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Pajmans, M.

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# The Animal Hinterland in Marieke Lucas Rijneveld's *My Heavenly Favorite*

*Marrigje Paijmans*

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In 2020, the Netherlands was the second largest exporter of agricultural products, after the United States (Kingdom of the Netherlands 2021; University of Wageningen 2021). Considering the Netherlands (41,543 km<sup>2</sup>) is 236 times smaller than the US (9834 million km<sup>2</sup>), Dutch farming appears as a paragon of efficiency. “Animal husbandry” concerns an important part of Dutch agricultural production, with a capacity of 3.8 million cows, 12 million pigs, and 102 million chickens,<sup>2</sup> to name the

<sup>1</sup>This chapter is partly based on discussions with Eline Buitenhuis about her thesis (2021). I would like to thank her for this inspiring collaboration.

<sup>2</sup>These numbers are based on the number of stables in 2020. The annual production also depends on an animal's lifespan, which ranges from six weeks for broilers to five years for dairy cows (Rijksoverheid 2021; see also Van der Peet et al. 2018).

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M. Paijmans (✉)  
Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam,  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

three most popular types of livestock, in a country harboring 17 million humans. Most of these animals are bred, raised, and capitalized on in the smallest amount of time and space possible,<sup>3</sup> while their presence remains largely invisible. City dwellers visiting the countryside will see grazing dairy cows,<sup>4</sup> but most calves, pigs, and chickens spend their shortened lives in hermetically sealed “megastables.” What are the consequences of this selective exposure and concealment of livestock farming for animals in the Dutch countryside?

This chapter conceptualizes the obscured space of intensive livestock farming in the Netherlands as a “hinterland” through an analysis of Marijke Lucas Rijneveld’s novel *My Heavenly Favorite* (*Mijn lieve gunsteling*, 2020).<sup>5</sup> It is Rijneveld’s second novel set in the countryside, after his debut, the English translation of which by Michele Hutchison won the 2019 International Booker Prize. *The Discomfort of Evening* (*De avond is ongemak*, Rijneveld 2018) is written from the perspective of a farmer’s daughter who struggles with the emotional inaccessibility of her deeply religious parents. The book presents a torn image of Dutch rural society, as partly rooted in traditional Reformed values, and partly propelled by global developments, particularly in popular culture and farming. *My Heavenly Favorite* also features a farmer’s daughter, but her story is narrated by a 49-year-old veterinarian, who is traumatized by incest and the mass culling following the foot-and-mouth epidemic of 2001. In this epidemic, 270,000 animals were killed, most of them preventively (De Steur 2001, 30). When the vet falls in love with the 14-year-old farm girl, he effectuates a reversal of the incestuous relationship with his mother, and a morbid re-enactment of his role in the culling during the epidemic. The relationship between the girl and the vet depicts how a society in which animals are systematically harmed often fosters harmful relations among humans as well. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), Carol J. Adams observes the long-standing association between the abuse, slaughter, and

<sup>3</sup>In 2020, the share of organic livestock in the Netherlands was only 3.4%: 8% for laying hens; 2.6% for dairy cows; 0.8% for pigs. The Netherlands has a smaller share of organic acreage than the EU average, and growth is leveling off (University of Wageningen 2022). For criteria for organic farming, see Van der Peet et al. (2018).

<sup>4</sup>70.5% of all milk produced in the Netherlands complies with the “Meadow Milk” quality mark, indicating cows spend at least six hours in the meadow 120 days per year (Van der Peet et al. 2018).

<sup>5</sup>Translation rights have been acquired by Faber and Faber, publication date unknown. All translations in this chapter are by the author.

consumption of animals on the one hand, and the abuse, objectification, and consumption in sexual terms of women in patriarchal society on the other (Adams 2010). Feminists of different orientations, too, have interpreted the links between speciesism and sexism as a ground for mutual solidarity between women and animals (Richards 2020, 80–81). Acknowledging that animals, killed by the millions, have less scope for resistance than women (Hastedt 2014, 208), this chapter submits that *My Heavenly Favorite* explores this ground as animal hinterland.

