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To Die For: Modern Femininity and the Quest for Anti-Hegemonic Anthropomorphization

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Abstract

*This paper provides an analysis of how the concept of femininity is used in literary anthropomorphizations of animals and plants. I argue that this usage of femininity for anthropomorphization provides a framework, from which animal and plant life are reevaluated as meaningful. However, the notion of femininity portrayed in my exemplary case study can be shown to depict a specifically white and patriarchal narration of femininity. Therefore, this paper explores possibilities for literary anthropomorphization that is feminist, decolonial and narrates animal and plant life as meaningful. My general advocacy is one for intersectional perspectives and new ways of generating meaning and worth that consider different, interwoven struggles at once and make sense of them precisely in their interwovenness. To do so I connect feminist literary criticism, decolonial theory, Afropessimism, and environmentalist perspectives. My case studies are the *Song of the Dodo* by David Quammen and *Mushrooms* by Sylvia Plath.*

Keywords: *Feminist Literary Criticism; Ecofeminism; Decolonial Feminism; Anthropomorphization; Critical Epistemology*

Introduction

If one attempts to criticize the current mass extinction of species, the question arises as to how attention can be generated for this circumstance at all. The conceptual basis of the sixth mass extinction, namely plant and animal life not being considered enough meaningful, becomes a challenge for advocacy on behalf of the species experiencing extinction. Any work aiming to be a kind of “wake up call” in this regard is therefore confronted with the task of having to break through what is already part of the problem the authors are attempting to draw attention to. After all, there is only room for criticism where there is already room for attention: nothing can be criticized that is not considered.

An obvious strategy to counter this difficulty is to anthropomorphize the depicted *nature*²: readers can be brought into an identification with *nature* that allows them to feel it instinctively. Literary discussions of the extinction of species are particularly often elegies or tragedies

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² In this paper I italicize words like *nature* or *femininity* to draw attention to them as specifically Western conceptual frameworks; that is to draw attention to their concept *making*. I write about them specifically in their function as concepts of Western modernity. This consideration is particularly important to me for *woman*, *femininity*, *masculinity*, *nature* and *culture* as concepts. I want to explicitly state that I understand binaries and dualisms as a constructed and conceptually produced polarity. My understanding of concepts draws from Robert Brandom's conceptual inferentialism: I believe that concepts are what they are by how they relate to other terms and concepts - by what they exclude or include or what they are associated with (Brandom, 2000, 71).



(Heise, 2016, 32). Work of this nature can be a powerful hermeneutic tool to render *nature* more culturally meaningful.

In this paper, I question the role that the notion of *femininity* plays in literary anthropomorphization. In doing so I draw from eco-feminist analysis of *woman* in relation to *nature* and *other to culture* (Warren, 2000, xiii; Merchant, 2000, 1; Shiva, 2016, xvi; Chollett 2022, 193).³ This interwovenness of patriarchal domination and domination of *nature* is not a new topic by any means. However, these analyses have not been systematically related to discussions of anthropomorphization as well as reflection of anti-racist and anti-colonial nature so far. In this paper, I draw from eco-feminist scholars and activist like Val Plumwood (2003), Carolyn Merchant (2000), Karen Warren (2000), Vandana Shiva (2016) and relate their core findings to a discussion of literary anthropomorphization. I regard this attempt as a relevant contribution to turning eco-feminist work into tangible action in the struggle for more eco-justice.

To start off, I show that a specifically *feminine* anthropomorphization is oftentimes utilized to create the notion of worthiness of *nature*. I refer to David Quammen's portrait of the last Dodo as my exemplary case study here. I then focus on *femininity* as a conceptual framework arising in the context of Western modernity. I pay special attention to the conceptual proximity of *femininity* and *fragility* here: I provide an analysis of the cultural meaning and role of this conceptual interwovenness. In doing so, I question the aforementioned *fragile femininity* specifically with regard to its role in the colonial and patriarchal regulation of power.

I argue that these considerations are of fundamental importance to literary anthropomorphization of *nature*. I thus argue that a critique of mass extinction should also be a critique of Western modernity. In doing so, I first explore the interwovenness between patriarchal and colonial oppression and the circumstance of mass extinction. From this investigation, I conclude that the hierarchized *nature-culture-binary* functions as the conceptual basis of patriarchal and colonial violence as well as violence against *nature*. This binary establishes *nature* as a category that legitimizes violence and oppression by conceptualizing it as automatically and necessarily inferior to *culture* (Shiva, 1988, 415; Plumwood, 2003, 19; Bronfen, 1996, 66).⁴ I, therefore, argue for finding anti-hegemonic forms of anthropomorphization that can touch and ultimately question this *nature-culture-binary* as a hegemonic conception.

The concluding section of this paper focuses precisely on this search. I take up general considerations on value, role, and possible criteria for anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization. I then examine *Mushrooms* by Sylvia Plath. I suggest reading Plath's poem as a possible example of anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization. I analyze Plath's poem to substantiate the idea of anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization using an exemplary piece of literary work. Finally, I summarize the analysis of *femininity* in relation to literary anthropomorphization.

³ The conceptual entanglement of *woman* and *nature* has also played an important part in constructing the figure of the witch in early modern times. On this, see Chollett 2023, chapter 5 and Merchant 2000, chapter 7. For more general reflections on *nature* as a concept that produces and reproduces material as well as epistemic conditions, see Haraway 1998.

⁴ The general notion of dualism that results in binary concepts such as these is to be critiqued when critiquing conceptual frameworks of modern power structures. For a detailed account of dualistic conceptions and their involvement in upholding oppressive systems of power, see Plumwood 2003, Chapter 2. For an analysis of the nature-culture-dualism as a specifically Western conceptual framework, see Merchant 2000, Chapter 5.

***Femininity* and Anthropomorphization: An Inventory**

This section first contextualizes anthropomorphization in its role and function in literary accounts of mass extinction. In light of these considerations, I then explore the role of *femininity* in anthropomorphization. This exploration takes shape first in general considerations of the potential of feminine anthropomorphization to trigger dismay and sadness in readers. It is then further explored through an analysis of David Quammen's portrait of the last dodo.

Together with Ursula Heise, I understand the discourse on the sixth mass extinction primarily as a question of what stories we as a culture talk about the extinction of species (Heise, 2016, 5). The question of emotional dismay in relation to the extinction of species is primarily a question of what narratives about this extinction are based on and how culturally integrable and tangible the circumstance in question can be presented. As much as one might wish a situation to “speak for itself” it doesn’t really. Situations don’t speak, they are told. One way of telling the story of species extinction is to conceptually humanize the *nature* depicted.

