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**Deconstructing Anthropomorphism: The “Humanimal”  
Narratives of Kenneth Grahame, Beatrix Potter, and Richard  
Adams**

Douglas Peter Leatherland

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy



Department of English Studies

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2018



# Deconstructing Anthropomorphism: The “Humanimal” Narratives of Kenneth Grahame, Beatrix Potter, and Richard Adams

Douglas Peter Leatherland

## Abstract

This thesis proposes that popular narratives categorized as children’s animal stories – Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), Beatrix Potter’s tales (1902-30), and Richard Adams’ *Watership Down* (1972) – feature characters which are rendered anthropomorphic in a diversity of overlapping and contradictory ways. Each of these narratives draws on a complex and varied tradition of anthropomorphic animals in literature. Due to their popularity, they have received various critical responses which pose different meanings implied by the author’s use of anthropomorphic tropes. My study aims to amalgamate these readings into a meta-critical analysis of the anthropomorphisms in the work of the three authors. Beginning with a historical overview of anthropomorphism across the disciplines and the key debates surrounding this supposedly fixed concept, this study questions the implications made about the human condition which are inherent in assumptions that a text is representing a character in an anthropomorphic way. To be anthropomorphic, such modes of representation must necessarily attribute features which are exclusively human, but even when we deconstruct previously held assumptions of anthropomorphism in the work of popular writers of animal stories, we find that what does or does not constitute anthropomorphism is a multifarious and complex issue. While at times the anthropomorphisms in these narratives are explicit and draw on popular elements of fable and fantasy, at other times they merge with more naturalistic representations. The figure of the “humanimal”, which constitutes a neither/both structure of relation between the human and the animal, emerges as the most relevant figure as we follow the trajectories of anthropomorphic tropes in the narratives of Grahame, Potter and Adams. While the humanimal figure is often identified in the animal narratives of authors such as Franz Kafka, I propose that by deconstructing anthropomorphic tropes, popular “children’s” animal stories may also be considered humanimal narratives.



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## Introduction: Anthropomorphism and the “Humanimal”

In *Animal Land: The Creatures of Children’s Fiction* (1974), Margaret Blount categorised children’s animal stories according to ‘three distinct types of writer’:

...first, the sort of writer who cannot help writing about animals – they are his first love and find their way into his work whether he will or no; besides Jack London, C.S. Lewis or Alison Uttley, there are the great naturalists Ernest Thompson Seton, H. Mortimer Batten, J.W. Fortescue or Denys Watkins Pitchford. The second kind of temperament tends to dislike, or be critical of, the human race and finds animals a more innocent, congenial alternative with which to populate the earth, and includes Swift, T.H. White or Beatrix Potter. The third category [...] is concerned, consciously or unconsciously, with teaching us something. The moral urge is very strong – not in the folklore animal stories, but in the early animal tales of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; however, more twentieth-century writers belong to the group than one might think. There are High Lofting, Paul Gallico, Beverley Nichols, and C.S. Lewis once more, and all these numerous creators who start by dressing animals and giving them human voices end up by saying more than intended – anthropomorphism has unexpected results. Animals are beautiful, innocent, funny and strange, and their built-in appeal can be used as a half-way stage towards comment on the human race. One can do this, as perhaps Kenneth Grahame did, without realising it.<sup>1</sup>

The three texts I have chosen to discuss – Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), Beatrix Potter’s tales (1902-30), and Richard Adams’ *Watership Down* (1972) – are widely considered to be great works of anthropomorphic children’s literature. They are amongst the most recognised and popular texts of the very specific, albeit ambiguously defined genre, of the children’s animal story. The popularity of these texts has also invited diverse critical responses, and thus the ways in which anthropomorphism has been read, conceived or evaded in readings of each text can be seen in their various manifestations. This thesis proposes that the labels of ‘anthropomorphic’ and ‘children’s literature’ become more ambivalent as we progress through the twentieth century. Blount’s claim that children’s animal stories can be neatly categorised as above, although helpful in thinking about the differences between two more diverse but contemporaneous writers such as, for example, Jack London and Beatrix Potter, does not acknowledge the plurality of genres and modes of writing that often converge in animal narratives. As we shall see, each of the texts I shall be discussing feature elements of natural history writing, animal fable, allegory, nonsense literature, beast-epic and papillonades, to name just a few that immediately spring to mind. This plurality also means that the boundary between what we consider to be either explicit or implicit anthropomorphic techniques becomes blurred, and fluctuates according to the multiple conceptions of the human-animal relationship which are conveyed or assumed in each text. As Blount states, ‘anthropomorphism has unexpected results’. Throughout this

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Blount, *Animal Land: The Creatures of Children’s Fiction* (London: Hutchinson, 1974), pp. 16-17.

study, I shall be deconstructing the term ‘anthropomorphism’, and its multiplicity of implications for the seemingly fixed categories of the ‘human’ and the ‘animal’. Further, I will adopt anthropomorphism in a very fluid sense in order to deconstruct widely held assumptions about the degree of anthropomorphism that critics have implied in each text.

