a process of animalization, which will turn him into the beast he chases. His symbiosis with the animals that he encounters during this journey helps him to reconcile himself with his own haunting memories whilst he plots his revenge.

After Debch finds and kills Léonie's murderer, who went to hide on the Canadian-US border, he decides to travel south, where his adopted father lives, to investigate further into the events in Shatila as well as into the past of the person he thought had saved him from his premature death. He knew that he had witnessed the modus operandi followed by Welson Wolf Rooney, the Mohawk who killed Léonie, earlier in his life. Once in Texas, he meets a Maronite Christian militiaman who participated in the massacre and discovers that his own name contains powerful symbolism from that time: his first name 'Wahhch' is a variation from 'whhouch', which means 'monster'<sup>5</sup> and his surname 'Debch' means 'brutal'. That is the nickname his adoptive father had when he was part of the militias that entered Shatila, "we called him Wahhch el Debch. Ya 'né, the Brutal Monster [...] Because he was brutal and he was a monster" (310). In his extreme cruelty, his adopted father convinced Debch that he was a hero, yet he named him after the atrocity he committed in Shatila, where he forced a four-year old boy to

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<sup>5</sup> The 'monster' is one of the most common elements in literature to critique human existence. However, this article departs from the premise that Debch follows a process of animalization, rather than monsterization. For further references on Monster Theory, see Asma (2009), Scott (2007) and Cohen (1996), among others.



witness the stabbing of his own sister and her rape through that wound. He then murdered the rest of his family and ordered that the child be buried alive alongside his family's horses. Wahhch el Debch then took our protagonist under his wing because he needed a boy to prove his masculinity as "[a] man who doesn't produce a son, who only produces daughters, isn't a man" (325) and because he was also sterile. The hegemonic masculinity<sup>6</sup> of Wahhch el Debch was being questioned by his fellow militiamen, a complex that increased the violence with which he operated in Shatila: "he didn't want to put his sex where his men had put theirs because he wasn't a queer. He didn't want to dip his sex in their sperm. He wasn't a queer and that's why he carved another vagina for the girl" (323-24). After discovering this, Debch, the adopted son, becomes the monster he was named after and kills his adopted father in the most horrific way he can imagine. He is assisted by wild animals, which dismember him and eat his entire body until he has disappeared into the desert.

*Anima* could be classified within what Ganteau calls 'vulnerable text', that is, a text that presents bodily frailty as the common denominator of humanity and centres upon the impact that certain traumatic experiences have on either individuals or communities. The idea of trauma lies behind this kind of narrations. Caruth defines trauma as

the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge [...] and thus continually returns, in its exactness, at a later time. Not having fully integrated as it occurred, the event cannot become a 'narrative memory' that is integrated into a completed story of the past [...] The transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one's own, and others', knowledge of the past, may lose both the precision and the force that characterises traumatic recall. (153)

The two narrative levels found in the novel follow, on the one hand, the way in which Debch pursues the man who murdered his wife and, on the other, the way in which the haunting memories chase him. As previously mentioned, the protagonist is a refugee survivor of one of the Middle East's most brutal massacres which took place in the late twentieth century, yet he does not appear to remember much—or he does not want to remember—of that day when his family were slaughtered. It is not until he learns more about the details surrounding the death of his own wife when something triggers inside him. Tal comments on the "effects of trauma upon individual survivors and the manner in which that trauma is reflected and revised in the larger, collective political and cultural world" (5), making reference to the re-living of that traumatic experience. When Debch discovers that his wife was stabbed in her abdomen before being raped through that very same wound, he realizes that this was not the first time that he had witnessed such a horrific act.

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<sup>6</sup> The term 'hegemonic masculinity' was coined by Connell (1987; 1995) to make reference to the idealized behaviour performed within certain social and cultural spheres by men to portray a specific image of masculinity. According to Messerschmidt, "[h]egemonic masculinity is neither transhistorical nor transcultural, but varies from society to society and changes within a particular society over time" (130), which implies that it is a concept in constant motion.