The strategy of anthropomorphization is a controversial one, and with good reason⁵. Together with Ursula Heise, I am of the position that under any circumstance anthropomorphization needs to be implemented as a tool to render *nature* meaningful and raise attention to mass extinction as a form and result of violence. This paper attempts to contribute to attentive anthropomorphization in discussing concerns of feminist and decolonial intersectionality with regard to anthropomorphization.

If a depiction of mass extinction aims to affect people, it needs to tie in with cultural narrative and patterns of interpretation that carry the ability to emotionally affect, to cause a sense of loss (Heise, 2016, 5). If the death of animals and plants is to be felt as a loss, their lives must first be perceived as valuable. Modernity is based on the idea that human life is worth protecting (Braidotti, 2013, 55; Bronfen, 1996, 66; Reemtsma, 2013, 2).⁶ In that sense it is an effective strategy to then portray animal and plant life as possessing “human qualities” to cause a reevaluation of the worthiness of these lives. A successful anthropomorphization dissolves the *animal-human binary*⁷ for a brief moment. To make species extinction tangible as a loss for people, this resolution is necessary: *nature* must be integrated into human narratives. Only in this way can it receive attention and ultimately be upgraded and protected.

In *After Nature* Heise problematizes anthropomorphization and still advocates it - as a strategy in two ways: First, as a strategy to make species protection culturally significant. On the other hand, as a strategy of self-reflection and a shift in perspective. I subscribe to this position in understanding anthropomorphization as problematic but necessary. Given this problematic

⁵ The question of anthropomorphization is explored in greater depth in Vogel 2020 and Heise 2016. Vogel focuses on the question of the best possible anthropomorphization, while Heise sheds light on anthropomorphization primarily in its function as a form of appreciation and a tool for raising attention. The three main pitfalls of anthropomorphization can be summarized as follows: 1) Anthropomorphization tends to reproduce human power over nature on a narrative level. 2) Anthropomorphizing representations of *nature* might not do justice to the complex issue of species extinction. 3) Anthropomorphization could reproduce human categories that may themselves be part of the problem. My paper focuses specifically on the third pitfall with regard to notions of *femininity*.

⁶ In his (2022) paper Hubert Zapf discusses the theoretical frameworks of *Posthumanism* and *Ecobumanism* with regard to them troubling the notion of *the human*.

⁷ A detailed analysis of the categories of *human* and *animal*, their implications and their zoological (Non-)durability can be found in Vogel 2020, Braidotti 2013 and Haraway 2010.

nature of anthropomorphization it makes sense to examine how exactly the anthropomorphization is done, that is how it relates itself to the human concepts it utilizes. I attempt to make such an analysis regarding a feminine gendering of *nature*.

Beautiful and fragile: Anthropomorphization and Femininity

I believe that anthropomorphization as a strategy for emotional touch tends to *feminize* the depicted *nature*. This tendency results from the attempt to understand how readers experience *nature* as precious and worthy of protection. I argue that modern conceptions of femininity are a particularly good conceptual framework to achieve this emotional response.

Wanting *nature* to be understood as *valuable* and *significant* makes it appealing to therefore portray the lives in question as *beautiful* and *fragile* (Heise, 2016, 7) - like *a beautiful woman⁸ in need*. The *beautiful woman in need* is a cultural narrative and she is valuable for two reasons: she is beautiful and she is helpless. A *beautiful, dying woman* inspires melancholy: she is a sight of great sadness and great beauty. For *nature* to be portrayed as valuable this narrative is promising: if *animals* and *plants* were briefly felt as *beautiful, dying women* are felt, it would be superfluous to ask for reasons to protect them. There would simply be no question of their worthiness of protection. Doing this would be necessary and honorable because saving *something beautiful and fragile* is always a matter of honor. Honor is a concept that is interwoven with the idea of masculinity: taking it back to the Western trope of the beautiful woman dying - it is a man who does the saving, and it is a woman who does the dying. So, this evoked sense of *fragility* and *worth* is gendered in nature, and it provokes urgency because of masculine coded narratives of *doing honorable saving*.

Let's sit with this claim of mine for a bit – on death and *beautiful women*. Allan Poe wrote the following lines in 1846: "The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (Poe, 1846, 19). How exactly is the *death of a beautiful woman* poetic? What does this conceptual connection between poetry and *dying women* reveal about modern conceptions of *femininity*? And in what sense is this conceptual linkage important for anthropomorphic depictions of *nature*?

Let us dive into the first of these questions with Elisabeth Bronfen (1996): in said essay Poe also writes that melancholy and sadness are the two "most legitimate poetic moods" (ibid., 63). *Death* for him is the pinnacle of *melancholy*, *woman* the pinnacle of *beauty*. Bronfen analyzes this connection of *femininity* and *death*: [...] Woman as man's object of desire is on the side of death [...] because she so often serves as a non-reciprocal 'dead' figure of imaginary projection [...]. [...] culturally constructed femininity protects man (and androcentric culture) from death (Bronfen, 1996, 63). Here Bronfen points out that the idea of *femininity* functions as a cultural concept to protect the existing social order. Insofar as *woman* in patriarchal society is primarily an imaginative surface for men, she is always already dead and carries death as a theme within her.

This associative proximity of *death* and *femininity* expresses itself in culturally shared notions that Leslie Jamison summarizes in her 2014 essay on female pain: according to Jamison, women are culturally positioned in immediate conceptual vicinity to the idea of *pain* (ibid.,

⁸ I regard the concept of *woman* here as a concept of Western modernity: I use it to describe an idea with modern specifics and not an actual group of people. For detailed reflections on the concept of *woman* see Young 1994. For reflections on the interwovenness of the notion *woman* and the notion *nature* see Plumwood 1997 and Vandana 2016.

5). Attributes of *weakness*, *emotionality*, and *fragility*, which conceptually separate *femininity* from *masculinity*, create this closeness. *Women*, in their conceptualization as the weaker sex and their positioning as the weakened sex, have always been closer to *pain* than *men*. *They have always needed more protection*. This *woman need for protection* has been created on interpretative and material level by patriarchal culture. The association of *femininity* with *beauty* is part of this conceptualization of *woman in need of protection*. The associative proximity of *femininity* to *fragility* and *aesthetics* shapes *femininity* as a concept at its' very core.

