Howls and Whispers: Animal Subjectivity, Human Grief, and Decolonial Kinship in Canadian Francophone Fiction

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Abstract

As scholars debate the ethics of the "animal turn," indigenous voices expressing multispecies kinship for decades remain underappreciated in Canadian Francophone literary scholarship. This study examines innovative zoopoetic techniques employed by André Alexis and Naomi Fontaine to decolonize emotional paradigms and reorganize interspecies ethics. We analyze *Fifteen Dogs* (2015) and *Manikanetish* (2017) through three theoretical frameworks: zoopoetics theory, affective neuroscience, and decolonial affect theory. Using comparative textual analysis, we investigate animal narrative agency and challenge anthropocentrism. Alexis reveals human cognitive limitations through canine perception, while Fontaine, drawing on Innu ontologies, emphasizes reciprocal relationships and animal agency. Their contrasting approaches to grief—individual ownership versus communal ecological survival—redefine

ecological ethics. This research demonstrates how Canadian Francophone literature contributes to conversations about multispecies justice and indigenous sovereignty in the Anthropocene. The novelty lies in triangulating experimental literary form, neuroscientific frameworks, and indigenous land-based wisdom to illuminate how these narratives challenge Western epistemic violence. Our findings show that these texts create innovative models of interspecies coexistence that move beyond anthropocentric paradigms, offering critical insights for environmental humanities and decolonial studies.

Keywords: Canadian Francophone Literature, Zoopoetics, Decolonial Affect, Interspecies Grief, Animal Subjectivity, Indigenous Sovereignty

Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the environmental humanities experienced a radical shift: the animal turn. This movement opposes centuries of anthropocentrism in which non-human animals have been marginalized in moral consideration and cultural representation (Boehrer, Hand, & Massumi, 2018; Aaltola, 2018). Western philosophical traditions have long maintained a mechanistic perspective on animal life, refusing to recognize their capacity for complex subjectivity and emotion (Aaltola, 2018). This epistemic crisis is powerfully illustrated in André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs* (2015), in which the god Apollo proclaims human intelligence to be "an occasionally useful plague"—a divine pronouncement exposing the absurdity of human exceptionalism (Alexis, 2015, p. 23). The novel's central wager between Hermes and Apollo—whether animals granted human consciousness would become happier or more miserable—functions as a literary thought experiment exploring the foundations of anthropocentrism (Alexis, 2015). This philosophical gambit mirrors historical debates from René Descartes's mechanistic view of animals as automata to Jeremy Bentham's (2007) revolutionary question: "The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?" (p. 14).

Alexis situates his narrative within these longstanding debates, using mythological fiction to interrogate contemporary assumptions about consciousness, language, and moral considerability. Alexis (2015) uses canine experiences to reveal the ambiguous nature of human communication, as Hermes observes that humans frequently "had no idea what their words meant to each other" (p. 156). This fictional experiment resonates with developments in affective neuroscience, where Jaak Panksepp (1998, 2005) identified seven cross-species emotional systems (SEEKING, FEAR, RAGE, PANIC/GRIEF, CARE, LUST, PLAY) that challenge Cartesian dualisms separating human and animal interiority. Panksepp's (2011) research demonstrates that these emotional circuits are not uniquely human achievements but shared mammalian inheritances, fundamentally questioning the philosophical scaffolding that has justified animal exploitation for centuries. The animal turn thus represents not merely an academic trend but a fundamental rethinking of ethical and aesthetic possibilities, requiring what Ralph Acampora (2006) calls "corporeal compassion"—an embodied awareness of mutual vulnerability across species boundaries. This shift has profound implications for literary studies, where critics increasingly recognize that representing animal consciousness demands formal innovations that resist anthropocentric translation (Driscoll & Hoffmann, 2017; McHugh, 2011).