The first reference to Debch's childhood trauma is provided by his pet cat who opines that, when Debch first saw his wife's body, "he wanted to scream, as on that day so long ago when men had buried him alive. I mustn't cry, he'd repeated to himself, if I cry, if I scream, they'll begin again, they'll dig me up, kill me and bury me again" (3). These animal narrators that apparently have access to Debch's mind to transcribe his thoughts sometimes use direct speech to share some of the statements uttered by the protagonist. From this initial citation, which appears at the very beginning of the novel, and onwards, the reader must gather the evidence left by the different creatures that Debch finds on his journey. The novel, thus, follows Laub and Podell in postulating that "survivors of a trauma [...] often become involved in an ongoing dialogue with the trauma, which leads them to engage consciously or unconsciously, in artistic expression" (993). Hence, the problem of representing the past goes beyond the simple traumatic event itself. The haunting memories that chase Debch remain latent as if they had turned irrelevant, as the protagonist states himself:

When I saw Léonie dead, I remembered that as a child, I was buried alive. I don't mean that I had forgotten, it's just that I didn't think about it anymore. It had become banal. And we forget banal things. Your efforts to arrest Léonie's murder have triggered a crack in my memory. The more days that go by and that man is still on the road, the more memories emerge [...] I just hope that, in bringing his scape to an end, you will bring an end to the excavation of my memory. (151)

Mouawad is careful to ration the information surrounding this trauma that torments his protagonist. All of the animals that narrate the story would appear to have access to this information, as if they could read Debch's mind. Of course, this could be a wonderful narrative effect were it not for the fact that, as already pointed out, we discover at the end of the novel that the entire story was written by Debch himself and presented to the coroner that was investigating Léonie's death. It is the protagonist himself who reveals his own trauma through fiction by using domestic and wild animals as the filters of his own thoughts. Thus, he writes his own fiction. Narrative memory, according to Joshua Hirsch, "is characterized by flexibility and mastery of point of view" (21). This is the exact effect achieved by Mouawad whilst giving voice to animals and insects as this point of view is not subject to social conditions pertaining to a specific instance of memory. Animals are, apparently, objective narrators. If, as the dog that narrates the third part of the novel asserts, "[a]mnesty is amnesia [...] and amnesia is ignorance" (300), it is unavoidable that the entire narration is built on filling in the gaps left in the protagonist's memory following his wife's harrowing murder. Actually, it is when Debch eventually confronts his past that he is able to turn trauma into a 'narrative memory', following Caruth, by writing the text that he eventually sends to the coroner investigating Léonie's murder.

Whilst postulating her widely popular term 'postmemory', Marianne Hirsch refers to the act of revisualizing a traumatic event through images (in her particular case, family pictures) and affirms that "[f]or survivors who have been separated and exiled from a ravaged world, memory is necessarily an act not only of recall but also of mourning, mourning often tempered by anger, rage, and despair" (243). As a survivor





of the Sabra and Shatila massacre, Debch is unable to create an effective narrative memory of that event as a child, hiding it away in his subconscious until the day he sees the image of his wife murdered in a similar fashion to the one his sister was killed in. It is at that point that the memories emerge. In this case, a terrible murder reactivates Debch's capacity for action. His experience as a survivor not only empowers him but also changes his role as a victim of the Sabra and Shatila massacre and turns him into a murderer himself in search of revenge (both for Léonie's murder and for the murder of his family in Shatila). Traumatic vulnerability, thus, is used as an empowering element in the narration. Memory's anachronistic quality, as Rothberg would say, produces new sources of creativity thanks to "its ability to build new worlds out of the materials of older ones" (5). Traumatic memories are, in this case and considering their powerful potential, subject to constant negotiation and interaction with different elements, be they public or private.

Texts about vulnerability, like the one under analysis, "are often seen to be characterised by the inability to voice trauma, and they tend to limit themselves to indirect evocation" (Ganteau and Onega 10). *Anima* builds up the tension through the narrative effect achieved at the end of the novel when we find out that the entire text was an autofiction<sup>7</sup> written by the protagonist. Blanco asserts that "en la autoficción, es claro que lo vivido—el trauma—es el que habita y posibilita la creación narrativa, es decir: la trama" [in autofiction, human experience—the trauma—is what lives within and enables creating writing, that is: the plot]<sup>8</sup> (101). This implies that there is a healing intention in the enunciation act that can be clearly perceived in the behaviour of the protagonist. If *Anima* follows the philosophy of using literature as a means to overcome traumatic experiences, fiction is, thus, a journey from the pain caused by trauma towards the release from that trauma (Blanco 104). This is a journey shared by Chagnon as he is the first to read Debch's story and his subsequent reaction emboldens him to share his own experiences as the addressee of the manuscript:

today that's over. I no longer write as I did before. Everything that Wahhch Debch upset and transformed in my life has triggered my desire to speak differently and to write as it comes, to speak about myself, to involve myself and to finally say "I" so I can make up for some of the time lost. (334)

He then continues by recognizing that "we always need to embody the incomprehensible, the unimaginable. How else can we go on living with the abstraction of bodies that have disappeared?" (335).