Poe's musing, which describes the *death of beautiful women* as the most poetic subject of all, expresses an aesthetic exhilaration inherent in modern concepts of *femininity*: an overwhelming beauty and fragility that inevitably overcomes one. This overwhelmingly strong perception of witnessing a precious being is precisely what some anthropomorphic representations of *nature* try to trigger in their recipients: the *beauty* and *fragility* of *nature* would suddenly become inescapably evident. The worthiness of *nature* would be irrefutable. Exactly this perception could be a consequence of clever use of feminization in depictions of *nature*. In addition, a closeness to *nature* is another association that is inherent in *femininity*. In the conceptual environment of modernity, feminization thus lends itself as a strategy to produce aesthetic and emotional elation that makes the preciousness of what is portrayed feel evident.

To deepen our understanding of this strategy of feminization, I draw from Davids Quammen's portrait of the last dodo as an exploratory case study. Quammen aims to draw attention to the extinction of species in his book *The Song of the Dodo*. He portrays a scene in which the entire species of the dodo has been exterminated except for so few specimens that the species dies out due to the accidental deaths of these last individual animals (Heise, 2010, 51). The following excerpt is the same that Heise (2010) examines in *The End of Nature*. I follow up on her analysis and relate it to the previous discussion of *femininity* in relation to *grief* and *death*. First, I'll let Quammen's scene speak for itself and unfold its effect afterwards:

Let's imagine a single survivor, a lonely refugee, existing somewhere in Mauritius in the late 17th century. Let's pretend it was a female. Clumsy and flightless, the animal was disoriented — but smart enough to escape and survive while its fellows perished. Maybe it was just lucky. Let's imagine his young was found by a wild pig while his last fertile egg was eaten by a monkey. The male was dead, killed by a hungry Dutch sailor, and the female could not hope to find a new mate. In the past six years, a period beyond the bird's memory, it had not seen a single member of its species. *Raphus cucullatus* had become a dying rarity. But this one physical specimen was still alive. Let's imagine it was thirty-five or forty years old, old age for most species of bird but not impossible for one so large. The animal no longer ran, it waddled heavily. By now it was going blind. Then came a morning in 1667 when before dawn it took refuge from a torrential downpour under a cold stone ledge of one of the Black River cliffs. It bowed its head and pressed it against its body, puffed up to keep heat loss low, stared in silent misery. It was waiting. Neither itself nor anyone else knew that it was the last living dodo specimen on the whole wide earth, After the rainstorm, it no longer opened its eyes. This is what extinction looks like.

(David Quammen, 2004, 336 f.)

I understand this excerpt as a kind of emblem of the *feminization strategy for melancholy*. Quammen's scene leaves one undeniably affected. For a moment, you mourn the fictional last

female dodo. You might sit in the rain for a moment and cry, looking for warmth that doesn't exist because the dodo is gone.

I argue that this catchy, melancholy affect is brought about most prominently by the reference this scene makes to culturally shared notion of *femininity* in Western culture. Quammen's last female dodo is physically and mentally wounded. It waddles and goes blind and has lost all conspecifics and "family members": it is fragile all around and its fragility is an escalating process (the female is going blind at the very moment of the scene) culminating in death. The dodo female is essentially characterized by Quammen in her relationship to other animals: she gave birth twice and lost both children (cruelly). She loved and her lover died. This characterization and dramatization along relationships is typical for feminine figures, especially for specifically feminine coded scenes of tragedy (Bronfen, 1996, 64; Barnett, 2023): because what could be more tragic and melancholic than a beautiful woman mourning her lover?⁹ Quammen writes a scene that appears in countless movies and books for the dodo (cf. *ibid.*): a woman mourns a relationship (or several) in the rain. Quammen's scene works because it connects to countless pop culture images and narratives: because we have long known the dodo female in her existence as a grieving lover and mother. We are used to her and to empathizing with her. We are collectively habituated at experiencing empathy in sight of this scene. Quammen introduces us to this dodo female by letting her become a feminine figure that has long lived in all our emotional worlds – one that we already know (cf. *ibid.*): a woman crying in the rain on the love she felt and on the love she lost.

Another gender-specific characterization becomes apparent with regard to the deaths described: the beloved man was killed. The last baby eaten by a pig and the last fertile egg by a monkey. The female dodo herself, however, dies an entirely gentle death, leaving her body entirely intact: she dies softly. This gentle dying amplifies the melancholy of the scene; it underscores the perceived preciousness and innocence of the deceased animal. You can almost see her sitting there in the rain, as if asleep in a sad, dreamless sleep. Bronfen describes this "intact dying" as a phenomenon of feminized representations of dying: the aestheticization of a corpse and its feminization are directly related¹⁰.

What do these considerations leave us with? Quammen feminizes his depiction of the last dodo to trigger melancholy touch and dismay: *femininity* is utilized within this anthropomorphization as a strategy of touch and is very successful at that. Quammen succeeds in rewriting a scene that is deeply familiar to us in its "human version" for a dodo. Scenes like this one can make people feel deeply because they connect with culturally handed-down patterns and feelings and skillfully utilize them – whether this is an intentional utilization or one happening intuitively.

I regard this utilization as the greatest strength as well as the greatest pitfall of Quammen's portrait: the scene evokes melancholy and sadness that is hard to resist. This affect is

⁹ The Western narrative tendency to characterize *feminine subjects* in terms of their social relations is interwoven with the conceptual entanglement of *care* and *femininity*. For discussion on more-than-human care that queers the understanding of *care* as *human* and *feminine* see Barnett 2023, Dare 2023 and Kimmerer 2015. For an analysis of the conceptual as well as material interwovenness of *woman*, *nature* and *care* see Shiva 2016 (*Who really feeds the world?*).

¹⁰ The scene also utilizes the idea of *fertility* ("last fertile egg"). The fertility of the last dodo appears here as part of her *fragility*: her *fertility* is fugitive and now gone. This scene here references culturally shared notions of *fertility* as interwoven with *femininity* and with *nature*. Quammen builds on these conceptual interlinkages by allowing the (past) fertility of the last female dodo to become an aspect of the scene's melancholy.

manufactured *because* the last dodo is portrayed as a grieving lover who dies a gentle, lonely death in the rain. Quammen reproduces hegemonic images of *femininity* that are a central component of the same power structures within which the mass extinction of species takes place. Also, his portrait of the female dodo as a grieving lover carries the implication that there is an easy solution¹¹ to the melancholy of the scene.