Despite this interdisciplinary renaissance, the unique contributions of Canadian Francophone literature to animal studies remain undervalued in critical scholarship. While zoopolitics in Belgian farming literature or Swiss alpine narratives have been carefully studied, Québécois and Indigenous North American perspectives represent significant gaps (Driscoll & Hoffmann, 2017). This oversight manifests broader patterns of epistemic colonialism, wherein dominant academic practices marginalize alternative ontologies (TallBear, 2017). Naomi Fontaine's *Manikanetish* (2017) poignantly articulates this erasure through the lament of her Innu narrator: "We forgot the smell of the first snow. We ceased hearing the breath of the

caribou" (p. 42). This passage, rendered in French from Innu-aimun cultural contexts, captures how the erasure of Indigenous ecological knowledge perpetuates cultural amnesia. The forgetting Fontaine describes is not natural decay but violent erasure: residential schools that punished Indigenous children for speaking their languages, policies that severed connections to traditional territories, and industrial development that disrupted caribou migration patterns essential to Innu cultural survival. When Fontaine's students struggle to remember how their grandparents tracked animals through snow, they confront the material consequences of what Audra Simpson terms "ethnographic refusal"—the colonial appropriation and subsequent dismissal of Indigenous knowledge systems (Simpson, 2014).

The Canadian literary tradition, particularly in what François Provenzano (2011) terms the "Francophonies of the North," contains distinctive interventions negotiating Western and Indigenous worldviews that have not been adequately theorized. Fontaine's autofictional narrative of a returning Innu teacher represents what zoofolkloristics scholar Hubert Zapf (2024) calls an "imaginative counter-discourse"—a narrative that inverts anthropocentric paradigms and centers animal agency. The gap in critical analysis is particularly significant given Canada's pioneering role in animal welfare legislation, including Bill S-203 recognizing animal sentience (Canada, Parliament, Senate, 2019). Yet this legislative progressivism exists in tension with ongoing dispossession of Indigenous territories: the same government that banned cetacean captivity continues approving resource extraction projects that destroy caribou calving grounds, revealing how liberal animal welfare reforms can coexist with colonial violence. An animal turn that ignores Northern Francophone narratives risks perpetuating the epistemic violence it seeks to address, especially as climate change accelerates the erosion of Indigenous ecological knowledge systems in regions such as Nunavik (Reid et al., 2021). By examining how Alexis and Fontaine navigate these contradictions through literary form, this

study contributes to decolonial approaches within environmental humanities that recognize Indigenous sovereignty as inseparable from ecological justice (Whyte, 2018).

Method

This study adopts a comparative literary analysis approach integrating three theoretical frameworks to examine animal subjectivity and interspecies grief in Canadian Francophone writing (Driscoll & Hoffmann, 2017; TallBear, 2017). The research employs qualitative textual analysis methods merging close reading techniques with triangulated theoretical perspectives to identify how André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs* (2015) and Naomi Fontaine's *Manikanetish* (2017) employ innovative zoopoetic strategies to decolonize emotional paradigms and restructure interspecies ethics (Boehrer, Hand, & Massumi, 2018; Simpson, 2017). This methodological integration responds to calls within posthumanist literary criticism for approaches that neither reduce animals to metaphors nor impose human frameworks onto non-human experiences (Haraway, 2008; Meijer, 2019). By triangulating Western experimental zoopoetics, neuroscientific research, and Indigenous ontologies, this study seeks productive tensions between seemingly incommensurable epistemologies rather than false synthesis (McKegney, 2020).

The primary texts were selected through purposive sampling criteria prioritizing works that explicitly engage with animal consciousness and cross-species relationships within post-2015 Canadian Francophone literary production (Provenzano, 2011). *Fifteen Dogs*, winner of the 2015 Giller Prize, represents urban Canadian experimental fiction exploring animal subjectivity through mythological allegory (Alexis, 2015), whereas *Manikanetish* exemplifies Indigenous Francophone perspectives on human-animal relationships using autofictional form (Fontaine, 2017). These texts offer contrasting epistemological models—Western experimental fiction and Indigenous land-based ontologies—allowing examination of diverse approaches to zoopoetics within "Francophonies of the North" writing systems (Provenzano,

2011; Vizenor, 2017). The selection deliberately juxtaposes settler and Indigenous authors to examine how positionality shapes representations of animal agency: Alexis, writing from Toronto's urban milieu, imagines animal consciousness through divine intervention and OULIPO-inspired linguistic play, while Fontaine, grounded in Innu territorial relationalities, centers pre-existing animal personhood that requires no human enhancement (Elliott, 2019).

