

Dog guides as witnesses with specific reference to Miles and Houellebecq

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Since Wild Dog first crawled from the Wet Wild Woods and laid his head on Woman's lap, he has helped man, not only to hunt and protect, but also as guide. A guide with enhanced senses in the physical world who could find a way across unmarked landscapes, a clever empathic being who could lead man to certain places or to specific individuals. No wonder then that the best-known ancient dog deities accompany humans as guides, often on their way to the afterlife. Dog guides—not to be confused with guide dogs—have remained a constant feature of the representation of dogs in literature, reflecting as much of the nature of these dogs as of the nature and needs of the humans they attend. In this way, the human-animal relationship also reveals how the solipsistic tendencies of human self-definition limits our capacity for being in the world. In the two contemporary novels that form the basis of my enquiry, *La Possibilité d'une île* (2005) by Michel Houellebecq and *Op 'n dag, 'n hond* (2016) by John Miles, the agency of dog guides introduces an intriguing element of distancing, reminding us that the self has meaning only in relation to another and that human concerns are not absolute. **Keywords:** animal studies; dogs; John Miles; Michel Houellebecq.

“Ich fürchte, die Tiere betrachten den Menschen als ein Wesen ihresgleichen, das in höchst gefährlicher Weise den gesunden Tierverstand verloren hat.”

— Friedrich Nietzsche^{1,2}

There was a time, it seems, long after our early ancestors left the relative safety of the oceans, long after their descendants sacrificed the joys of a healthy spine for the dubious prestige of walking upright and even after the equally dubious invention of language, a time when the human / animal line was more blurred than it

has since become. When it made perfect sense for a Greek god to turn into a swan to seduce a maiden. When it was fathomable for a Norse god to produce as offspring a snake and a wolf. In those times, the early ancestors of the domestic dog floated in and out of mystic representation and in the ancient Egyptian dynasties associated with the holy city of Abydos, the deity Wepwawet, the opener of ways, is sometimes depicted with the head of a jackal, sometimes with the head of a wolf and sometimes, simply as a dog. Older than Anubis, Wepwawet is often seen leading the souls of anthropomorphic deities. It is thought that the first inhabitants of the Nile Valley in the Neolithic period were struck by the social behaviour of packs of wild dogs that were roaming the land—at a time when these human tribes were starting to organize their own hierarchic structures—that they could even have been influenced in hunting techniques and the codification of leadership rituals by their observation of these animals and that the preponderance of canids in the zoomorphic deities of Egypt can be traced back to African Wild Dogs rather than to jackals and wolves. Through the association of the dog with hunting, Wepwawet was associated with war and therefore also with protection of the royal person. In various texts, the dog god is identified with the notion of spatial elevation because he assists the pharaoh in his ascension to heaven; he opens the way, guiding the soul in its journey between worlds (Wegner; Wilkinson 257; Luellon Bolton iv).

When Wild Dog crawled from the Wet Wild Woods and laid his head on Woman's lap, he became First Friend and helped man, not only to hunt and to guard, but also as guide (Kipling 79). A guide with enhanced senses in the physical world who could find a way across unmarked landscapes, a clever empathic being who could lead man to certain places or to specific individuals. And so the dog became associated with the notion of guide, with finding things in this world and particularly with opening the way to those who cannot see.

Even so, Dog never lost the quality of a companion, a companion that may still act as a guide to modern man as he struggles to find his way through various ontological uncertainties. But if such guidance is to transcend traditional allegoric or symbolic representational conventions, we also have to ask how modern man in his godlessness and having lost the ancient sense of interconnectedness between the species, can rethink the boundaries between the “human self” and the “animal other”.

La Possibilité d'une île (2005) by Michel Houellebecq and *Op 'n dag, 'n hond* (2016) by John Miles, are both novels in which the protagonist, also the narrator, takes stock of his existence after arriving at a point in his life where he is confronted with time and its inevitable consequences; ageing, finitude, loss, death. In both novels, this stocktaking takes on a written form with various references to other writings and writers. A dog or dogs are witnesses, in each case, of the life lived and are actively involved in the result of the appraisal and the reckoning.