I consider Quammen's scene to be a technically very successful implementation of feminization as a strategy for emotional touch; the degree of melancholy that his scene can trigger is remarkable. The scene is an unprecedented example of emotional mobilization for species extinction. However, as an actual discussion of the extinction of species, I consider it to have failed in two respects: It reproduces modern hegemonic concepts without any reflection on this reproduction being recognizable. And melancholy of the scene is brought into existence with regard to a tragic love scene rather than the extinction itself, thereby shifting the scene's focus away from the extinction issue. My main concern however is the notion of femininity that Quammen is utilizing and reproducing here. In what follows, I argue that this notion of femininity is actually part of the very power structure Quammen aims to criticize when critiquing the sixth mass extinction: this species extinction arises because of the power structure of modernity, more specifically it arises from a colonial and patriarchal manner of structuring the world. The notion of *femininity* Quammen utilizes, I argue, is an important component of exactly this power structure that is part of the problem of this current species extinction.

Power Structures of Modernity: Colonialism and Patriarchy within the idea of *Femininity*

The notion of *Femininity* permeates our cultural world and thus also permeates our anthropomorphic depictions of nature. To evaluate the importance of this circumstance, we need to have a closer look at this idea of femininity that is at work here: this next section is therefore dedicated to conceptually locating the notion of *femininity* within modern, Western structures of power. I specifically focus on the question of how the conceptual connection between *femininity* and *fragility* is related to patriarchal and colonial relations of power. I argue a) that there is huge hegemonic scope to the notion of *beautiful, fragile womanhood* and b) that this hegemonic dimension should be of interest in considering and conceptualizing anthropomorphization, specifically those that are coded as *feminine*.

Modern Power Structures: A conceptual localization

When referring to the concept of *modernity*, I describe a culture dominated by Western perspectives and Eurocentrism. I am particularly interested in the power structures of modern societies. In other words: I am concerned with the question of the exercise of power or violence, that is specifically *modern*, with exercises of power and forms of violence that only

¹¹ In writing such a culturally ingrained scene, Quammen also (involuntarily) implies that the melancholy of the scene is easily remedied: the character of the grieving lover is so tragic precisely because it has a seemingly simple solution: the pain of the grieving lover is tragic because she could so easily be redeemed by him and yet she is not. I argue that Quammen unintentionally transfers this aspect of *the grieving woman trope* to his scene of the last dodo: his scene is of great melancholy and yet it seems as if it could be dissolved at any moment as a likeable male dodo walks through the crevice and lovingly clasps the lonely female dodo in his wings. Due to this aspect of the narrative, which Quammen bases his portrait on, his scene misses the goal of actually addressing the species extinction.

occurs in the context of modern cultures, or which are based on central elements of modern self-narration.¹²

The sixth mass extinction as the first man-made species extinction features exactly such a specifically modern power structure – hierarchies and circumstances that are specific to modernity are reflected in the situation of this species extinction.

When referring to modernity I refer to a) specific power structures, still in place and b) to a specifically modern self-understanding when it comes to *violence* that renders systemic forms of violence in modernity *invisible*.¹³

I believe modern structures of power are primarily based on culturally shared patterns of interpretation and narrative habits. They are the ones we need to look at closely to know better what it is that we are thinking. Or more precisely: what our collectively shared narratives mean and do for the power relations in place.

In what follows I focus on the colonial and patriarchal dimension of modern culture and on the interwovenness of the two systems. I argue that both are deeply inscribed in the modern understanding of *femininity*. I undertake this digression in order to examine what the associative closeness of *femininity* and *fragility* is connected to: What cultural significance and role does *fragile femininity* have in modern structures of power? I will now outline a brief answer to this question to then take our considerations back to anthropomorphization.

Gentle Violence: Hegemonic Femininity and White Supremacy

Femininity as a modern notion is permeated by the idea of *fragility* and *beauty*, where *woman* is the *delicate and beautiful sex*. I argue that this conceptual interwovenness acts as a patriarchal and colonial securing of power.

To start with, *Femininity* as constituted by *tenderness* is part of a hierarchical, binary construction of *gender*: masculinity occurs conceptually close to *strength*, whereas *femininity* is *tender* – a bit *fragile*, a bit *weak* (Bronfen, 1996, 65). *Feminine fragility* is conceptually connected to notions of *beauty* and thus experiences what seems at first sight to be a form of appreciation: but the hierarchy between *tenderness* and *strength*, between *femininity* and *masculinity* is unmistakable and is reflected in various dimensions. For example, Bronfen argues that life (survival) is conceptually and politically *masculine*, while *femininity* has always implied death by being a platform for male imagination and needs (Bronfen, 1996, 63, 65). This reflection alludes to the conceptualization of *femininity* as *passivity* and *masculinity* as *activity*. This notion of *feminine passivity* is directly related to the idea of *beautiful fragility*: *femininity* is *fragile* precisely because it is *passive* and thus *dependent*. This conceptual framework brings *woman* into existence as *the one in need of rescue* (cf. *ibid.*). The conception of *femininity* as *fragile* reflects a hierarchical and binary

¹² For an analysis of the *nature-culture-dualism* as a specifically Western notion, see Merchant 2000, chapter 5.

¹³ Like Jan-Philipp Reemtsma, I believe that modern culture holds a very specific self-image here: it sees itself as the ambassador of non-violence and narrates itself as a place of increasing non-violence (Reemtsma, 2013,10). Where there is *actual modernity*, there is no violence; that's the narrative. This self-understanding conceptualizes modernity as a non-violent space: experiencing violence in modernity is made into an oxymoron. And this oxymoron is exactly what I would like to state at this point as a specific feature of modern power structures: the modern exercise of power is characterized by the fact that it renders itself invisible (cf. *ibid.*, 11). This statement alludes to what is usually understood by "systemic violence" or "institutional violence": exercises of power that are consistently and frequently normalized and are therefore not read as such. A central part of this exercise of power consists precisely in the more difficult visibility of its' operation.

order of *gender* that envisages the predominance of masculine attributes (Plumwood, 2003, 43; Merchant, 2000, 1).

Fragile femininity is also not the *universal femininity* it tends to be narrated as. Rather *fragile femininity* is one that specifically white women can and are encouraged to embody. Women of Color and Black Women are not conceptually envisioned in this *fragile femininity*: they are not included in the idea of *preciousness*, of a specific *worthiness of protection* that is aesthetically delightful to *the (white) man*. One component of the marginalization of Black women and Women of Color in particular is precisely this exclusion from *femininity*. *Fragile femininity* perpetuates white supremacy by universalizing *white femininity* as *the one femininity* or *the right femininity*; with that *white* is again conceptualized as *the human color* (Wynter, 1994, 42; Braidotti, 2017, 17). In addition, this concept divides subjects socialized within *femininity* and thus creates a structural obstacle to resistance against patriarchal as well as colonial social structures.