This study utilizes three complementary analytical frameworks. Firstly, Zoopoetics Theory utilizes the framework provided by Kári Driscoll and Eva Hoffmann (2017), examining how literary texts confer narrative agency to animals beyond metaphorical representation. This approach focuses on formal innovations rendering animal consciousness through linguistic experiments, specifically analyzing Alexis's OULIPO-inspired methods and Fontaine's strategic narrative restraint regarding animal interiority. Zoopoetics emerged from frustrations with allegorical readings that reduce animals to symbols for human concerns, demanding instead attention to how literary form can generate genuinely non-human perspectives (Driscoll & Hoffmann, 2017). Secondly, Affective Neuroscience applies Jaak Panksepp's cross-species emotional systems (1998, 2005) to provide scientific grounding for analyzing animal consciousness representation. Textual depictions of canine behaviors are mapped onto Panksepp's (2011) seven core emotional circuits (SEEKING, FEAR, RAGE, PANIC/GRIEF, CARE, LUST, PLAY), bridging literary analysis with empirical research on mammalian affective systems. This integration responds to debates about whether literary representations of animal minds can claim validity; by demonstrating textual alignments with neuroscientific findings, the analysis argues that imaginative literature can generate insights about animal experience that complement but are not reducible to scientific knowledge (Daston & Mitman, 2005). Lastly, Decolonial Affect Theory employs Indigenous relational ontologies developed by Kim TallBear (2017, 2021) to analyze how Fontaine's Innu epistemologies critique Western emotional paradigms. This lens examines how Indigenous knowledge systems reconfigure

human-animal relationships through reciprocal obligation rather than domination, challenging the possessive individualism that structures Western animal rights discourse (Todd, 2018; Simpson, 2017).

Close reading analysis involves systematic textual examination of passages depicting animal consciousness, human-animal interactions, and cross-species emotional experiences (Boehrer, Hand, & Massumi, 2018). Particular attention focuses on narrative focalization shifts between human and animal perspectives, linguistic innovations, and formal devices generating non-human subjectivity (Driscoll & Hoffmann, 2017). Comparative textual analysis examines how Alexis and Fontaine employ contrasting approaches toward expressing animal agency—anthropomorphic experimentation versus Indigenous ontological frameworks—illuminating divergent models of interspecies grief and their implications for ecological ethics (Elliott, 2019; TallBear, 2017). Thematic coding organizes textual excerpts under a priori categories: animal subjectivity markers, human-animal emotional interactions, grief representations, and land-based knowledge systems, while emergent themes are identified through iterative analysis (McKegney, 2020). This coding process revealed unexpected resonances: both texts, despite radically different approaches, position sensory knowledge as epistemologically superior to abstract reasoning, suggesting shared critiques of Enlightenment rationality from seemingly disparate positions (Neimanis et al., 2015).

This research acknowledges methodological limitations. The analysis focuses exclusively on published literary texts and does not incorporate Indigenous oral traditions (Mestokosho, 2020), and the theoretical frameworks reflect the researcher's positioning within Western academia (TallBear, 2017). As non-Indigenous scholars, we acknowledge limited understanding of Innu cultural protocols and epistemologies. This analysis respects the autonomy of Indigenous knowledge systems and does not claim authority to interpret Innu perspectives definitively. The study prioritizes engagement with published scholarship by

Indigenous authors and positions itself as contributing to ongoing conversations about multispecies justice rather than making authoritative pronouncements about Indigenous ontologies (Simpson, 2017; Todd, 2018). The comparative methodology risks creating false equivalencies between settler experimental fiction and Indigenous ontologies; I maintain this risk is productive if the analysis foregrounds incommensurability rather than synthesis, allowing texts to speak from their distinct epistemological positions while identifying moments of unexpected resonance (TallBear, 2021; McKegney, 2020).