The protagonist of *Op 'n dag, 'n hond*, a retired teacher, is forced to reconsider his future after an armed robbery in which his wife is killed. The sudden solitude this loss brings is also reflected in the shrinking of his physical environment as he moves into a bleak garden flat to accept a remedial teaching position at a school in the city. He is portrayed as a reflection in the window within a cramped space: “a rather elderly man holding his head, in way that suggests that he has no idea what to do with it. [...] A few steps are enough for his home enclosed on two levels, like a memory” (Miles loc. 32); “and sometimes the view of an equally fenced off garden” (loc. 146).³ The brutal suspension of his imagined future, the loss of companionship and the image of reduction, so typical of the world of the ageing subject, are all factors that compel the teacher to reflect on his past as other losses—and his failure to prevent them—come to haunt him. The shame and betrayal of past actions appear doomed to remain festering wounds of remorse when distance and the death of those he had wronged remove the possibility of atonement.

Retirement is in itself a separation from social belonging and participation and this further inevitable retraction from society is underscored by the teacher's obvious attempts to remain active and involved and by his acute awareness of the generational distance that separates him from the children he is meant to teach:

I am three or four generations removed from the children who are going to sit here, their world is foreign to me? Their music does not move me, their slang is meaningless to me, even that of their parents means nothing to me. I have only a superficial knowledge of the technology they manipulate more deftly than my own generation could do with their own language. (Miles loc. 1907–10)⁴

The image of shrinking or reduction in the contemporary representation of ageing is linked to the notion of contraction, not only of space but also of time. Contraction becomes an incarceration, whether self-imposed or a consequence of institutionalized old age, a confinement which is shown as deadly in *La Possibilité d'une île* in the narrator's descriptions of the “the agony of old people, crammed into communal rooms, naked on their beds, in nappies, moaning all day without anyone coming by to rehydrate them or even to give them a glass of water” (loc. 1088).⁵ Awareness of ageing as a state of separation is described with aching acuity in *La Possibilité d'une île*. Ageing is both the way in which the subject sees himself, or his perception of the other's gaze—with the possibility of alienation arising from a certain conflict between physical degeneration and the inner conviction of still being the same. The othering invariably results from some sort of physical confrontation; the sudden awareness of a discord between body and mind, between projected image and reality, between self-image and the perception of others. For Daniel, the 47-year old protagonist of *La Possibilité d'une île*, the projection and reception of sexual prowess is the only valid measure of his resistance against decrepitude:

At times, walking by her side in a park or on the beach, I was overcome by an extraordinary elation, I felt like a boy of her age and I walked faster, I breathed deeply, I squared my shoulders, I spoke loudly. At other times, however, when I surprised our reflection in a mirror, I was overcome by nausea and, breathless, I would curl up under the blankets; I suddenly felt so old, so lifeless. (loc. 2489)⁶

The retired teacher's body-image is depicted with similar fluctuation: surprising physical determination when he acts on the sexual advances of the Welsh woman with the wheelchair-ridden husband with whom he takes his meals, firmly extolling the urges of the body in order to quell her guilty remorse. He yields with no hesitation, "involuntarily" (loc. 2106), to the instinctual carnal desire that had developed "quite naturally" between them. On the other hand, after he is run over in traffic, his body betrays him as infirm and vulnerable. His mind involuntarily wanders to the distant past, he "loses his grip" (loc. 2577) and forgets the name of his neighbour (who takes him for an old street beggar).

