<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript Number:</th>
<th>IJTS-1165</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Title:</td>
<td>Book review for &quot;The Land of Little Rain&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article Type:</td>
<td>Book Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corresponding Author:</td>
<td>Ti-han Chang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNITED KINGDOM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Author:</td>
<td>Ti-han Chang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order of Authors:</td>
<td>Ti-han Chang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Information:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If Jacques Derrida’s philosophy has radically changed our understanding of the relationship between human and animal subjectivity, Wu Ming-yi’s literary writing goes a step further in challenging the relationship between human and non-human subjectivity in general.

Composed of six individual short stories, *The Land of Little Rain* (*ku yu zhi di*, 苦雨之地) hereafter *The Land*) explores themes and subjects concerning non-human species in Taiwan. As an ecological writer, Wu Ming-yi is particularly interested in the question of how literature is able to configure non-humans (both animals and non-animals) and unveil their subjectivity to readers. In *The Land*, Wu pursues this objective both by developing a new mode of literary writing and by debunking our anthropocentric conception of language.

Aligning himself with the nature writing at the early stage of his career, Wu’s non-fictional essay collections focus mainly on empirical observation and scientific study of the natural environment and non-human species in Taiwan. By contrast, his cli-fi (climate fiction) and his postcolonial environment novels often showcase his literary imagination, in which he anthropomorphises non-human species and dramatises climate events, historical moments, or environmental exploitation. But Wu’s writing in *The Land* may take his long-term readers by surprise. It breaks with this former division, going beyond the boundary of fictional writing.
by integrating non-fictional material from his nature writing, thus forming a new cross-genre genre that Wu considers able to fully exhibit the being and essence of the non-human world.

The stories presented in the collection should therefore not be read as the life journeys of the main human characters, but as stories about the non-humans. Each story begins with the author’s hand-drawn picture of a wild Taiwanese animal or plant species—a Metaphire Formosae (earthworm), a black-naped Oriole (bird), Taiwan Hemlock (conifer tree), a Formosan clouded leopard, and a grey-face buzzard—in the style of eighteenth-century natural science drawing.¹ These images imitate the effects produced by a camera, representing and documenting wildlife and nature in a faithful manner close to our visual perception. To paint them in such detail, it is necessary for Wu to cultivate an insight into these non-humans. The author has to move away from his anthropocentric gaze and adopt a non-human perspective, capturing the meaning of a buzzard’s glance, an earthworm’s movement, or a bird’s tweeting.

Whilst Wu’s other fictions give more attention to our ethical consideration of non-humans, the narratives in The Land underline the ‘becoming’ of non-humans. ‘The Clouds are Two Thousand Meters Up (雲在兩千米)’ narrates the protagonist’s search for an unfinished story written by his deceased wife, a story about the Formosan clouded leopard, an extinct species that lies at the heart of the indigenous Rukai mythology. In the story, details about the leopard’s biological features, habitat, diet or hunting habits are carefully interwoven with Guan’s (the protagonist) quest to pursue the unfinished story. The undertaken journey

¹ Except the fifth story, ‘Eternal Mother (恆久受孕的雌性)’, the picture of Pacific bluefin tunas, was drawn by another graphic artist, Wu Ya-ting (吳亞庭).
represents a transformational process of ‘becoming’. In this meta-fictional story, the ‘fictional’ becomes the ‘non-fictional’ (i.e. an encounter between Guan and A-bao, a character invented by his wife) and the human becomes the animal (i.e. A-bao’s transformation into a leopard). Finally, the story ends with the sexual intercourse between Guan and a wildcat, which resembles the mythologised creature. This union between a human and a non-human thus represents not only Wu’s attempt to bring about a change of our perspective with regard to non-human subjectivity, but also symbolises his attempt to marry fictional and non-fictional writing.

Other than Wu’s deliberate attempt to develop a cross-genre type of writing, the book also aims to debunk our common anthropocentric conception of language and its relation to our subjectivity. Language, generally seen as the defining feature that separates humans from non-humans, often leads to the anthropocentric assumption that non-humans possess no subjectivity.

‘Can non-humans speak?’, ‘Can we understand their speaking?’, and ‘In what way can literature present a language system that does not overlook non-human others?’ These are the questions raised in many of Wu’s works. In his previous fictional works, the voices of non-humans are often represented through anthropomorphised animals such as the tortoise, the whales, and the elephants, which recount the physical torments or psychological sufferings they endure through wars and exploitation. In The Land, rather than assuming that non-humans should speak to us in our language, Wu considers that humans are only part of the larger language system embedded in the ecology we share with non-humans. Hence, it is humans who should learn new ways to communicate with non-humans. As the back cover tells us, ‘[i]n the ancient time, humans and all other beings speak the same language. The
tweeting of the birds, the twinkling starlight from afar, the wind that caresses the green grass field, the sound of ocean waves and the cry of an infant inspires each other’.