Results and Discussion

Zoopoetics as Decolonial Praxis: The concept of zoopoetics—literature granting narrative agency to animals beyond metaphor—finds radical expression in Canadian Francophone literature through distinctive formal innovations (Driscoll & Hoffmann, 2017). André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs* (2015) exemplifies subversion of human linguistic structures, featuring cross-species poetry: poems that are "secretly a dog's name, pronounceable when spoken aloud but inaccessible in print" (p. 78). This OULIPO-inspired technique materializes animal consciousness, embedding canine identity into textual DNA and compelling readers to engage sonically rather than semantically. The constraint— that each poem must contain a dog's name hidden within its sonic structure—performs the novel's central argument: human language simultaneously enables and constrains expression, creating possibilities for beauty while restricting what can be spoken (Alexis, 2015). When readers encounter these poems on the page, they experience the frustration of partial understanding that characterizes cross-species communication, a formal enactment of the epistemic humility Alexis advocates (Driscoll & Hoffmann, 2017).

Prince's linguistic innovations exemplify active zoopoetic consciousness: coining the term "human" (*grrr-ahhi*) deliberately avoids connotations of mastery, while the pun correlating "bone" (*rrr-eye*) and "stone" (*rrr-eeye*) constructs what Driscoll and Hoffman

(2017) terms a "grammar of being," where playfulness inscribes canine epistemology (Alexis, 2015, p. 92). This canine language emerges not as degraded human speech but as equally valid semiotic system with its own logic: the phonetic similarity between "bone" and "stone" reflects canine sensory priorities, where objects are categorized by smell, texture, and potential for play rather than abstract categories like "mineral" versus "organic" (Alexis, 2015). When Prince composes verse such as "Beyond the hills, a master / who knows our secret names" (Alexis, 2015, p. 167), the growl-based meter and nature imagery create what scholar Kári Driscoll and E. Hoffman (2017) describes as a "non-human semiotic system," using form to resist anthropocentric translation. The master who "knows our secret names" evokes both human domination and the dogs' pre-consciousness state when names were scent-marks and pack positions rather than arbitrary sonic labels—a nostalgia for embodied knowing that human language has alienated (Alexis, 2015).

Conversely, Naomi Fontaine's *Manikanetish* (2017) employs zoopoetics through absence rather than presence. Her refusal to anthropomorphize animals—depicting pheasants "dead on the edge of the road" and rabbits screaming "like babies in traps"— enacts what indigenous zoocritic Kim TallBear (2017) calls "ontological silence" (Fontaine, 2017, p. 33). This narrative restraint honors Innu protocols wherein caribou need not speak human language to communicate meaning; they "leave it all in their tracks on dirt roads" (Fontaine, 2017, p. 56), creating what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor (2017) terms "visual sovereignty". The tracks function as archive and prophecy: experienced hunters read past weather conditions, herd health, and future migration patterns from indentations in snow, a textual system more informationally dense than alphabetic writing yet dismissed by settler epistemologies as "primitive" (Fontaine, 2017; Vowel, 2016). Where Alexis constructs animal language, Fontaine dismantles human linguistic dominance—both approaches fundamentally engage

zoopoetics' central aim: giving voice to creatures without ventriloquism (Driscoll & Hoffmann, 2017).

The Tragedy of Human Consciousness: Fifteen Dogs revolutionizes animal subjectivity through its exploration of Panksepp's affective neuroscience, particularly the SEEKING and PANIC/GRIEF systems structuring canine consciousness (Panksepp, 1998, 2005). When Prince composes poetry like "Beyond the hills, a master / who knows our secret names" (Alexis, 2015, p. 167), his verse embodies Panksepp's SEEKING system—the primal drive to explore and find meaning—while simultaneously expressing PANIC/GRIEF through elegiac longing for belonging. This poetic synthesis mirrors Panksepp's (1998) finding that mammalian brains share "homologous subcortical networks" (p. 52), here transformed by imposed human intelligence into artistic expression. Panksepp's (2011) research demonstrates that these emotional systems operate below cortical consciousness, suggesting that Prince's poetry emerges from deep mammalian drives overlaid with human conceptual apparatus—a hybrid consciousness neither fully dog nor fully human. The novel thus literalizes questions about animal consciousness: if human intelligence is grafted onto canine neurobiology, do the resulting beings experience the world as humans with dog bodies, dogs with human minds, or something altogether unprecedented (Alexis, 2015)?