In *La Possibilité d'une île*, a permanent solution to the weakness and limitations of the human body is proposed in the form of a scientific sect who puts an end to sexual reproduction and ageing through genetic manipulation (the creation of neo-humans) and cloning. As the clones approach the beginning of physical deterioration, they are replaced by young adult clones who absorb the life and knowledge of their predecessors by reading the life story each of them writes and whose contact with other neo-humans is limited to electronic communication. The life stories of the various descendants of humans become legends, *legenda* in the original hagiographical sense of the word, lives in written form *to be read* in order to ingest and imitate. This creates a certain unity but does not replace a yearning for purpose, for real feeling and experience: "this solitary routine, interrupted only by intellectual exchanges, which had constituted my life, which should have constituted it until the end, now seemed unbearable" (loc. 5414).⁷ The 25th clone of the original Daniel, Daniel 25, becomes increasingly disillusioned with "the sadness, the melancholy, the languid and ultimately fatal apathy" (loc. 5423) of his disembodied life and distractedly pursues fragments of information about the life of his ancestor as he attempts to piece together an ordinary human existence with its apparent contradictions, its tragic mistakes and its passions.⁸

Similarly, the retired teacher weaves his own life story with characters hidden in and behind others. After his wife's death, he decides to finish an unpublished manuscript she left behind. But gradually, this manuscript becomes a depository for recollections and fragments of his own life; a past that threatens to trap him like the relics from which his palaeontologist acquaintance cannot escape, an amalgam of fragments, memories, chance meetings and the constant fluttering of shame and guilt that accompanies betrayal and lies, a past that would prevent him from going forward in any movement resembling life.

Thus, both protagonists are wrapped in ruminations about their past, one bound by duty to prepare the future of his clones, the other in an effort of expiation. Immobilized by the trappings of the past, they reach an impasse, a dead end, so to speak. Enter the dog.

In *Op 'n dag, 'n hond*, dogs punctuate the disjointed narrative. Many are nameless. They are simply integrated in the narrative as typical features of South African life: the large aggressive dogs that belong to the murderers, the old Golden Retriever taken for a walk, the poisoned Jack Russell, the three SPCA dogs drowned in their cages, nameless victims of a mundane catastrophe. The named dogs, in the order of their appearance, read like a summary of the protagonist's life. The first dog we encounter is called Skoert ("Scat" or "Scoot")—the neighbour's dog, a short-haired German pointer. He is fond of the teacher, prefers his company in fact. He is described as obedient. And yet, the name indicates sudden departure—and this characterizes the behaviour of the protagonist: his life is marked by departures, leaving suddenly, even secretly, avoiding conflict and unpleasantness or just on a whim. Right until the end, the movement indicates unsettlement rather than direction and decision. The second dog is Bluf ("Bluff" in English). This is in many respects the alpha dog in the novel. Bluf is an Airedale Terrier who escaped from the custody of a vet and found his way to the teacher's classroom. Bluffing is, like his sudden departures, one of the teacher's coping mechanisms. Bluffing to spare feelings, bluffing to avoid confrontation. Mymer is the name of the third dog in the narrative, a Border Collie given many years previously as a present to his daughter, then six years old, and named by her to mark the dog as her own through resonance with the possessive adjective / pronoun (my / myne) although the word "mymer" is, in fact, a verb which means to ruminate or to muse in Afrikaans. Thinking over the past, meditating but not acting, is another kind of avoidance, of not moving on.

When Bluf enters his life, the teacher finally recognizes that he is as lost as the dog: "*Help my, ek raak als byster, ek verloor my greep*" (loc. 2329). (Help me, I'm at a total loss, I'm losing my grip.) His attitude towards the dog is not one of rules and obedience (as towards Skoert) but almost that of an equal; he even warns Bluf that he is not to be trusted. But Bluf stays with him, in spite of the confusion of city traffic and the teacher's esteem is evident. Could the dog be leading him?

Or is he leading and I following? He is not obeying me, he only appears to do so.