Animals are omnipresent in the novel, not only in the girl's daily life and the vet's professional practice, but also in their language and imaginations, providing a rich image of animal presence in the Dutch countryside. Contending that the animal hinterland is brought forth precisely in the entanglement of human and animal lives, this chapter will analyze the roles and images of animals in the relationship between the girl and the vet to gain a better understanding of the exploitative human-animal relationships in the Dutch countryside. The vet relates the novel in the second person, in a prolonged and insistent address to the girl, referring to the Biblical Song of Songs (Rijneveld 2020, 212), which epitomizes his attempt to follow her relentlessly with his gaze, to trace her character, to penetrate her world, and eventually her body. Although the girl initially enjoys the vet's attention and accepts his advances, she recoils when he starts to approach her physically. From then on, the girl seeks to escape the vet's gaze by "becoming animal," entering an obscure animal hinterland where he cannot follow. At the narrative level, the girl starts eluding the vet's language; the further she withdraws into her imagination, the less the vet understands her. This chapter will conduct an affective analysis of the girl's imaginations to bypass the vet's perspective, thus mapping the obscured animal hinterland.

"Hinterland," "becoming animal," and "affect" are central notions in this chapter that require some explanation. The notion of hinterland is significant for two reasons. While "hinterlands" have traditionally been seen to serve port or market towns through agriculture or extracted resources (Uzoigwe 1976, 195), today, the word is increasingly used to denote the peripheral and underprivileged areas through which megacities nourish and fuel themselves, often without regard to the origin and modes of production of resources, resulting in the industrial or extractive ruin-ation of these landscapes (e.g., Cuevas Valenzuela et al. 2021). Hinterland geographies are seldom associated with the Netherlands, as a densely populated country with relatively small cities and an easily accessible

countryside that often fulfills both agricultural and recreational functions. It is exactly because of the Netherlands' high population density and the multiple purposes of its countryside that intensive livestock farming has been withdrawn from sight. Not only the animals, but all the adverse effects of their presence, including bad smells, the emission of hazardous substances, and nutrient surpluses and pesticides polluting the soil and water (Post et al. 2020, 2) are regulated so that they remain imperceptible or not too disturbing for local communities and tourists.

This is where the second significance of hinterland comes into play. Phil A. Neel observes that US hinterlands, despite being closely entwined with urban cores through production chains, remain virtually absent in cultural representations, as a “sunken continent that stretches between the constellation of spectacular cities” (2018, 13). Neel’s concept of the hinterland as unseen resonates with the obscurity of Dutch animal hinterlands, even if the concealment of intensive livestock farming in the United States and the Netherlands differs greatly. Neel describes farms as remote compounds in the far hinterland—“windswept wastelands of farm, desert, grassland, and jungle” (9)—while Dutch farms are often located near densely populated areas or busy roads. In response, Dutch farms have adopted a selective approach, opening to the public with images that correspond to an ideal representation of the country, and concealing rural actualities that do not (Peeren and Souch 2019, 38). The images of grazing cows that pervade advertisements for dairy products, for example, serve to disguise the isolation and slaughter of veal calves, thus naturalizing and legitimating the large-scale extraction of “raw materials” from animals. Dutch popular media contribute to the perpetuation of the rural idyll by a selective representation of, for instance, small-scale and organic farms producing rustic products. Rijnveld’s novel confronts the rural idyll, in terms of both its romantic evocations of nature and its illusion of harmonious human-animal relationships. The concept of hinterland enables an analysis of the novel that makes livestock farming and its ruinous effects on animals and the natural environment visible as processes of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization.

The girl’s attempts to escape will be analyzed using Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of “becoming animal” in *A Thousand Plateaus* (2005 [1980]). “Becoming” is a reciprocal process in which “that which one becomes becomes no less than the one that becomes” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 305). The girl in the novel is understood as tapping into her imagination of an animal and adopting its modes, adjusting her image

of the animal to her body's capacities in the process. For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming animal is one episode in a series of becomings: "If becoming-woman is the first quantum, or molecular segment, with the becomings-animal that link up with it coming next, what are they all rushing toward? Without a doubt, toward becoming-imperceptible. The imperceptible is the immanent end of becoming" (2005, 279). Within this series, becoming animal is associated with specific traits. Firstly, becoming animal involves becoming member of a pack, becoming "multiplicities," and thus "like everybody else, ... to no longer be anybody" (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 197). This trait is useful in analyzing how the girl relates to different animals simultaneously, avoiding one well-defined identity. Secondly, becoming animal implies a loss of "faciality." The face being that "what gives the signifier substance ... what fuels interpretation," faciality is the way the face "marks the limit of [a sign's] deterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 115). In other words, the synergy between linguistic and facial expressions narrows down the number of possible interpretations, while loss of faciality allows for an infinite number of interpretations. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of faciality thus enables an analysis of the girl's escape at the narrative level, through the elusiveness of her language. Thirdly, becoming animal involves a line of flight, which can be understood as an escape as well as a liberation, both a de- and a re-territorialization: "In one way or the other, the animal is more a flier than a fighter, but its flights are also conquests, creations" (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 55). This trait will be used to examine how the girl's imaginations contribute to her oppression as well as her freedom.