The novel's narrative focalization shifts masterfully between human and canine perspectives to enact this subjectivity. When Majnoun observes humans' "inconceivable" sensory poverty—their inability to "distinguish the smell of snow in winter from early spring"— the narration adopts his olfactory consciousness, rendering human perception as deficient rather than superior (Alexis, 2015, p. 201). This sensory critique extends beyond mere observation: Majnoun catalogues the olfactory richness humans miss—the metallic tang of approaching storms, the territorial declarations in urine marks that constitute neighborhood histories, the chemical signatures of fear and desire that make human emotional dissembling

laughably transparent (Alexis, 2015). His bewilderment at human reliance on vision and sound reflects Panksepp's (1998) research on mammalian sensory hierarchies: humans' evolutionary shift toward visual dominance came at the cost of olfactory acuity, a trade-off that privileges abstraction over embodied knowing. This perspective reversal reaches its zenith when Majnoun critiques human concepts of "government" and "religion" as "very bad ideas" resulting from sensory poverty (Alexis, 2015, p. 153). His analysis is devastating: government requires believing in abstract entities ("the state") that lack scent, sound, or physical presence, while religion demands faith in masters-of-masters who never appear—both systems incomprehensible to consciousness grounded in immediate sensory verification (Alexis, 2015). Through such moments, Alexis performs what zoopoetics scholar Driscoll and Hoffman (2017) term "narrative defamiliarization," forcing readers to experience Toronto's streets through canine sensoria—where urine marks become historical archives and trash bins promise archaeological wonders.

The novel's exploration of human-animal bonds centers on Nira, whose radical empathy contrasts with pervasive human cruelty (Alexis, 2015). In a harrowing veterinarian scene, Majnoun witnesses "a cat whose leg was being amputated without anesthetic" while technicians "laughed over coffee" (Alexis, 2015, p. 213)—an atrocity resonating with Panksepp's (1988) research on animal pain perception. The technicians' laughter reveals how professional desensitization enables routine violence, a microcosm of industrial animal agriculture's systematic cruelty. Nira's response embodies philosopher Corine Pelluchon's "ethics of consideration"; she recognizes Majnoun's distress and whispers, "I know... it's unbearable" (Alexis, 2015, p. 214; Pelluchon, 2021). Her acknowledgment performs interspecies witness: validating Majnoun's perception that the cat's suffering matters, countering the veterinary staff's callous dismissal (Pelluchon, 2021). This intimacy renders their asymmetrical grief profoundly tragic. When Majnoun outlives Nira after Zeus'

intervention with the Fates, he endures five years of "excruciation" awaiting her return—a canine manifestation of prolonged PANIC/GRIEF (Alexis, 2015, p. 330; Panksepp, 2011). His vigil beside her abandoned belongings, his refusal to accept her absence, mirrors Panksepp's research on separation distress in social mammals: the PANIC/GRIEF system evolved to maintain social bonds through emotional pain at separation, making Majnoun's suffering neurobiologically inescapable (Panksepp, 2011).