The parallels that exist between characters found in the text—and between the protagonist and the author himself, as mentioned above—create a powerful network of connections that transport the reader from Canada to the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> *Anima* is a

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<sup>7</sup> Term coined by Doubrovsky in his novel *Fils* (1977).

<sup>8</sup> Our translation.

<sup>9</sup> As a sample of refugee literature, *Anima* questions the stereotype of this genre as literature of 'distant suffering' (Boltanski 2004) since Mouawad places the conflict on Canadian soil. For more information about the connection between refugee literature and postcolonial theory, see Gallien 2018.



good example of the way in which traumatic vulnerability might lead to post-traumatic stress disorder, which can actually serve as a source of inspiration for representing haunting memories through creative writing. The murder of his wife, thus, empowers the protagonist. This is textually shown through an innovative narrative technique, to be scrutinized in the following pages, and by recalling a historical event as far removed from the Canadian literary canon as the Sabra and Shatila massacre is. The unfeasibility of using a human eye and the impracticality of using a single narrator found in the novel are two prominent characteristics within the performing arts which are utilised in this case, for fiction. It should be noted that this fragmentation of the discourse does not provide objectivity. It is merely an attempt to offer a sense of neutrality as the various animal narrators are privileged witnesses to these events without being either directly or consciously related to them. Thus, these observers perform the same function as an audience of a theatrical performance, observing but not participating. This parallel is made clear if we take the internal division of the novel into consideration. The momentum of the story is developed through theatrical acts—being mindful that Mouawad is first and foremost a playwright—and the animal eye gives life to human characters. Blanco considers that the eye is paramount for theatrical performance since, according to him, “estamos en un arte de la mirada en donde es esa mirada del otro quien me da vida, quien me construye y a quien me debo” [it is the art of watching which gives life, shapes and provides the meaning]<sup>10</sup> (min. 19:46). Or, more succinctly, performing arts are somewhat futile without an audience. There is, thus, a parallel between this philosophy and Mouawad’s novel. Debch’s retelling through his manuscript exists due to the animals that have watched him; they are the ones that have given life to him, the ones that have shaped him, the ones that made sense of him. Ultimately, humans are human because animals are animals, and this dichotomy is as natural as both humans and animals are.

Wajcman argues that we are all objects waiting to be watched, an idea used by Mouawad in his novel as if “*all the world’s a stage*. El Ojo absoluto pone a la humanidad en escena” (all the world’s a stage. The Great Eye puts humankind on stage) (192). It is through the animal’s eyes that Debch transitions from being an active subject to a passive one who is being watched and does not even have a direct voice in the novel. It is for this reason that the narration is brutalized through this animal eye. The protagonist does not watch, he is being watched. In consequence, humankind turns into a passive object and occupies a secondary position. Animals, contrarily, take an active role since they are not only the audience to these events but also the narrators. They are the ones with a voice, therefore the active subjects.

It is necessary to question the reasons that compelled the protagonist to present his experiences as fiction by using animals and insects as narrators of the events since *Anima* is a text aimed at giving a voice not only to individual and communal traumatic memories that have been silenced, but also to non-human beings. The animals and insects that appear throughout the novel, especially in the first three quarters, represent

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<sup>10</sup> Our translation.



a sense of otherness. According to Huggan and Tiffin, “the western definition of humanity depended - and still depends - on the presence of the ‘non-human’” (viii). Animals are those other creatures that surround humans though humans are those creatures that surround animals. In view of this, the author seems to follow the train of thought posited by Wesling where the literary approach to the kingdom of animals is key as they can gift us the ability to “let the other speak” (17) because we, as humans, produce an “unavoidability of the thought of the animal” (27).

There is a strong connection between Animal Studies, as an academic field, and ecocriticism, an avenue of research that advocates for equal recognition between humans and non-humans within environmental scholarship. *Anima* diverges from the classic representation of animals in mainstream literature as different and/or inferior to humans. Contrary to this, the novel recognizes the symbolic dimension of the animal eye when portraying contemporary society. This motivation engages with the need to challenge not only the binary separation between human and non-human, but also between real and unreal (Baker 3). As Derrida noted in his foundational text *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, based on a ten-hour lecture given in 1997 at the Cerisy Conference and which is nowadays considered as a critical text around which Animal Studies revolve, the term ‘animal’ is in itself a violent word since it is based on supremacy. Mouawad explores the limits of human oppression towards animals regarding ideas of, as Pyke would argue, “superiority [...] embedded in the cultural model of domination that patterns most human societies at this historical moment” (1). This anthropocentric view of the world is common in literature. Using an animal eye as the main narrative technique implies an innovative approach to “the ‘question of the animal’ in ways that bring together historical, philosophical, philological, and theological strands of thought in fruitful and productive ways” (Ohren and Bartosch). This is exactly what Animal Studies claims: the need to question from within the Arts the boundary between the human and non-human divide so as to acknowledge the important role played by animals and insects in human societies.