As argued by animal studies scholars (e.g., Baker 2002, 95), Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming animal is anthropocentric, as it is exclusively in service of humans and their development. Can it also be employed to trace and describe animal agency in *My Heavenly Favorite*? This chapter hypothesizes that the animals in the novel, like the girl, are forced to retreat to a hinterland beyond their perpetrators' gaze and narration. At the narrative level, their agency is obscured, but they are able to exert influence and generate meaning at the level of "affect," the forces and feelings that connect and divide bodies through sensual experience. According to Deleuze and Guattari, those near-imperceptible, interstitial, visceral forces are sensed in the imagination, either consciously or unconsciously, and from there may compel systems of knowledge, history, memory, and circuits of power (Parr 2010, 11–12). It is through the girl's imagination that she "becomes animal" and gains access to the animal hinterland. An

affective analysis reveals how animal agency is conveyed through the animals' sensual presence in the novel, the experiences and feelings they produce in the vet and the girl, and the way these experiences and feelings generate effects in the form of the animals' alignment with or unsettling of the spatial, social, and power structures of the Dutch countryside.

The girl's becomings will be examined with respect to multiplicities, faciality, and lines of flight. The first section describes how she constructs an animal hinterland from any material available to her: the presence of physical animals and their representations in the Bible and pop culture. In this process, the animal hinterland's affective entanglement between rural and global economies takes shape. The second section analyzes the girl's escape from the hinterland through a series of increasingly precarious becomings. To obtain her freedom, she leaves the animals that protected her behind, implicating herself in the hinterland's power structures. The third section discusses the implications of the novel for actual animals, arguing that, despite the girl's flight, the novel holds out hope for more ethical human-animal relations in the powerful affects animals can generate in humans.

### BECOMING ANIMAL ON THE FARM

The girl in *My Heavenly Favorite* spends hours cuddling and talking with the cows in the dark stables or lying between the sheep in the meadows while watching the birds in the sky. The vet sees her need to spend time with animals as compensation for emotional distress caused by her brother's death, her mother's departure, and her father's neglect. The vet assumes the girl recognizes her own suffering in that of the animals, because from his perspective animal life is marked by disease and the prospect of slaughter. For example, when young bulls are prepared for transport to the slaughterhouse, he observes how "you would keep cuddling them and scratching them behind their ears, whispering inaudible words to them; it was only there that I saw how you carried your loss with you" (16).

This is not the only way, however, in which the girl identifies with animals. To the vet, she calls herself The Frog, otter, and bird, every animal expressing different traits of her character. The Frog refers to a figure in *Frog and the Little Bird* (*Kikker en het vogeltje*, Velthuijs 1991), a Dutch children's book by Max Velthuijs about Frog, who finds a dead bird and reckons it is "broken." This upsets the girl: "*A dead person cannot be broken, a dead person is dead, just that. The person staying behind is broken*"

(168; emphasis in original). The Frog thus expresses her being shattered by the losses she has suffered. The otter manifests her fascination for male genitals, ever since the vet showed her an otter's *baculum*. Her healthy adolescent interest is exploited by the vet, but takes an unexpected turn for him when the girl desires to have her own penis. The bird, finally, embodies the girl's wish to flee from "The Village." When she makes a literal attempt to fly, from the hayloft, she ends up in the hospital, where the vet forces her to perform fellatio on him. From this moment, the girl also identifies with the dead bird in *Frog and the Little Bird*, inspiring her to "play dead." The three animals thus provide the girl with indirect ways of expressing her grief, exploring her sexual orientation, and preparing her escape.