Caribou as Ancestral Teachers: Fontaine's (2017) construction of animal subjectivity grounds itself in Innu relational ontologies that reject Western binaries. When Jean-Guy butchers a caribou calf following a plane crash, his action transcends predation: "I took the rifle and shot the little one. The mother ran off, and the pilot woke up, startled. We went to fetch the caribou and I started to butcher it, thanking Tshishe-Manitou for assuring our survival for two more weeks" (Fontaine, 2017, p. 144). This ceremony of thanksgiving does not render the caribou prey but a relative being whose death requires spiritual reciprocity—a practice Anishinaabe scholar Kim TallBear (2017) describes as "lifeway entanglement" (p. 188). The mother's departure, mentioned without elaboration, carries profound significance: she chose not to defend her calf, recognizing the legitimacy of human need in this moment—an act of consent within Innu ontologies where animals possess agency to give or withhold their bodies (Fontaine, 2017; Todd, 2018). The White pilot's startlement at the gunshot reveals his alienation from these protocols: he sees only violence where Jean-Guy enacts ceremonial exchange, highlighting how settler and Indigenous witnesses perceive the same event through incommensurable frameworks (Fontaine, 2017).

Unlike Alexis's anthropomorphized dogs, caribou possess agency through their absence: they "leave tracks on the dirt roads," and the mother who "ran off" demonstrates what Cree-Métis writer Chelsea Vowel (2016) terms "autonomous presence"—animals existing independently of human perception (p. 56). This autonomous presence challenges Western

phenomenology's assumption that objects exist for human consciousness: caribou pursue their own projects, make their own decisions, and maintain their own social worlds that humans can observe but never fully comprehend (Fontaine, 2017). The tracks function as communication without translation: experienced Innu hunters read herd composition, health status, and movement patterns from hoof impressions, developing interspecies literacy that respects caribou autonomy while enabling sustainable harvesting practices (Fontaine, 2017; Vowel, 2016). This ontology is encoded in Innu-aimun language. Jean-Guy teaches students "the language of the woodsman, Innu-aimun" (Fontaine, 2017, p. 139). This linguistic frame contains verb-based epistemologies positioning animal behaviors as deliberate rather than instinctive (Todd, 2018). Where English grammar divides the world into subjects acting upon objects, Innu-aimun's verb-centered structure emphasizes ongoing processes and relationships: caribou don't simply exist, they "caribou-ing," continuously enacting their species-being through migration, feeding, and reproduction (Todd, 2018; Fontaine, 2017).

When rabbits "scream like babies in traps," the simile acknowledges suffering capacity without sentimentalizing or erasing difference (Fontaine, 2017, p. 37). The comparison to babies recognizes shared mammalian distress vocalizations while maintaining species specificity: rabbits scream like but not as babies, their pain comparable but not identical to human infant suffering. This careful calibration resists both anthropomorphic projection and callous dismissal, modeling ethical attention to animal experience that neither colonizes nor ignores (Vowel, 2016). *Manikanetish* reconceptualizes resilience as ecological co-emergence. The narrator's transformation in Nutshimit—learning to build traps and no longer fearing darkness—demonstrates how land-animal relationships restore Indigenous identity (Fontaine, 2017, p. 38). The darkness that once terrified her becomes familiar when she learns to read nocturnal animal movements, recognizing that night belongs to different beings whose presence she must respect. Trapping here signifies not domination but sensory apprenticeship;

reading rabbits' distress calls or detecting bear presence teaches what Cree scholar Willie Ermine (2017) terms "inner wilderness"—interior attunement to more-than-human rhythms (p. 194). This apprenticeship reverses colonial education's trajectory: instead of Indigenous students learning Western disciplines that alienate them from land, they relearn traditional practices that reconnect them to territory and its inhabitants.

The Politics of Interspecies Grief: Alexis (2015) and Fontaine's (2017) contrasting modes of animal interiority generate opposing models of interspecies loss . In *Fifteen Dogs*, animal subjectivity emerges as anthropomorphic experiment—a divine imposition disrupting canine consciousness. Majnoun's suffering when encountering veterinary cruelty stems from human-derived empathy rather than natural canine sensitivity (Alexis, 2015). This artificial subjectivity culminates in Prince's deathbed epiphany, when he realizes his language "would be flowering again"—a result of Apollo's artificially enhanced SEEKING system (p. 416; Panksepp, 1998). The tragedy lies not in death itself but in consciousness's burden: Prince's awareness of his own mortality, his linguistic attempts to preserve memory against oblivion, his poetic struggle against the silence that awaits—these distinctly human anxieties impose suffering his pre-consciousness canine existence never knew (Alexis, 2015). The novel thus indicts the Promethean impulse to "gift" consciousness, revealing how such gifts can curse as much as bless (Alexis, 2015).