In a manner of speaking, he has the more important task of showing me the way to the underworld. From somewhere, the teacher remembers the dog holding a scale, the scale on which the human heart is weighed; it must be lighter than a feather, if not, that soul is shattered. (loc. 2525)⁹

This reference to the Egyptian canid deities of Anubis or Wepwawet clearly establishes the dog as guide in the novel. The description of psychostasia is also accentuated in the paratext of the Afrikaans edition of the novel through the cameo

reproduction of a painting by Imelda Almquist, entitled *The Weighing of the Heart Ceremony*, which accompanies the chapter headings. The visual leitmotiv created by this image of a canid figure holding a heart and a feather in human hands serves to secure the connection between the role of the dog as both guide and master of destiny. Throughout the novel, this image is further reinforced by references to destiny and fate, such as the vision of an old woman unravelling a tattered piece of knitting and rolling the yarn into a ball to be used again, just as the teacher unravels the past in an effort to map out and navigate his future. Intertextual play, although more tenuous as a marker, can also be seen at work, supporting and extending the imagery. One of the teacher's acquaintances, a bookseller and literary critic (who may well play a decisive part in the publication of the novel started by his late wife and completed by himself), is nicknamed Montalbán, after the Catalan novelist, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, famous for his food-loving detective Pepe Carvalho. In homage to his Catalan colleague, the equally famous Sicilian author, Andrea Camilleri, christened his own epicurean detective Salvo Montalbano. One of the latter's most celebrated cases is that of the *Terracotta Dog*, in which Montalbano discovers the mummified remains of two murdered lovers, watched over in death by the terracotta sculpture of a dog. The clue to the mystery comes in the form of a legend, that of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus or the "people of the cave", as it appears in the Qur'an, in the eighteenth surah, "Al-Kahf". According to this legend, a group of young faithful believers, in order to protect them and preserve their faith, were made by God to fall into a deep sleep in a cave for 309 years. The dog, known as Kytmyr or Quotmour in the Persian tradition, accompanies them in their sleep, just as Wepwawet opens the ways of eternal darkness. Although the Qur'an is intentionally vague about the number of believers, it is significant that the dog is counted as one of them: "They will say, 'Three, and their fourth being their dog.' And they will say, 'Five, and their sixth being their dog,' guessing at the unknown." According to the Imam who recounts this legend to Montalbano, this dog in the cave also became the guardian of written communication (Camilleri loc. 5009), thus expanding the function of the dog as guide and opener of ways even further and giving a deeper meaning to the clear intertwining in Miles' novel of past lives and the act of writing.

When the terrier, Bluf, crosses the street unexpectedly in front of a car, the teacher dashes after him recklessly and sustains a concussion. But this is in itself a selfless action of blindly following his dog guide—an expression of trust and acceptance. This incident is a violent eruption in the teacher's life, a peripeteia, simultaneously a turning point and a point of departure, a new beginning in his efforts to come to terms with the other violent incident that marks him, the brutal murder of his wife. As he follows Bluf to Bloemfontein, further sins of his past are revealed—the betrayal of Mymer and of his daughter, of the dog he had put down when he fled from his love affair with the wife of a friend. But during this dream-

like pursuit of Bluf, the revelations of his past reach further than mere ruminations: “*Was dit nie vir Bluf nie, dan het hy nie vanmiddag hier gesit om alles op te diep en hom die pynlike gevolge van sy optrede te verbeel nie*” (loc. 3448). (Were it not for Bluff, he would not have sat here this afternoon, mulling everything over and imagining the painful consequences of his actions.) In order to let the dead past bury itself, he has to recognize not only the guilt of his actions but also their consequences, and to accept the impossibility of direct reparation. The boundaries surrounding Death are absolute. “*Die afgelope dae dink hy ’n hond snap die kern van tyd, dat niks magtiger is as die dood nie*” (loc. 3711). (The past few days, he has been thinking that dogs understood the essence of time, that nothing is mightier than death.) He is gradually brought to realize that “the opener of ways” is not merely a guide to the paths of the underworld but also to the choices and the paths taken in life. The possibility of atonement and thus absolution comes in the form of another mirror image: an encounter with a woman who survived an armed robbery because of her husband’s sacrifice; a woman whose past is therefore linked to his like matching pieces of a puzzle. Through her intervention, he is able to follow Bluf so that he can apologize face to face for abandoning him—the only possible way of seeking expiation for his past betrayals and therefore, since Bluf represents more than just this one individual dog, the apology is directed not at him but at Dog with a capital ‘d’. “He will get out, first ignoring the farmer approaching in the background and say to Dog, I’m sorry, pal, that I abandoned you when they caught you and tied you up. And he will wait until Bluf responds with his tail: ‘It’s all right, thanks for coming’” (loc. 3788).¹⁰