The animal identifications also serve as disguises. Much to the vet's chagrin, the girl never exposes herself completely. When he asks: "Who are you actually: the bird, The Frog, or the otter? You shrugged and said you only knew who you were if you were not asked. I thought it was a vague answer" (98). Refusing to be pinned down, the girl resides in multiplicities, as an animal merges into the pack "to no longer be anybody" (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 197). In response, the vet starts explaining the girl's puzzling statements to his own advantage, suggesting he knows her feelings and what she is doing when out of his sight: "I drove away and did not see that you tried to frolic, that you tried, but it would not work, not as before" (182). This makes the vet an unreliable narrator, presenting the girl as a neglected and confused child who benefits from his attention. Ignoring her multiple identities, he fails to recognize that she is plotting a line of flight beyond his gaze, in her imagination.

The vet finds it increasingly difficult to interpret the girl's utterances. For example, when he asks whether the girl and her boyfriend are having sex, she responds by referring to *Moby-Dick*: "sometimes you had to go on a hunt to discover what it is you were afraid of" (111). She continues that "it seemed wonderful to be swallowed by a whale, as Jonah in the Bible, and ... to be thrown up somewhere, far away from the boring The Village" (113). The vet does not understand how this answers his question, but interprets the swallowing as sexual intercourse and assumes the girl is looking forward to having sex. He ignores the ambiguity of her words, which also seem to indicate that she is afraid to have sex, but considers it a passage to adulthood and freedom. In that sense, "to be swallowed by a whale" can be considered a loss of faciality, a becoming animal effecting a disconnect between the girl's language and face, which explains why the



vet fails to “read” the girl and how his attempts to narrate her thoughts and actions increasingly fail.

The previous paragraphs have invoked several examples of texts triggering the girl’s imagination: the Bible, a literary novel, but also a children’s book and a film. Other references to popular culture include Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” (1982), the horror movie *It* (1990), and Kurt Cobain (1994). While the girl has been raised with the Bible, fitting the image of the Dutch countryside as a traditional realm, clearly popular media have also found their way to The Village, albeit sometimes with a delay. Especially in the vet’s explanation, the pop songs and films advocate the importance and joyfulness of sex. When Leonard Cohen sings “There ain’t no cure for love” (66), and Bonny Tyler “Love him till your arms break” (306), the novel makes popular media complicit in the girl’s belief that sex is both necessary and morbid. The Bible, on the other hand, is associated with the culture of silence in The Village, which prevents anyone from intervening in the pedophile relationship. Religious culture prevents the villagers from questioning authorities, such as the father’s authority over the family, even if grief prevents him from taking good care of his children. Sickness and death are also taken for granted, “because God would decide whether or not you would get breast cancer” (14). When a young woman referred to as Suzi disappears, the villagers hamper police investigations, which they consider an undermining of the close-knit community (204). As quoted in Psalm 49:13–14, the collective takes precedence over the individual: “This is the fate of those who trust in themselves. . . . Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them” (27). The culture of silence especially applies to sexual matters, such as the girl’s first menstruation, which out of sheer helplessness she communicates to her father as “I am bleeding like a pig” (195), after which she finds a pack of sanitary towels at her doorstep. The blend of popular and religious culture in the novel reflects the hinterland’s entanglement of traditional values and globalizing culture. Together, they have a detrimental effect on the girl: while pop songs encourage her to embrace sex, religious conventions prevent her from gaining knowledge or sharing experiences about it, complicating the development of a balanced sexual identity.

Many quotes taken from popular culture, such as the sheep “destined for the grave” and the bleeding pig, involve animal suffering. The girl is continuously compared to sick and suffering animals, emphasizing that the animals in her direct surrounding are oppressed by a similar

entanglement of traditional ideas, in this case about human-animal relationships, and the globalizing trade in animal products. The vet renders these processes as pathological and the doctors that should cure the illness as ill themselves. To cope with his incest trauma, the vet abuses the girl as “a breech calf in the nursery of my sick desires” (11). The first time he kisses her, he “tasted the resistance which I also felt when I shoved a drench gun into an ewe’s mouth to inject her against maggots” (83). The girl is not innocent either; in drawing a line of flight from her imaginations of animals, she effectively reiterates the exploitation of animals on a conceptual level, implicating herself in the pathological entanglements of the hinterland.