In *The Land*, the protagonists’ learning of non-human language is thus also a process of becoming. In ‘How the Brain Got Language? (人如何學會語言)’, he outlines the ability of all beings to communicate through scents, movements, exchanges of glances, or the sense of touch. For example, Wu observes that while an earthworm does not possess organs of hearing, it can ‘hear’ the movements of another animal with the vibration it detects through the setae on its skin. In line with this, Wu challenges that aspect of human cognition which largely relies on the symbolic realm by introducing the ‘physical’ aspect of language that humans and non-humans share. The main character of the story, Di-zhi, an ornithologist who studies the musicality of birds’ chirping in different species, explores the possibility of expressing bird tweeting with sign languages after he became deaf. Through sign language learning, Di-zhi realises that meanings and ideas do not need to be conveyed by words (i.e. in human language), but they can be fully inscribed or expressed by one’s body. Our bodies, which share many similar features with those of non-humans, *can* be the vehicle for us to communicate with them. It is through Di-zhi’s invented sign languages of the bird tweets that the ‘silent’ beings from two seemingly different worlds (i.e. the deaf people in Di-zhi’s bird-watching society and the birds) are able to finally speak to each other.

Overall, the cross-genre writing that Wu has developed not only offers a fresh perspective on his own fictional works, but also could potentially be taken as a new model in shaping the growing ecocriticism movement within Taiwanese literature. However, though Wu’s experimental writing style may have its appeal, in terms of the book’s overall structure, it is not entirely successful. Compared to his other short story collection, *The Magician on the
Skywalk (天橋上的魔術師 2013), which exhibits tighter structure and much more coherent themes, The Land appears to lose focus at times. The central background element, a living cyborg (i.e. a computer virus) actively generated by humans remains insufficiently explored and serves only as a recurring motif among Wu’s stories, despite its potential to bring the discussion of human and non-human relations to a different level. A final chapter that brings together the strands of this recurring motif, thus showing its significance, would have given the book greater coherence.

Ti-han Chang

University of Central Lancashire, UK

tihan_tw@hotmail.com
If Jacques Derrida’s philosophy has radically changed our understanding of the relationship between human and animal subjectivity, Wu Ming-yi’s literary writing goes a step further in challenging the relationship between human and non-human subjectivity in general.

Composed of six individual short stories, The Land of Little Rain (苦雨之地, hereafter ‘The Land’) explores themes and subjects concerning non-human species in Taiwan. As an ecological writer, Wu Ming-yi is particularly interested in the question of how literature is able to configure non-humans (both animals and non-animals) and unveil their subjectivity to readers. In The Land, Wu pursues this objective both by developing a new mode of literary writing and by debunking our anthropocentric conception of language.

Aligning himself with the nature writing at the early stage of his career, Wu’s non-fictional essay collections focus mainly on empirical observation and scientific study of the natural environment and non-human species in Taiwan. By contrast, his cli-fi (climate fiction) and his postcolonial environment novels often showcase his literary imagination, in which he anthropomorphises non-human species and dramatises climate events, historical moments, or environmental exploitation. But Wu’s writing in The Land may take his long-term readers by surprise. It breaks with this former division, going beyond the boundary of fictional writing.
by integrating non-fictional material from his nature writing, thus forming a new cross-genre that Wu considers able to fully exhibit the being and essence of the non-human world.

The stories presented in the collection should therefore not be read as the life journeys of the main human characters, but as stories about the non-humans. Each story begins with the author’s hand-drawn picture of a wild Taiwanese animal or plant species—a Metaphire Formosae (earthworm), a black-naped Oriole (bird), Taiwan Hemlock (conifer tree), a Formosan clouded leopard, and a grey-face buzzard—in the style of eighteenth-century natural science drawing. These images imitate the effects produced by a camera, representing and documenting wildlife and nature in a faithful manner close to our visual perception. To paint them in such detail, it is necessary for Wu to cultivate an insight into these non-humans. The author has to move away from his anthropocentric gaze and adopt a non-human perspective, capturing the meaning of a buzzard’s glance, an earthworm’s movement, or a bird’s tweeting.