Even though the title was a relatively late inspiration, John Miles affirms that the unknown dog who makes himself at home under the teacher’s table initially sparked the creation of the novel, even before the narrative and the part the dog would play in it were clearly defined (Miles and Du Toit). After all the other dogs we encounter, each of which represents a facet of the teacher’s existence, Bluf arrives (one day, a dog), not as an appendage or an extension of something or someone else, but imposing himself as an entire being, present of his own volition and on his own account.

Daniel, in *La Possibilité d’une île* has a dog companion named Fox. Fox is a Pembroke Welsh Corgi, rescued in a pack of feral domestic dogs by Isabelle, Daniel’s first love: “*C’est ainsi que Fox fit son entrée dans nos vies; et, avec lui, l’amour inconditonné*” (loc. 885). (“And so Fox entered our lives; and with him, unconditional love.”) The human race is more or less replaced by neo-human clones who gradually lose all emotional capacity, but the clones of the domestic animals that accompany them, remain true to the original. In the later stages of this post-human world, dogs embody the only surviving qualities of the human race: “goodness, compassion, loyalty, altruism remain with us like impenetrable mysteries, nevertheless contained in the limited size of a dog’s corporeal shell” (loc. 916).¹¹

In his human state, before the arrival of Fox, Daniel's conception of human love is inextricably bound to sexuality. There is no parental or filial love in his life; friendship is virtually non-existent. But sexuality is in constant danger of falling victim to the decrepitude of ageing. The unconditional love of Fox is therefore the only constant in his life. Fox in all his manifestations is simply an embodiment of love in its purest form and guides by example (loc. 2320):

Love is easy to define but seldom occurs—within the series of living beings. Through dogs we pay homage to love, to its possibilities. What is a dog, if not a love machine? One presents him to a human and orders him to love that human—and however disgraceful, perverse, deformed or stupid he may be, the dog loves him. This characteristic was so surprising, so striking to humans of the old race that most of them—all evidence supports this—were brought to love their dog in return.¹²

Through their interaction, in other words, humans are trained to love by their dog companions. The simple act of feeding Fox, for instance, is the only completely selfless and caring gesture Daniel repeats throughout the novel.

When Daniel 25 decides to defect from the neo-human world, he leaves it to escape the endless routine of an existence of indifference and repetition and in the hope of finding a community. After 24 generations of clones, only Fox has kept the very idea of emotion alive. Finally, the reality of his love for Fox is brought home to Daniel 25, through the boundless suffering he experiences when the little dog is savagely killed by a tribe of humans. The expression of loss the clone is able to feel contains the finality of Fox's guidance of his almost human companion to greater understanding. A very similar insight is expressed almost a decade later in a poem Houellebecq writes after the death of his own dog, Clément: "*Par la mort du plus pur / Toute joie est invalidée. [...] Il faut quelques secondes / Pour effacer un monde*" ("Non réconcilié" 105). (The death of the purest being / Invalidates all joy. [...] A few seconds suffice / To obliterate a world.)