The narratives of Grahame, Potter and Adams reflect the ambiguity surrounding the human/animal, or ‘humanimal’ distinction. The term ‘humanimal’ implies a *neither/both*, as opposed to an *either/or*, structure of relation between the human and animal identities of both human and nonhuman animals. ‘Humanimal’ is a term used by W.J.T. Mitchell in his Foreword to Cary Wolfe’s *Animal Rites* (2003): ‘Perhaps we need a new term to designate the hybrid creatures that we must learn to think of, a “humanimal” form predicated on the refusal of the human-animal binary.’<sup>2</sup> We may also apply the term ‘humanimal’ in exploring the rich variety of animal characters that populate our literature. A major aim of this study is to deconstruct ‘anthropomorphism’ as a term which reconfigures the human-animal binary by questioning the assumption that characteristics supposed to be anthropomorphic are human in the first place. Theriomorphism (or zoomorphism), the process of attributing animal characteristics onto humans is also implied in these animal narratives; anthropomorphism and theriomorphism often converge. Moreover, presumed definitions of theriomorphic characteristics are equally as ambiguous.

For the purposes of exploring to their fullest extent the questions of a) what constitutes anthropomorphism, b) what kind of anthropomorphism is being depicted, and c) when and to what extent do anthropomorphisms overlap, the choice of texts in this study deliberately exclude any works of fantasy fiction which feature animal characters who inhabit secondary worlds (C.S. Lewis’ Narnia stories, for example) in order to ground the above questions within some sort of real-world context. It also avoids texts which feature animal characters that do not speak or exhibit any other overt anthropomorphic tropes (Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild* (1903), Henry Williamson’s *Tarka the Otter* (1927)). Finally, it excludes texts which feature animal characters as subsidiary to human protagonists (Hugh Lofting’s *The Story of Doctor Doolittle* (1920)). My choice of texts is also limited to British writers, although a study of greater scope would almost certainly explore narratives written by American, Continental, and non-Western authors.

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<sup>2</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, ‘Foreword’ to Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. xiii.

The study is divided into two sections, Chapters 1 and 2 focusing on the overlapping contexts in which concepts of anthropomorphism have emerged, and Chapters 3 to 5 exploring this overlap of anthropomorphisms in the works of Grahame, Potter and Adams. Chapter 1 contextualizes anthropomorphism in the complex history of the human-animal relationship in the discourses of Western philosophy and science. There has been a diverse array of definitions proposed to explain anthropomorphism and to categorise its differing manifestations. I trace in this first chapter the evolution of our perceived affinities with, or distinctions from, the animal kingdom, beginning with the totemic cultures of the ancient world and moving through classical, medieval and modern perceptions of species distinction and continuity. Amongst the most crucial conceptions of the human-animal relationship as one of rigid distinction is the mechanomorphic Cartesian position which claimed that nonhuman animals were machines void of reason, intentionality, or an immortal soul. A brief history of classification is also included, as diverse and conflicting taxonomic systems of classification reveal much about the instability and arbitrary nature of species categories. The great anthropomorphism debate commences, of course, with the advent of Darwin's evolutionary theory, and develops in the disciplines of behaviourism, classical ethology and cognitive ethology. The chapter concludes by exploring various posthumanist positions on the anthropocentric presumption that 'the animal' is a category separate from 'the human', particularly the arguments of Jacques Derrida, Cary Wolfe and Donna Haraway, and their implications for our assumptions about anthropomorphism.

Chapter 2 offers another historical overview, this time discussing anthropomorphic and theriomorphic representations of (non)human animals in fiction. From the fables of Aesop to the beast-epic tradition popularised by Reynard the Fox to the didactic children's tales of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, changing conceptions of human and nonhuman animals have influenced the degree to which animals are literally or symbolically, anthropomorphically or anthropocentrically (or both) represented in literature. Animals have been depicted across almost all fictional modes and genres, most popularly, in classical and medieval Europe, as fabular and allegorical substitutes for human concerns. I will briefly trace the evolution of one popular trope, the cunning fox, from its Aesopic manifestation to the Reynard cycle, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Nun's Priest's Tale* and John Dryden's *The Cock and the Fox*. Foxes are amongst many species whose history can partially be traced in literature from the ancient fables to the present.