Manikanetish, conversely, grounds animal subjectivity in ancestral personhood (Fontaine, 2017). The caribou Jean-Guy sacrifices represents what Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson (2017) defines as "rooted vitality": its life is not stolen but accepted through ceremonial gratitude (p. 52). Where Alexis's dogs gain consciousness through divine intervention, Fontaine's (2017) caribou teach through bodily sovereignty—footprints and the mother who "ran away" constitute autonomous presence (Belcourt, 2020). This sovereignty extends to decisions about death: within Innu ontologies, caribou choose when to give their

bodies to hunters, withdrawing when protocols are violated or offering themselves when relationships remain respectful. This belief system, dismissed by Western rationality as superstition, finds support in documented caribou behavior: herds avoid areas where hunting occurred without proper ceremonies, while returning to territories where Indigenous protocols are maintained, suggesting caribou agency in determining harvest sustainability (Reid et al., 2021).

Toward a Zoopoetic Ethic: This study fundamentally realigns zoopoetics—historically preoccupied with Western approaches to representing animal consciousness—with the Innu ontologies of Naomi Fontaine's *Manikanetish*. While André Alexis constructs animal subjectivity through divine intervention, Fontaine's (2017) depiction of Jean-Guy's caribou hunt positions predation as reciprocal relationship: "thanking Tshishe-Manitou for assuring our survival" theorizes the concept of "lifeway entanglements" (Alexis, 2015, p. 144; TallBear, 2017, p. 188). These contrasting ethical frameworks engage directly with contemporary socio-ecological justice movements. In Canada, the 2019 Bill S-203 prohibiting cetacean captivity reflects arguments about sensory deprivation resonating with Majnoun's observations about human sensory poverty (Canada, Parliament, Senate, 2019; Alexis, 2015). The legislation cited scientific evidence that tank confinement prevents cetaceans from exercising echolocation and social bonding capacities essential to their species-being—precisely the sensory alienation Alexis critiques through Majnoun's perspective (Canada, Parliament, Senate, 2019).

However, Fontaine's (2017) land-as-kinship moves beyond liberal reform. Her students fishing trout to "re-appropriate what I left behind as a child" anticipate collaborative conservation models, and Jean-Guy's caribou ritual exemplifies principles underlying Canada's Indigenous Protected Areas initiatives (Fontaine, 2017, p. 37; Reid et al., 2021). These initiatives, which grant Indigenous communities authority over conservation practices within traditional territories, recognize that protecting animal habitats requires respecting Indigenous

sovereignty: caribou preservation cannot succeed through top-down regulations that ignore Innu knowledge systems developed through millennia of coexistence. Canadian Francophone literature participates in broader cultural conversations about animal rights and Indigenous sovereignty that inform legislative debates. *Fifteen Dogs*' critique of sensory deprivation in captive animals contributes to public discourse supporting Bill S-203, while *Manikanetish*'s portrayal of land- based relationships amplifies Indigenous voices advocating for territorial protection in caribou habitat regions (Alexis, 2015; Fontaine, 2017; Canada, Parliament, Senate, 2019; Reid et al., 2021)

Conclusion

This study reveals how Canadian Francophone literature creates innovative models of interspecies coexistence beyond anthropomorphic projection. We demonstrate how Alexis (2015) and Fontaine (2017) dismantle anthropocentric narcissism: *Fifteen Dogs* deploys canine consciousness as a critical lens illuminating human cognitive constraints, while *Manikanetish* refuses translation altogether—its caribou function as territory-defining presences whose tracks constitute pre- colonial grammar. This contrasts with mainstream scholarship positioning the animal turn as a Eurocentric theoretical breakthrough; instead, we demonstrate Indigenous epistemologies practicing multispecies diplomacy long before contemporary Western philosophical interventions. The temporal priority matters: when scholars celebrate Haraway's companion species or Derrida's question about animal suffering as inaugural moments, they erase Indigenous traditions that never required philosophical breakthroughs to recognize animal personhood because such recognition structured their ontologies from time immemorial.