The representation of animals as such in literature is, of course, a paradox since they are necessarily—and regardless of one's political position in relation to anthropomorphism—humanized in our thinking and transcribing of them in human language. However, posing an animal in a text on an equal footing with human characters without presuming complete understanding opens the possibility of a multitude of perceptions and expressions since it compels us to defy our certitudes and to move away from absolutes. Understanding the world through the lens of non-human animals inevitably means exploring the unknown and acknowledging the limitations of reason, accepting to be guided by a reality beyond human comprehension or perception.

Such an undertaking can perhaps be seen best as a process, a working towards, just like translation. Understanding something else does not mean that we appropriate it, but that we attempt to transfer ourselves as best we can to the centre of

the other in order to adopt a different perspective. Perhaps, the essence of communication should always be a kind of decentring, an attempt to gain insight and to explain ourselves by entering into the system of the other, knowing as we do so that understanding cannot be controlled but comes to us through relationship and a kind of interaction that focuses on the other rather than on the self, always remaining open to the unexpected instead of clinging to preconceived notions or theoretical gridlines.

These two novels have in common the fact that understanding or significance or meaning is not reflected from the animal as a symbol or a representation of anything beyond itself. The dogs in both novels are presented as individuals, and their significance in and beyond the narrative is drawn from the relationship into which they enter with human individuals and which affects both dog and human. Neither of the human protagonists places human reason in the centre of their relationship with their animal guide and, perhaps because of this, both show themselves to be vulnerable and amenable to a different kind of reason, a different language. In his novel, *Anima*, Lebanese-Canadian author Wajdi Mouawad captures the fragility and the complexity of this transient possibility for blurring the human-animal divide:

The human is a narrow passage one has to enter in the hope of encountering him. One has to advance in darkness, sniff the smells of all the dead animals, hear their cries, the gnashing of teeth and the weeping. One has to walk, sink your paws into a sludge of blood and then come back up along the golden line left there by the human himself when he was nothing but childhood with no roof sealing his sky. Animal among animals, he was not yet suffering. The human is a passage and every human weeps for the sky he lost. A dog knows this and this is why his affection for humans is endless. (149)¹³

A similar mutual dependency between animals and humans casts doubt upon the typically human inclination to historical solipsism: that the past is what has led to us, and the future what will be created by us. Humans may be the result of four billion years of evolution but we are not the culmination of Darwinian selection. As Julian Barnes so vividly reminds us in *Nothing to be frightened of*, the creatures that exist six billion years from now when our sun dies, will be very different from us (216–7).

‘We’ shall not die out in six billion years. Something far beyond us—or at any rate, far different from us—will die out. For a start, we might have disappeared in another of the planet’s great extinctions. [...] But even without a new Extinction, evolution will not unfold in the way we—sentimentally, solipsistically—hope. The mechanism of natural selection depends on the survival, not of the strongest, nor the most intelligent, but of the most adaptable.

Essentially, *Op ’n dag, ’n hond* and *La Possibilité d’une île* both deal with human vulnerability and awareness of the unsustainable status quo in an age of decrepitude and seemingly irreversible human-induced changes to the planet. This

insight further motivates the importance of interconnectedness and the pressing need to investigate new ways of communicating across difference. To succeed, an exploration such as this should be grounded in the acceptance to be guided to understanding by non-human animals rather than forcing them into a human paradigm of communication. This approach also holds true in the realm of animal studies in literature where the theories that abound should not be allowed to become another preconceived and constrictive layer obscuring transparency and an ethical otherstanding of texts. Returning to ancient holistic perceptions of human-animal interrelatedness may well be a key to unlocking the potential of a post-anthropocentric relationship to the world, if only until the next major extinctive event.¹⁴