This *fragile femininity* also plays a fundamental role in the marginalization of Black men and Men of Color. It has historically and it does now: precisely because of this *tenderness*, the *delicate white woman* is always conceived as constant potential victims. Along the modern conceptualization of Black men and Men of Color as particularly *threatening* and *inherently dangerous*, the following trope emerges: *innocent, delicate (white) woman* as the victim of, *unbridled (Black) men* (Fanon, 2008, 167). This narrative is of great importance for both colonial and patriarchal structures of power and their constant securing¹⁴: this figure of thought systematically masks the violence emanating from *white man*. And it creates a legitimizing narrative for the exclusion and mistreatment of Black men and Men of Color.

These considerations serve as an approximate classification and problematization of *fragile femininity*: this notion perpetuates colonial and patriarchal structures and exercises of power on a multitude of levels and serves as a systematic obstacle to resistance against these same structures. Natalee Bauer terms the colonial violence that emanates from this concept of *fragile femininity* “tender violence”: She thus refers to the violent nature of the idea of *fragile femininity*, *white woman as tender* (Bauer, 2017, 86). This rooting of the notion *fragile femininity* - as implied by Quammen - in colonial and patriarchal structures of power is the background against which I now come back to the question of anthropomorphization.

Critique of Man-Made Mass Extinction as a Critique of Modernity: An Argument

I now further explore the interwovenness of modern structures of power with man-made mass extinction. I focus on an investigation of the connections between naturalist¹⁵, patriarchal

¹⁴ How *delicate femininity* functions as a catalyst for colonial violence can be observed exemplary in the painting "American Progress" by John Gast (1872): it shows a *white, blond woman* in a white robe floating angelically across the sky. She lays out cord and carries a schoolbook in her arms; below her are indigenous people. The painting feminizes the colonial idea of *civilization* and thus downplays and aestheticizes it beyond all measure. I think this painting serves to give an impression of how *delicate white femininity* is used to disguise and legitimize colonial action and thought. For theoretical reflections on this see Bauer 2017.

¹⁵ I introduce *naturalist* as a makeshift term in the context of this work: it describes the power structure that conceptualizes *nature* as inferior to culture. I wish to differentiate myself from the concept of speciesism and the movement of anti-speciesism: I consider the concept of speciesism to be unsuitable for looking at categorizations and conceptions as such. Furthermore, I don't see my work as standing in the tradition of Peter Singer, to whom the coining of the term speciesism essentially goes back. In my understanding of a meaningful critique of species extinction as a well-founded and reflected critique of modernity, I understand my considerations as a counter-position to any work for animal rights that reproduces or accepts the marginalization of certain groups of people (cf. e.g. Moskopp, 2015).

and racist violence (Shiva, 1988, 415; Merchant, 2000, 1). Based on these analyses, I argue for a critique of species extinction that positions itself as a critique of modernity: that is, one that can relate the current extinction of species to modern culture as a whole.

Species Extinction of Modernity requires Criticism of Modernity: My Advocacy

Modern structures of power can be understood as a complex web of normalized concepts, interpretations, and behaviors: the different dimensions of this structure (patriarchal power, racist power, naturist power, colonial power etc.) overlap and condition each other. Following up on the work of Bronfen (1996), I propose that a fundamental conceptual violence ought to be recorded. One that produces exclusion along a wide range of characteristics. Merchant (2000) examines the conceptual proximity of *femininity* and *nature*: *Woman*, according to Bronfen, occurs through her association with nature as *the other to culture* (Bronfen, 1996, 66; Merchant, 2000, 127). *Femininity*, as *the anti-civilizational*, appears as a threat to the existing order (ibid./Pinkola Estés, 1997, 10; Haraway, 2010, 15). Like Merchant I regard this conceptual opposition of *femininity* and *culture* as a central conceptual origin of patriarchal violence, that is, culturally shared and normalized processes are the necessary basis for systemic violence because violence can best take place when it is not regarded as such. And what better way to achieve this effect than through a fundamental conceptual exclusion? Also, conceptualizing *femininity* and *culture* as opposites creates a fundamental legitimacy of violence against *femininity* and the beings embodying it. Modern self-narration essentially operates along the lines of a rhetoric of *civilizational progress*, in which *culture* appears as downright sacralized (cf. ibid.; Bronfen, 1997, 66; Shiva, 1988, 415): *civilization* – in this narrative – is *the greatest thing that humans have created so far*.

This conceptualization as *the being-other-to-culture*, as the *anti-civilizational*, is found even more prominent in racist rhetoric and colonial logic: Black people, People of Color, indigenous populations, or people with (post-) migrant biographies are made into the conceptual counterpart to the notion of *culture*. The same applies to *animals* and *plants*: as *nature*, they stand in very concrete contrast to the notion of *culture*. As Mikael Vogel (2020) discusses in his essay TIER¹⁶, the *nature-culture-binary*, like the *animal-human-binary*, is a cultural construct, more than a zoological differentiation (cf. ibid. 7; Plumwood, 2003, 43; Braidotti, 2013, 72 onward; Haraway, 2010, 9).¹⁷ This conceptual violence to be made into *the other to culture* also presents itself as a commonality that both racist and patriarchal degradation share – in both systems of degradation the marginalized group experienced being referred to as *animals* (Braidotti, 2013, 68; Merchant, 2000, 1, 127; Vogel, 2020, 14; Federici, 2004, 105). The conceptualization as *animal* expresses a disparagement that lies precisely in the fact that *the human* appears as the modern, civil subject and *the-other-to-the-human* is subordinate to what is conceptualized as *human*. One might object that *women*, just like People of Color and Black people, are also *human*

¹⁶ Mikael Vogel discusses the category of the *animal* at length in his essay *TIER*. He does so primarily from the standpoint of an anti-speciesist writer. I refer to him in the context of different forms and perspectives of critiquing the category *animal*: alongside feminist, Marxist, anti-colonial and posthuman approaches Vogel too aims to critique as a form of establishing and upholding violent structures of power. In forming this critique Vogel focuses on how those considered *animal* today are violated and how their violation is legitimized through the notion of *animal*. I engage with Vogels work as one form and focus of critiquing the category of *animal*. In his essay Vogel specifically engages with how the category of the *animal* is conceptually formed through the notion of the *animal – human – binary*. I draw from fundamentally draw from Vogel in my own considerations of the *animal – human – binary*.