### BECOMING NOCTURNAL, PLAYING DEATH

The vet compares his own position between perpetration and victimhood to that of the ram in Genesis 22:13, “who was stuck with his horns in bushes and who would be sacrificed instead of Abraham’s son” (199). He is tangled in his own desires, which he cannot control; he can only await his punishment. He recollects *The Sacrifice of Isaac* (c. 1638) by Jan Lievens (Fig. 16.1), “who had painted Abraham and Isaac in a fervent embrace while they fearfully look up to the sky with the knife and the dead ram next to them. I lisped to the sky that I wanted to be the ram, oh, sacrifice me” (204). More than the ram, however, the vet resembles Abraham, clenching Isaac (the girl) tightly and doubting whether God will accept the ram instead—Isaac’s bare skin suggests he is not yet safe from Abraham. As an incest victim, the vet can also be compared to Isaac, and the girl to the ram, who suffers because of the vet’s agony. The painting shows that hierarchy is relative, and that the vet and the girl’s relationship is partly based on mutual understanding. This also means the vet can relate to the girl’s animal imaginaries, in which capacity he compares himself to a parasite: “I slowly crawled under your skin, like liver fluke in a cow” (97). When he sexually penetrates the girl for the first time, he refers to the myth in which Zeus takes on the appearance of a swan to seduce Leda: “*to really become a Swan in her lap*” (291; emphasis in original). The vet adopts the girl’s animal imaginaries to conquer her, finding the entrance to the animal hinterland.

When the girl is no longer safe in the animal hinterland, she further withdraws into new becomings, loosely following the trajectory set out by Deleuze and Guattari. After giving up her individuality and faciality, she



Fig. 16.1 Jan Lievens, *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, c. 1638, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum Braunschweig, photographer: B. P. Keiser

now also relinquishes her gender, her body, and daylight. First, the vet notices “that you were dusking between a boy and a girl, and that you became increasingly preoccupied with ‘dear boys’ in the swimming pool” (183). He is not sure whether she wants to be with boys or become a boy. In effect, she is in a process of what Donna Haraway calls “becoming with,” seeking connections and encounters that distract her from the vet’s sphere of influence (2008, 27). Then, the girl stops eating, becoming so

“thin that you could not be held anymore, there was too much space between my arms” (332). This “line of flight” is cunningly intercepted by the vet: “I kissed you and you asked how many calories a kiss contained, and I said that it only costs you calories and you pushed your little tongue in my mouth” (318). To lose more weight the girl starts running “in the dusk through the deserted landscape” (331), to the point where she seems weightless and transparent, reducing her affective presence to the bare minimum. She is pursuing what Deleuze and Guattari call “nocturnal deterritorializations” unto becoming imperceptible: “having lost my face, form, and matter. I am now no more than a line” (2005, 587, 199). As lines of flight always involve de- and re-territorialization, the girl’s attempts to survive threaten to become her undoing.

At this point, death has become the girl’s last resort, “a state of absolute deterritorialization, the state of unformed matter” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 55–56). The dead are omnipresent in the girl’s life and, even if their presence is neglected, they affect her no less than the living: memories of her brother, of culled cows, and of veal calves leaving for slaughter. Her morbid fascinations include the belief that, during her “flight,” she crashed into the World Trade Center, killing thousands of people. Calling herself “the class helper of death” (119), it is only a small step to exploring her own. She starts to play dead every time the vet assaults her: “I was pounding you and failed to notice that you went limp” until afterwards, “slowly, you returned to life again” (289). In the final scene, when the vet is already under investigation, but has not yet been sentenced, he sees the girl winning a Bible contest: “And you walked over to the platform ... and instead of accepting the prize you laid down on your back, as the winged one in *Frog and the Little Bird* and you were magnificent, and dead, yes, you played yourself stone dead” (363). This is not mere play, however. After escaping to New York, the girl becomes a famous pop singer, and her songs, which appear in fragments throughout the novel, describe how part of her has died in the process: “I’ve become the bottom of the hole” (228).<sup>6</sup> In another song she apologizes for leaving: “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, the buildings, the planes, the people, even if everything was easy to fix, nothing would stop the evil” (353). She believes her flight has shattered The Village, as it shattered the WTC, and she feels guilty. She lost her innocence in abandoning the villagers to save herself, which has left her empty.

<sup>6</sup>All lyrics are in English and have thus not been translated.