NOTES

1. "I'm afraid animals consider humans as similar beings who have lost their healthy animal reason in a most perilous way." (Nietzsche 152)
2. All translations are my own unless otherwise mentioned in the Works Cited.
3. "[...] 'n nogal bejaarde man wat sy kop vashou, op so 'n manier dat dit lyk of hy nie mooi weet wat om daarmee te maak nie"; "Enkele treë is genoeg vir sy afgehoekte tuiste op twee vlakke, soos 'n geheue [...] en soms die uitsig op 'n ewe afgeslote tuin."
4. "Van die kinders wat hier gaan sit is ek drie of vier generasies verwyder, ek ken nie hulle wêreld nie? Hulle musiek laat my koud, hulle sleng is vir my betekenisloos, selfs hulle ouers s'n is vir my onbekend. Ek weet net bolangs van die tegnologie wat hulle beter beheer as my eie geslag hulle taal."
5. "[...] l'agonie des vieillards entassés dans des salles communes, nus sur leurs lits, avec des couches, gémissant tout le long du jour sans que personne ne viennent les réhydrater ni leur tendre un verre d'eau."
6. "Par moments, en marchant à ses côtés dans un parc, ou le long de la plage, j'étais envahi par une ivresse extraordinaire, j'avais l'impression d'être un garçon de son âge, et je marchais plus vite, je respirais profondément, je me tenais droit, je parlais fort. À d'autres moments, par contre, en croisant nos reflets dans un miroir, j'étais envahi par la nausée et, le souffle coupé, je me recroquevillais entre les couvertures; d'un seul coup, je me sentais si vieux, si flasque."
7. "[...] cette routine solitaire, uniquement entrecoupée d'échanges intellectuels, qui avait constitué ma vie, qui aurait dû la constituer jusqu'au bout, m'apparaissait à présent insoutenable."
8. "[...] la tristesse, la mélancolie, l'apathie languide et finalement mortelle [...]"
9. "Of is dit hy wat lei, ek wat volg? Hy is nie aan my gehoorsaam nie, dis net oënskynlik die geval, by wyse van spreke is hy in groter opdrag om my weg te lei, die onderwêreld in. Van iewers onthou die onderwyser van die hond wat 'n weegskaal vashou, die skaal waarop die mensehart geweeg word; ligter as 'n veer moet dit wees, anders word daardie mensesiel vernietig."
10. "Hy sal uitklim, eers die naderende boer op die agtergrond ignoreer en vir Hond sê, jammer, maat, dat ek jou in die steek gelaat het toe hulle jou vang en vasmaak. En hy sal wag totdat Bluf met sy stert te kenne gee, Nee, dis reg, dankie dat julle gekom het."
11. "[...] la bonté, la compassion, la fidélité, l'altruïsme demeurent donc près de nous comme des mystères impénétrables, cependant contenus dans l'espace limité de l'enveloppe corporelle d'un chien"
12. "L'amour est simple à définir, mais il se produit peu—dans la série des êtres. À travers les chiens nous rendons hommage à l'amour, et à sa possibilité. Qu'est-ce qu'un chien, sinon une machine

à aimer? On lui présente un être humain, en lui donnant pour mission de l'aimer—et aussi disgracieux, pervers, déformé ou stupide soit-il, le chien l'aime. Cette caractéristique était si surprenante, si frappante pour les humains de l'ancienne race que la plupart—tous les témoignages concordent—en venaient à aimer leur chien en retour.”

13. “L'humain est un corridor étroit, il faut s'y engager pour espérer le rencontrer. Il faut avancer dans le noir, sentir les odeurs de tous les animaux morts, entendre les cris, les grincements de dents et les pleurs. Il faut marcher, enfoncer les pattes dans une boue de sang et remonter le long d'un fil d'or abandonné là par l'humain lui-même, lorsqu'il n'était qu'enfance et que nul toit ne scellait son plafond. Animal parmi les animaux, il ne souffrait pas encore. L'humain est un corridor et tout humain pleure son ciel disparu. Un chien sait cela et c'est pour cela que son affection pour l'humain est infinie.”
14. I dedicate this article to the memory of Pushkin, for guiding me in the velvety constancy of feline love.

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