¹⁷ On the *animal-human-dualism* as an instrument of power see Braidotti 2013, chapter 2.

beings: but the crux of the matter is that *being human* is a concept that as such can and does exclude exactly those groups (Braidotti, 2013, 68; Wynter, 1994, 42; Merchant, 2000, 127). Sylvia Wynter theorizes racism and colonialism as a conceptualization of being-human as white and male (Wynter, 1994, 45). These exclusions are deeply inscribed in modernity and have their origin in the hierarchical *nature-culture-binary* (Merchant, 2000, 127; Braidotti, 2013, 3; Plumwood, 2003, 43). Paula von Gleich, who researches colonialism and racism within the theoretical tradition of Wynter, sums up the depth of this violence as follows: “What does it take to dismantle the border erected between people defined as humans and people condemned to 'non-humanness' and to forge a new and truly all-encompassing concept of 'the Human'? Wilderson's answer, echoing Frantz Fanon, is as old as the question posed: 'the end of the world' as we know it” (Von Gleich, 2017, 2012).

Von Gleich¹⁸ understands the exclusivity of the modern concept of *being-human* as so pervasive that changing them would mean *the end of the world as we know it*. The question of *the end of the world* also forces itself on us in dealing with the human-made mass extinction: from an ecological point of view, the end of the world as we know it is irretrievable since the current species extinction is irrevocably changing the ecosystem (e.g. Heflik, 2021). Considering this, I would like to propose the following attitude: the world as we know it is coming to an end one way or another. The only question is whether this is done in more of a hegemonic or more of an anti-hegemonic way. And if we want it to happen in an anti-hegemonic way, we are in deep need for new ways of presenting and narrating species extinction: ones that fight *femininity* as a colonial and patriarchal authority (Braidotti, 2011, 3, 28).

For an Anti-Hegemonic Anthropomorphization: An Argument

One may now legitimately ask why such new forms of representation should take place precisely in literary representations of *nature* and, moreover, precisely in anthropomorphization. This objection can be justified as an alternative because anthropomorphization alone certainly cannot lead to new ways of thinking and narrating species extinction as a whole. This movement must go beyond literary works and beyond anthropomorphization. However, I focus on anthropomorphization because I see in them as a special potential to start this movement towards other understandings of species' extinction and of *femininity* – for we need queered notions of *woman* and of *nature* (Braidotti, 2011, 28). In what follows, I will explain this idea in two steps: first I address the question to what extent literary works and writing as such can be understood as a place for this change. Secondly, I turn to the question of how anthropomorphization could be a successful strategy for this.

I would like to address the first question drawing from Audre Lorde and Helene Cixous. Both of them understand literary writings as a predestined space for anti-hegemonic conceptualization (Lorde, 1985, 1; Cixous, 1976, 875). I will now provide a brief insight into this train of thought to then relate it to my account of anthropomorphization – this is the theoretical background in whose light I attribute special potential to literary depictions of species extinction. Both Cixous and Lorde understand the intellectual oppression of *woman* as

¹⁸ I reference von Gleich as representative of the Afro-pessimist notion of *the end of the world*. I have three aims in mind in considering this notion here: a) I believe this notion of *the end of the world* showcases how deep the critique of the concept of *being-human* goes, b) I believe it also points out the deep interwovenness of this notion of *being-human* with other notions fundamental to Western world-building, c) I believe that both, Afro-pessimist works and eco-critical works consider *an end of the world as we know it* and I think there is merit to connecting these two considerations of *world ending*.

a central component of patriarchal oppression and hegemonic power relations. Insofar, as non-writing women is a part of this oppression, the *writing woman* is already a figure of resistance (Cixous, 1976, 875). Her writing is a form of resistance insofar as it captures and develops their perspective and from there creates a space for new conceptualization. Audre Lorde writes: "Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought" (Lorde, 1985, 1). Insofar as literary writing consists precisely of being an experiment with language, it is also exactly the place for finding new words and narrations, concepts, and interpretations (cf. *ibid.*) – or as Lorde puts it *new ways of making things felt*. It is precisely this consideration that makes me believe that literary accounts of species extinction are particularly a relevant building block in the deconstruction of the hegemonic *nature-culture-binary*. Literary writings are needed here in their potential for new conceptualization, reinterpretation, and creation of language.

Within literary writing as a form of resistance, what is the specific role of anthropomorphization? I argue that the potential of anthropomorphization is decisive in disarming the *human-nature-binary* and thus also the *nature-culture-binary*. By creating an identification of *humans* with *nature*, anthropomorphization makes the conventional distinction between *animal* and *human*, between *human* and *nature* and between *nature* and *culture* seem questionable. How plausible are these binaries really, when they can so easily be dissolved? In this sense, anthropomorphization bears special potential to question the *nature-culture-binary* long term, and this would be the start of an important act of resistance.

Considering this, I believe it is crucial to ask how anthropomorphization can achieve this disarming of the *nature-culture-binary* without - as seen in Quammen's work – reproducing central conceptual causes of the circumstance that is criticized. The following concluding section is my attempt to make a contribution to this search for anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization.

Antihegemonic Anthropomorphization: Feminist Anthropomorphization as a Systemic Critique of Modernity

This concluding section pursues the question of possibilities of anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization in two parts: First, I carry out a general search and reflection on what could characterize an anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization. In the second part I will analyze the poem *Mushrooms* by Sylvia Plath and analyze its potential as an anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization. The analysis of Plath's work is intended to further develop and illustrate my thoughts on anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization: my argument here is that Plath uses mushrooms as a feminist metaphor and in by doing so implements an anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization. Her poem serves as a case study for anti-hegemonic forms of anthropomorphization.¹⁹

¹⁹ In her (2015) book *The Mushroom at the end of the World* Anna Tsing writes the mushroom *Matsutake* as an entity helping us a) shine light on conditions of precarity, on those lives that know now 'stability' and b) helping us to learn to move through and with conditions of indeterminacy and uncontrollability. Thus, taking her readers on a journey learning from the lives of Matsutake mushrooms. Sylvia Plath seems to me to focus her poem *Mushrooms* on different aspects; however, Tsing and Plath share a fundamental notion: that mushrooms can teach humans about resistance, that they symbolize things and live in ways we can

Anti-Hegemonic Anthropomorphization: A quest

Anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization would seek to challenge modern conceptualization of *culture*. It would touch upon modern culture in general, illustrating not just the extinction itself, but the conceptual context of that made it possible in the first place. Anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization would partake in reshaping notions of *womanhood* and Blackness. It would provide a space for us to, as Peggy Karpouzou and Nikoleta Zampaki put it, *re-think and re-make our position in a human and more-than-human world* (Karpouzou and Zampaki, 2022).