As for this link between animals and humans (or humans and non-humans), it is important to emphasize that the protagonist is portrayed by these narrators as an ‘in-between’ creature on several occasions. These creatures are able to recognize themselves in *Debch* since, due to his attitude, he separates himself from other humans: “Often, when people spot me they are excited and exclaim, Ooooh!! And they laugh and make monkey faces, saying, ‘Look, a monkey!’ They act like idiots. But not him” (83). He actually relates to these animals, as well as to the catastrophic fate which awaits them, as when he speaks to a pig he finds on a truck on its way to the slaughterhouse:

We are both going to die, but you, pig, you will die amid the cries of your fellow pigs [...] You are a victim of the infinite injustice you share with others of your kind. The men who will kill you feel no hatred or anger towards you. They simply want to eat you. But I will die with the feeling that no one ever deserved to die as much as I do. I will die in the middle of the desert, I will die alone, hated by all, in the total indifference of the sand. (125)

The language used to communicate each animal’s thoughts brings an air of authenticity to the narration, since the discourse displays the characteristics of each





species. For example, we can behold the unwavering loyalty of the dog, the violence of the snake and the intelligence of the monkey, as in this case:

Humans are alone. Despite the rain, despite the animals, despite the rivers and the trees and the sky, despite fire. Humans remain on the threshold. They received the gift of pure verticality, and yet they spend their lives bowed beneath an invisible weight. Something makes them cower. It's raining: they run. They hope for gods and yet they are blind to the eyes of the animals looking at them. They don't hear our silence listening to them. Prisoners of their reason, most of them will never venture into unreason, barring an illumination that will leave them deranged and spent. They are absorbed by what they have at hand, and when their hands are empty, they place them on their faces and they cry. That's how they are. (83)

From the very beginning of the novel, these animal's perspectives are exposed by the very same discourse as uttered by the protagonist. Therefore, the reader has a first-hand account of Debch's experiences without being aware of the fact that through his use of animal eye that humankind is filtered. Both the behaviour of the protagonist and the focalization of the narrative are animalized in the text. Animals and insects play the role of the Greek chorus defined by Pavis as a '*spectateur idéalisé*'. Indeed, it is the various creatures that observe the story unfold before retelling it, within this fictional account, to its addressee: coroner Aubert Chagnon.

It is important to highlight, in relation to the use of this choral narrative as a version of the Greek tradition, that Pavis indicates that the chorus is the expression of a community. Thus, humankind is, to certain degree, animalized whilst the process of animalization is one of the main themes of the novel as *Anima* suggests that humans are wildest animals of all. However, the novel also humanizes animals by making them the story's narrators and, in doing so, deprives the humans of their linguistic capacity, reversing the traditional separator of the two. Therefore, humankind has its humanity removed before evolving into a simpler, more straightforward entity.

The deployment of multiple perspectives allows the reader to distance themselves from the brutal events that drive this tale as the animal narrators provide Mouawad with the means to illustrate the savagery from an alternative viewpoint. This theatrical characteristic throughout the text is fundamental. Moreover, it becomes apparent that this tale is really Debch's own life story which also doubles as a confession for the murders he committed. Debch fictionalizes his own experiences to exorcize his traumas through this ultimate quixotic literary twist. The novel's ending works as a conduit to expiate painful memories and explains Debch's own telling of the Sabra and Shatila massacre.

As mentioned before, in *Anima* humans are removed from their humanity, not only due to this narrative technique, but also because animals are the ones that have feelings, the ones that suffer, the ones that show their empathy. This is possibly one of the motivations for the author to write this novel: to offer a sense of healing after highlighting the darkest side of man—because man is portrayed as a sadist—to return to our animalistic origins after overcoming the extremes of human cruelty. Mouawad makes use of several theatrical elements to build a very particular narration, and wonderfully so due to his illustrious scriptwriting career. The use of the choral narrative