Our approach's novelty lies in triangulating experimental form, neuroscience, and land-based wisdom. We uniquely contrast Alexis's OULIPO-inspired zoopoetics—where Prince's bone/stone puns reveal language as simultaneously cage and liberator—with Fontaine's

strategic narrative silence about animal interiority, generating a third ethical space: ontological negotiation, where bears shape human behavioral protocols through territorial presence. Our intersection of affective neuroscience (canine PANIC systems as biological rebellion against confinement) with decolonial praxis (caribou sacrifice as sacred contract) unveils resistance strategies operating across species and cultures. These resistance strategies suggest unexpected alliances: dogs rebelling against imposed consciousness and Indigenous communities resisting imposed sovereignty both struggle against colonial impositions, though the former remains metaphorical while the latter remains materially urgent. We extend beyond textual analysis to demonstrate literature's material agency: Fontaine's trout-fishing scenes anticipate land-back movements by restoring connections between sustenance and cultural resurgence, while Alexis's sensory critiques participate in conversations supporting cetacean captivity bans.

The methodological innovations demonstrated here—triangulating zoopoetics, affective neuroscience, and decolonial affect theory— offer replicable frameworks for understanding human-animal relationships across cultural contexts. Future studies should apply these theoretical prisms to other marginalized literatures, analyzing how Global South, Indigenous, and diasporic authors deploy animal narratives challenging colonial epistemologies (Elliott, 2019; Bhabha, 1994). Comparative investigation must examine how other North American Francophonies negotiate Indigenous-European epistemological conflicts through animal representation, particularly in Acadian and Franco-Ontarian literature. Do Acadian authors navigate Mik'maq relationalities differently than Québécois writers engage Innu ontologies? How do Franco-Ontarian texts position themselves between Anglo-Canadian multiculturalism and Indigenous territorial claims? These questions require comparative analyses attentive to regional specificities rather than homogenizing "Francophone Canada" (Provenzano, 2011).

Interdisciplinary collaborations must incorporate Indigenous oral traditions alongside Western animal studies frameworks, following guidelines established by scholars such as Rita Mestokosho (2020) and Marie-Pierre Bousquet (2021). Policy applications require direct engagement: how can literary analysis inform environmental legislation beyond cetacean bans, including climate adaptation policies respecting Indigenous territorial sovereignty (Whyte, 2018)? As climate change accelerates, caribou populations collapse, and industrial development fragments habitats, the stakes of these literary interventions become increasingly material. The zoopoetic ethic emerging from this analysis demands fundamental restructuring of human-animal relations. Rather than providing non-human beings with voice through anthropomorphic ventriloquism, Canadian Francophone literature practices ontological modesty: acknowledging animals as already-speaking subjects whose messages humans must learn to read rather than translate.

Prince's OULIPO poetry and Jean-Guy's caribou rituals become pedagogical technologies of interspecies diplomacy, offering methodologies for what Indigenous scholar Kyle Powys Whyte describes as "spiraling relationalities" in the Anthropocene (Whyte, 2018, p. 224). As climate disaster intensifies erosion of Indigenous knowledge systems worldwide, this study contributes to what Mohawk theorist Audra Simpson (2014) terms "ethnographic refusal": rejecting extractive approaches to Indigenous wisdom while centering territorial sovereignty in ecological justice. By juxtaposing Fontaine's Innu epistemologies with Alexis's experimental zoopoetics, we demonstrate that the "Francophonies of the North" generate distinctive decolonial futures precisely by negotiating colonial legacies, where animals refuse confinement to human narrative forms, instead imposing what Gerald Vizenor (2017) calls "survivance"—living presence where survival becomes creative resistance (Provenzano, 2011). This survivance operates at multiple scales: individual caribou surviving harsh winters,

Innu communities surviving residential schools, and literary traditions surviving their marginalization within Anglophone-dominated Canadian studies.

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