What would such an anthropomorphization mean for *femininity* and its role in anthropomorphization? I propose to understand modern *femininity* as part of the described othering as *anti-cultural, anti-civilizational*. Considering this perspective, *femininity* as a notion touch on a central origin of species extinction - namely the hierarchical *nature-culture-binary*. This binary devalues *nature* and thus functions as a conceptual prerequisite for the man-made species extinction (cf. Plumwood, 2003, 43). Other dimensions of modern structures of power, such as patriarchal and racist power dynamics, also run along precisely this devaluation: the hierarchical *nature-culture-binary* functions as a catalyst for hegemonic power structures. The question of anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization is intended to raise the question of the interwovenness of power over *nature*, power over *woman*, power over *Blackness*.

First, anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization should relate to hegemonic power structures as a deeply interconnected system and thus sidestep the pitfall of nostalgically referring to biodiversity of past times. That way, criticism of prevailing power structures could be expressed explicitly or implicitly. The criticisms can also mobilize struggles against man-made species extinction together with anti-racist and anti-patriarchal struggles. Anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization would thus not only touch on the species extinction itself, but also on the complex socio-political context from which it originates and to which it is conceptually fundamentally connected. I believe that there is also emotional potential in stressing these intertwinements of different forms of marginalization. Thus, addressing the man-made extinction of species harbors the possibility of disillusionment: it is natural to feel powerless. The location of species extinction in dominant power structures and culturally normalized concepts offers a starting point. Admittedly not a starting point through which rapid change could be brought about, but one that helps make the connectedness of one's own life with species extinction more tangible. Because situating species extinction as one aspect of a world woven through with colonial and patriarchal structures, connects mass extinction to struggles one might already be familiar with and it connects mass extinction to the social roles we fill: I believe with this tangibility of the dense interwovenness of these systems comes a particular kind of urgency and a particular kind of possibility. For, understanding ourselves as part of the problem is very close to understanding ourselves as part of the solution.

My second reflection on anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization follows from the first. Such an anthropomorphization would do well to find a way of locating the sixth mass extinction in the context of modernity. As Heise observes, a certain “nostalgic transfiguration” is obvious

allow ourselves to aspire to in order to build lives in the margins of a world that was never structured to suit our living. Another recent account of mushrooms can be found in the book by Merlin Sheldrake (2021) *Entangled Life*. Sheldrake walks his readers through the entanglement of our lives and those of mushrooms. Thus, demonstrating once more that the notion of a *human-nature-binary* is no concept serving us well if we want to understand our own lives and those othered by modern dualism.

here, which does not actually represent an approach critical of modernity and its power structures (Heise, 2016, 32). However, I have in mind a localization of man-made species extinction as a modern phenomenon that does not primarily operate with nostalgia, but primarily with a form of disclosure: showing the origin of this extinction in concepts and ways of life in modernity.

Based on Vogel's reflections on the animal poem, I also see potential for literary discussions of man-made species extinction to allow reflection on the concept of *being-human* (Vogel, 2020, 32). Anthropomorphization in particular can be a means of challenging the *human-animal-binary* or *nature-culture-binary*. An anti-hegemonic approach could unmask these concepts as means to secure hegemonic power structures - or at least give us first indications for such a deconstruction.

My last general thought on anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization lies in the idea of reframing. This can appear as a reframing of the implied devaluation of the *nature-culture-binary* or as a reinterpretation of a specific hegemonic concept, such as *femininity*. Far from being a form of 'check list', these considerations are an experiment in finding new ways of writing about species extinctions. In the following section, I will continue these reflections using another literary example: my analysis of *Mushrooms* by Sylvia Plath focuses on Plath's way of anthropomorphizing. I suggest her poem as one example for anti-hegemonic forms of anthropomorphizing.

Anthropomorphization as Resistance: A Proposal

My analysis of Quammen's portrait of the last dodo focused on Quammen's mode of anthropomorphization: specifically on the role *femininity* as a notion plays in the scene of the last dodo's death. My analysis pointed out two things: on the one hand, Quammen's scene represents an excellent emotional mobilization regarding species extinction. It makes us mourn. On the other hand, this mobilization is created based on a concept of *femininity*, which is ultimately part of the complex cause of man-made species extinction. One aspect of this second argument is a critique of under-complex portraits of species extinction: descriptions of species extinction that don't focus on the topic itself in an intersectional manner that locates the mass extinction in its' modern cultural contexts.

In this section I consider a text by Sylvia Plath that anthropomorphizes mushrooms. Here, too, I pose the question of how anthropomorphization takes place and specifically what notion of *femininity* is utilized. As with Quammen, I focus on the question of emotional mobilization and the anti-hegemonic impetus²⁰.

²⁰ Plath's poem anthropomorphizes a plant (mushrooms), while Quammen anthropomorphizes an animal (the dodo): it could be argued that animals lend themselves more readily to anthropomorphization than plants do (e.g. eyes and mouths). Here one could see an advantage as well as a disadvantage for Plath compared to Quammen: anthropomorphization in her poem is more difficult because it is less obvious. Avoiding stereotypical gender roles, one could say, is easier that way. However, I don't think this difference is particularly decisive, because both authors decide to conceptually *humanize* and both succeed at that. In the context of a successful anthropomorphization, I think gender-specific stereotypes are just as obvious when applied to plants. In addition, Plath also feminized the mushrooms and thus, just like Quammen, is confronted with the concept of *femininity* and all subsequent narratives and figures of thought.

Mushrooms

Overnight, very
Whitely, discreetly,
Very quietly

Our toes, our noses
Take hold on the loam,
Acquire the air.

Nobody sees us,
Stops us, betrays us;
The small grains make room.

Soft fists insist on
Heaving the needles,
The leafy bedding,

Even the paving.
Our hammers, our rams,
Earless and eyeless,

Perfectly voiceless,
Widen the crannies,
Shoulder through holes. We

Diet on water,
On crumbs of shadow,
Bland-mannered, asking

Little or nothing.
So many of us!
So many of us!

We are shelves, we are
Tables, we are meek,
We are edible,

Nudgers and shovers
In spite of ourselves.
Our kind multiplies:

We shall by morning
Inherit the earth.
Our foot's in the door.