is a prime example of this, as well as the autofiction which represents traumatic experiences. *Anima* is, thus, a drama due to the fact that it covers all of the major characteristics of the performing arts: it is unexpected and irreversible and these are but two of the seven features which González Maestro considers indispensable for the Aristotelian tragedy. Firstly, there is suffering in *Anima*, not only human but also animal. Secondly, the novel has a philosophical dimension that transcends human reason. Thirdly, the text is driven by human conflict which turns into chaos, something materialized through the journey that compels the protagonist to kill others and to almost die himself. Thus, his metamorphosis into the animal world cancels his human nature. Fourthly, *Anima* also implies that the truth behind the text surpasses the limits of knowledge. The text is ambiguous when defining the causes of human cruelty because there are no explanations for it despite all the effort put into justifying it. Fifthly, the novel itself revolts against the extreme conditions of oppression that suffocates humankind in general and, in particular, the main character. Sixthly, punishment is an important element in the narration since Debch feels powerless before all the happenings around him yet, simultaneously, he is unable to explain or justify his violent reactions to these tragic events. Finally, language filters drama; that is, language narrates the unutterable. It is because of these characteristics that *Anima* is an extraordinary case study to analyze the animal eye and traumatic vulnerability in a text where human language vanishes behind non-human enunciation.

Humans are stripped of their capacity to communicate. They are made less human through a narrative technique that uses elements of the performing arts to build a story that yearns to give a voice to the voiceless. Mouawad exploits this technique to spur the reader into an active role. The reader, therefore, becomes an audience to a tragedy which demands an immediate reaction to the brutality of the events as narrated. In brief, this literary technique throws us into an anagnorisis that touches the reader profoundly.

*Anima* is not a pleasant reading. It is a text where hatred and violence take over to illustrate the monstrosity of humankind. It is because of this that the protagonist, who is also the implied narrator, exploits his animal side to chronicle what is, after all, a murder confession to the police. He needs to distance himself from the atrocious events that suggest a turning point in both his childhood and adult lives, but he also needs to offer a more neutral account of the events that motivated these crimes. A first-person narration handed in to coroner Aubert Chagnon would not help to contextualize the murder of Welson Wolf Rooney and of his own adoptive father. The use of animal narrators, on the contrary, allows the protagonist to detach himself from the traumatic experiences that transform him into a beast capable of the brutal violence that he too once endured.

This article focused on, firstly, the two narrative levels found in *Anima*—the protagonist's mission to get revenge for Léonie's murder before subsequently tackling his family's killer—and, secondly, the two narrative techniques used by Mouawad—the use of the animal eye as a narrative device and that of anagnorisis—in order to explore the complexity of a text that is open to different thematic and aesthetic approaches. Vulnerability Studies, Trauma Theory and Animal Studies served to approach concepts such as latency and return regarding the dynamics of memory. The novel implies a



direct dialogue with trauma since Debch's vulnerability as a man who lost his wife and family in the most horrendous manner empowers him to the point that he eventually murders the men responsible for such suffering. All the traumatic experiences that were silenced in the protagonist's subconscious are inevitably resurrected when he sees the image of his own wife murdered in a similar fashion to the one his sister was. Women, indeed, suffer male violence; however, animals are the ultimate victims of male cruelty in the novel: they are slaughtered for our consumption, they are taken from their natural environment to be kept as pets, they are killed for pleasure, etc. Children are also victims of male violence, be they physical or institutional. Curiously enough, *Anima* pays more attention to the plights of the indigenous communities from the North of the American continent than to those of refugees. Debch inevitably identifies with those children that were uprooted from their families and native culture. Canadian policies of integration are, thus, questioned thanks to a critical revision of its more recent history.

This novel carries a strong political message: violence has its consequences. The past always comes back, above all when traumatic events have not been properly overcome. It is when Debch confronts his memories and finds out about the events behind his hidden trauma when he reconciles himself with own past, and he does so by turning towards his animal side. *Anima* is, so to say, an exorcism with curative intention. The idea of healing is achieved when the protagonist is able to turn his own traumatic experiences into fiction. Fragmented traumatic discourse is uttered by animals, insects and humans since it is aimed at illustrating the wild side of the natural world. Debch speaks through animals because humans are the responsible of his suffering and, thus, their voice is worthless.

Mouawad's scriptwriting background is perfectly identifiable in this novel both through the narrative technique used and through all the dramatic twists that elevate the tension of the text until it reaches its climax. The theatrical elements utilized by the author enrich the different parts in which the novel is divided. *Anima* is, indeed, a really interesting case study to approach refugee vulnerability and the animal eye through a text with a unique voice that is able to split the plot into two different narrative levels by using two original narrative techniques.

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