Whilst Wu’s other fictions give more attention to our ethical consideration of non-humans, the narratives in The Land underline the ‘becoming’ of non-humans. ‘The Clouds are Two Thousand Meters Up (雲在兩千米)’ narrates the protagonist’s search for an unfinished story written by his deceased wife, a story about the Formosan clouded leopard, an extinct species that lies at the heart of the indigenous Rukai mythology. In the story, details about the leopard’s biological features, habitat, diet or hunting habits are carefully interwoven with Guan’s (the protagonist) quest to pursue the unfinished story. The undertaken journey

---

1 Except the fifth story, ‘Eternal Mother (恆久受孕的雌性)’, the picture of Pacific bluefin tunas, was drawn by another graphic artist, Wu Ya-ting (吳亞庭).
represents a transformational process of ‘becoming’. In this meta-fictional story, the
‘fictional’ becomes the ‘non-fictional (i.e. an encounter between Guan and A-bao, a character
invented by his wife) and the human becomes the animal (i.e. A-bao’s transformation into a
leopard). Finally, the story ends with the sexual intercourse between Guan and a wildcat,
which resembles the mythologised creature. This union between a human and a non-human
thus represents not only Wu’s attempt to bring about a change of our perspective with regard
to non-human subjectivity, but also symbolises his attempt to marry fictional and non-
fictional writing.

Other than Wu’s deliberate attempt to develop a cross-genre type of writing, the book also
aims to debunk our common anthropocentric conception of language and its relation to our
subjectivity. Language, generally seen as the defining feature that separates humans from
non-humans, often leads to the anthropocentric assumption that non-humans possess no
subjectivity.

‘Can non-humans speak?’, ‘Can we understand their speaking?’, and ‘In what way can
literature present a language system that does not overlook non-human others?’ These are the
questions raised in many of Wu’s works. In his previous fictional works, the voices of non-
humans are often represented through anthropomorphised animals such as the tortoise, the
whales, and the elephants, which recount the physical torments or psychological sufferings
they endure through wars and exploitation. In The Land, rather than assuming that non-
humans should speak to us in our language, Wu considers that humans are only part of the
larger language system embedded in the ecology we share with non-humans. Hence, it is
humans who should learn new ways to communicate with non-humans. As the back cover
tells us, ‘[i]n the ancient time, humans and all other beings speak the same language. The
tweeting of the birds, the twinkling starlight from afar, the wind that caresses the green grass field, the sound of ocean waves and the cry of an infant inspires each other’.

In *The Land*, the protagonists’ learning of non-human language is thus also a process of becoming. In ‘How the Brain Got Language? (人如何學會語言)’, he outlines the ability of all beings to communicate through scents, movements, exchanges of glances, or the sense of touch. For example, Wu observes that while an earthworm does not possess organs of hearing, it can ‘hear’ the movements of another animal with the vibration it detects through the setae on its skin. In line with this, Wu challenges that aspect of human cognition which largely relies on the symbolic realm by introducing the ‘physical’ aspect of language that humans and non-humans share. The main character of the story, Di-zhi, an ornithologist who studies the musicality of birds’ chirping in different species, explores the possibility of expressing bird tweeting with sign languages after he became deaf. Through sign language learning, Di-zhi realises that meanings and ideas do not need to be conveyed by words (i.e. in human language), but they can be fully inscribed or expressed by one’s body. Our bodies, which share many similar features with those of non-humans, *can* be the vehicle for us to communicate with them. It is through Di-zhi’s invented sign languages of the bird tweets that the ‘silent’ beings from two seemingly different worlds (i.e. the deaf people in Di-zhi’s bird-watching society and the birds) are able to finally speak to each other.

Overall, the cross-genre writing that Wu has developed not only offers a fresh perspective on his own fictional works, but also could potentially be taken as a new model in shaping the growing ecocriticism movement within Taiwanese literature. However, though Wu’s experimental writing style may have its appeal, in terms of the book’s overall structure, it is not entirely successful. Compared to his other short story collection, *The Magician on the*
Skywalk (天橋上的魔術師, 2013), which exhibits tighter structure and much more coherent themes, The Land appears to lose focus at times. The central background element, a living cyborg (i.e. a computer virus) actively generated by humans remains insufficiently explored and serves only as a recurring motif among Wu’s stories, despite its potential to bring the discussion of human and non-human relations to a different level. A final chapter that brings together the strands of this recurring motif, thus showing its significance, would have given the book greater coherence.

Ti-han Chang

University of Central Lancashire, UK

tihan_tw@hotmail.com