As Quammen did, Plath also anthropomorphizes in a precisely *feminine* mode here: She anthropomorphizes above all along the *we*-perspective of the poem and along the consistent mentioning of human body parts (*our toes, our noses*). Further, Plath makes use of adjectives with feminine connotations: *whitely, discreetly, quietly, gently, soft, bland, meek*.

Already in the third verse, however, Plath begins to break with her own anthropomorphization by describing the surroundings of the scene: *the small grains make room*. In the line that follows, she continues both the *humanization* and the depiction of the poems setting as *nature*: she writes of *soft fists* and *leafy bedding*. In doing so, she abolishes the idea of *human* and *nature* as mutually exclusive conceptions. She quite simply refuses to make use of these concepts in that binary manner. This play with the *nature-culture-binary* runs through Plath's poem: again, and again she depicts the scenery using *human* and *non-human* connotations at the same time. Plath does the same here regarding her *feminization* of mushrooms. In the phrase of the *soft fists*, she associates the *feminine* attribute of *softness* with an image of *violence*: *fists*. Here, Plath breaks with the idea that *delicate femininity* cannot be *powerful*, even *violent*. Within her poem, she creates a space in which these attributes are by no means opposed to each other, but rather work together magically. In doing so, she breaks with conception central to modernity. Thus, she creates an anti-hegemonic space in which notions conceptualized as opposites no longer are mutually exclusive – she breaks the binary.

Plath continues her play with the *nature-culture-binary* from verse 5 onward in a specific manner. She characterizes the mushrooms as *nonhuman* by naming their abstinence from what are considered *human body parts*: *earless*, *eyeless*. First, she addresses the conventional devaluation of *nature* along with its supposed *nonhumanness* in stating these absences. However, the verse that follows begins with the line *perfectly voiceless*. Here, she rejects the *nonhumanness* of the mushrooms as a defect and explicitly values it: here, too, she shatters a central element of the *nature-human-binary*, namely that of the hierarchical order.

Plath brings together her play with the concept of *nature* with her play with the concept of *femininity*. Verse 9 reads: *we are shelves, we are tables, we are meek, we are edible*. In the first two lines she enumerates objects twice and ends this enumeration with the word *meek*: I believe by connecting *humility* and reification, Plath achieves two things at once. On the one hand, she unmasks the *delicate, humble, gentle femininity* as a form of reification and, thus as a form of oppression. On the other hand, she shows the joint oppression that is produced by the concepts of *femininity* and *nature*: both concepts objectify. This disclosure comes to a head in the last line of the verse: *we are edible* means *we are consumable*. We must be consumable to *be* at all. This *we* effect *nature*, woman, Blacks, and all other entities that have no place (or not enough) for their own subjectivity within the power structures of modernity.

From this verse onwards, herbalism and *femininity* finally live together in Plath's poem and combine to form a subversive resistance: *we shall by morning inherit the earth*. Those who were banished to the outskirts of this world worked from there and tomorrow the world will be theirs. Plath anthropomorphizes mushrooms by allowing them to appear as a resistant metaphor that is explicitly coded *feminine*, thereby also reinterpreting *femininity*.

Although my exploration of *Mushrooms* remains brief here, I believe it shows the continual conceptual play with, within and beyond notions serving hegemonic interests of power: it is this *play of queering notions* that I propose as the central component of anti-hegemonic forms of anthropomorphization. Anti-hegemonic forms of anthropomorphization therefore exists as those forms of anthropomorphization that queer the very notion of *the human*. *Anti-hegemonic feminization* thus queers *the feminine*.

I believe we can learn about anti-hegemonic ways of anthropomorphization by contrasting the writing of Quammen and Plath: both made use of a specifically feminine

anthropomorphization, but Plath queered *femininity* in doing so whereas Quammen made use of a more conventional notion of *femininity*. I believe, the central difference between the two works of literature lies in Plath's play with modern concepts, instead of a purely strategic use of them as is recognizable in Quammen's work: Plath initially anthropomorphizes, but does not stop there, but rather ends with a disarming of the *human-nature-binary*.

In contrast to Quammen, Plath does not describe extinction here, but rather the opposite: her scenery is one of growth. Her poem is therefore much more difficult to read than an emotional mobilization for the sixth mass extinction, since she does not explicitly discuss said extinction. And yet the extinction of species is discussed insofar as Plath's scenery can be read as a scene that shows the potential of what *could* be the case if hegemonic structures of power can be dismantled - when the *human-nature-binary* can be disarmed.

Plath's lyrics fail to sadden us about the species extinction like Quammen's scene does, but it does help to illustrate a notion of feminist, anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization because it is an example of how a literary *humanization* can still queer notions of *femininity* and of the *human-nature-binary* while doing anthropomorphization. Plath constantly reinterprets hegemonic concepts - she plays with them. Calm and gentle, her poem describes nothing less than a total seizure of power: and after reading *Mushrooms*, one might wonder why *tenderness* and *combat* were ever thought of as opposites.

Conclusion

I began this paper with an inventory of the role of *femininity* in anthropomorphic depictions of *nature*. I provided an analysis that shows how the notion of *femininity* is of particular importance to anthropomorphization that aims to cause emotional affection. I further showed how the *femininity* utilized in this manner is a specific form of *fragile femininity* that is coded as white and is conceptually interwoven with colonial structures of power. Alongside this observation, I have discussed the hierarchized *nature-culture-binary* as a common core of patriarchal, naturist, racial and colonial oppression. Against this background, I advocated for the search for anti-hegemonic forms of anthropomorphization: This is how I termed forms of anthropomorphization, which use anthropomorphization to reveal hegemonic conceptual structures. In this advocacy lies my conviction that our environmentalist struggle does not benefit from further reproducing the hegemonic notion of *fragile femininity*.

In the search for possibilities of anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization, I identified the questioning and reinterpretation of hegemonic concepts as a central characteristic of anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization: Anthropomorphization in this use would not be a transfer of concepts common in the realm of the *human to nature*, rather it would provide a tool to create a critical perspective on the *nature-culture-binary*. As an example of such an anti-hegemonic anthropomorphization, I analyzed Sylvia Plath's *Mushrooms* and showed how she profoundly reinterprets hegemonic concepts in her poem.

I believe Plath's poem is a first point of reference for finding out more about concrete possibilities of this use of anthropomorphization. *Mushrooms* is an unmasking play with the concepts fundamental to the power structures in place. At the top of the list: the *nature-culture-binary*. Plath describes nothing less than the practice of a joint reinterpretation that finally realizes an anti-hegemonic end of the world.

We shall by morning inherit the earth.

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