Meanwhile, the vet has been sentenced to psychiatric treatment. He describes his arrest as everything turning black: “as if I stood face to face with the evening gloom, with a new-born calf” (362). Calves can be considered the very bottom of the animal hinterland’s hierarchy, considering they are separated from their mothers immediately after birth, for all bulls and the surplus of females to be slaughtered for meat within 12 months (Peet et al. 2018, 31). In the vet’s experience, their complete innocence connotes the Lamb of God, who is sacrificed to take away the sins of the world. In facing a new-born calf, his arrest is marked as apocalypse and final Judgment. The calf represents the girl, “sacrificed” for his sake: “I renewed myself through you, my heavenly favorite, and I did not see that I destroyed you, or did not want to see it” (360). In relation to the girl, the motif of the innocent calf indicates feelings of guilt about her implication in the hinterland’s pathological entanglements, where animals are the ultimate victims.

### THE ANIMALS OF THE HINTERLAND

Having so far emphasized how human relations are produced through animal imaginaries, what does *My Heavenly Favorite* imply for the animals in Dutch livestock farming? While the girl flees, the animals have nowhere to escape to. Their only chance for a better life lies in a change of human conduct, which will not occur if the rural idyll continues to determine the collective imagination of livestock farming. The novel challenges the idyll, not by showing animals as subjects, but by showing a girl that loses her subjectivity and takes refuge in the animal hinterland. The girl and the animals offer each other genuine care and comfort with their warm bodies, by scratching behind ears, and whispering inaudible words. The representation of this multisensory experience affects the reader, beyond the self-justifying narrative of the vet, who is unwilling to put his humanity in perspective. The novel is hopeful, then, in showing that, through the shared capacity of being affected, humans and animals can recognize each other’s suffering. Provided humans let go of dualistic narratives that prioritize human needs, they might be moved to end animal suffering.

The girl’s songs seem to contribute to this aim by opening the hinterland up to the world. On the one hand, they reveal her rural background—“what is a home without cows” (260); on the other, they break with The Village’s culture of silence. In accordance with the Bible verse that won her the aforementioned Bible contest, “There is nothing concealed that

will not be disclosed or hidden that will not be made known” (Luke 12:2).<sup>7</sup> The girl’s songs, the Song of Songs, the novel as a whole, they all appeal to the human capacity to be affected by the animal hinterland and to “become animal.” In this way, Deleuze and Guattari’s anthropocentric concept of becoming animal may also come to serve actual animals.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has conceptualized the obscured space of Dutch animal husbandry as a hinterland through an affective analysis of the relationship between the girl and the vet in Rijnveld’s *My Heavenly Favorite*, which emerges as a double-edged novel in which self-care and self-preservation involve the exploitation of other, more vulnerable bodies in the hinterland’s hierarchy, those of women, children, and particularly livestock. Despite this somber view of the Dutch countryside, the chapter has argued that the novel offers hope in exhibiting the powerful affect animals can generate in humans, which might lead to an improvement in animal lives. The affective analysis read beyond the vet’s narrative to demonstrate how the girl finds strength in engaging with animals and expressing her desires in multisensory animal imageries. In “becoming animal,” she enters an obscure animal hinterland that eludes the vet’s gaze and narrative. As the girl constructs this animal hinterland in her imagination, through an engagement with physical animals and their representations in the Bible and pop culture, affective entanglement between rural and global economies that constitute the hinterland is revealed. Traditional and globalizing discourses strengthen each other in justifying the exploitation of the weak by the strong. And yet it is in the mix of these discourses that the girl also finds the strength to take care of herself, thus exhibiting the continuous, precarious work required to stay sane in the hinterland.

When the vet gains access to the animal hinterland, the girl gives up more and more elements of her subjectivity, and part of her dies in her final escape from The Village to New York. She incorporates her experiences in her pop songs, which, as a metonym for the novel, are double-edged in commodifying the animal hinterland for the girl’s gain, while also breaking with the hinterland’s culture of silence to shed light on its non-idyllic actualities. Despite its ambivalence, the novel demonstrates the

<sup>7</sup>Notably, the author’s second name is Lucas (Dutch for Luke). This name was self-chosen, when the author came to identify as non-binary. Rijnveld prefers the pronouns he/him.

strong affects animals can generate in humans beyond the anthropocentric discourses of intensive livestock farming, allowing the animal hinterland to emerge as neglected and exploited, yet morbidly attractive and regenerative.

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