Exploring questions as to what extent a narrative is anthropomorphic (or theriomorphic) in its depiction of animal characters paves the way for questions of much

larger scope concerning narrative itself. Paul Ricoeur writes that ‘human action can be narrated [...] because it is always already symbolically mediated’.<sup>3</sup> Anthropomorphism extends that symbolic mediation to nonhuman animals, although such narratives are still inescapably bound to the language of human action. Discussing the uses of language in descriptions of animal behaviour written by naturalists, behaviourists and cognitive ethologists, Eileen Crist remarks that the ‘vernacular of action is the everyday language of human action. In using this language in accounts of animal action, certain dimensions of its logic in regard to human action become assembled in the case of animals as well’.<sup>4</sup> In other words, narrative is anthropomorphic by its very nature, not only in texts featuring nonhuman animal characters but in narratives about human characters as well. Monica Fludernik also identifies an inherently ‘anthropomorphic bias’ in narratives.<sup>5</sup> Narratives can also contain elements of theriomorphism, however. Characters can become caricatures, as in the works of Charles Dickens, or acquire personalities that reflect animalized aspects of ‘human’ nature, such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s Mr Hyde or Joseph Conrad’s Kurtz, examples of what Roberto Marchesini calls the ‘theriomorphic monsters’ of nineteenth- and twentieth century literature.<sup>6</sup>

Chapter 2 will also examine the work of Franz Kafka, an author whose short fiction famously depicts the fluctuation of anthropomorphic and theriomorphic elements in many of his protagonists, such as Gregor Samsa in ‘The Metamorphosis’ (1915) and Red Peter in ‘A Report to an Academy’ (1917). Gregor’s transformation into a giant cockroach is theriomorphic in that he literally changes into an insect, but also anthropomorphic in that the reader and the other members of Gregor’s family still think of him as human until the very end of the story, despite his new and repulsive physical form. Red Peter does not physically transform from ape to human but instead learns to speak and even think like a human under the constraints of captivity, but at the expense of losing the knowledge of his experience as an ape. Ultimately, he loses his animal identity while remaining unable to transgress his physical form in order to assume a new human identity. Of course, both of these narratives are also meant to expose the alienation and inexpressibility of the modern subject. I shall be discussing another example of Kafka’s short stories that demonstrates the ambivalent

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Vol.1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 57.

<sup>4</sup> Eileen Crist, *Images of Animals: Anthropomorphism and Animal Mind* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Monica Fludernik, *Towards a ‘Natural’ Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Roberto Marchesini, ‘Nonhuman Alterities’, *Angelaki*, 21.1 (2016), p. 170.

“humanimal” relation in Chapter 2: ‘Forschungen eines Hundes’ or ‘Investigations of a Dog’ (1922). The dog-philosopher in this narrative is physically animal but reasons in a way which, while setting him apart from his species, is not entirely human. He thinks from his species-specific perspective as a dog, which both reaffirms and challenges human centrality as he interprets the world in a way that is analogous to the anthropocentric worldview. We might think of the narrator’s species-centric viewpoint as being *canine*-centric.

The particular texts I have chosen are generally regarded as children’s literature, or rather literature written for children by adults. The child/adult distinction is equally as ambivalent as the human/animal distinction in many aspects. Grahame’s four protagonists are both children and Edwardian male bachelors, as well as being their animal selves. The power binaries of child/adult and male/female are played out in Grahame’s narrative through the association of both the child and the male with the animal, which by extension affiliates the adult, and the female, with the human; or, rather, what Grahame perceives to be the negative aspects of the human. Potter’s animals are depicted in much more explicit family relationship dynamics, some characters cast as children and some as adults. It is not immediately clear in some instances where there is an absence of an obvious family structure, however, whether an animal character in Potter’s tales is supposed to be a child or an adult. Her animals are also variously male and female, and so the gender binary implicit in Grahame is less marked in Potter’s use of anthropomorphism.

Adams’ rabbits, meanwhile, embody *neither/both* the rabbit and the human. The analogies drawn by Adams between rabbits and humans, while avoiding symbolic representations of the child as animal, deeply disrupt our preconceptions about what it means to be human, or rabbit, or even both. If the literary “humanimal” is comprised of both human and animal elements, how are we to identify where the human ends and the animal begins, or vice versa? Moreover, where do anthropomorphic tropes concede to more ‘naturalistic’ representations? Adams’ novel invites the reader to probe these questions further, but remains ultimately unresolved on them. Each narrative explores the intersections of the human/animal, or ‘humanimal’ spectrum, as well as blending different shades of anthropomorphism. All of these texts feature the more recognizable traits of the traditional fabular or allegorical anthropomorphism that characterizes narratives such as George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945), although very often this more anthropocentric shade of anthropomorphism gives way to a more ambivalent manifestation as we begin to explore a text like *Watership Down*, in which the anthropomorphism is often explicitly non-anthropocentric. Adams’ rabbits display characteristics which are *analogous* rather than

*homologous* to recognisably human characteristics, while the definition of what these characteristics are in both instances are portrayed ambiguously. Sameness and difference between species are thus sustained in equal measure throughout the novel, resisting interpretations of *Watership Down* as either affirming or dispelling notions of essential species difference.

Chapters 3 to 5, which examine each of the three authors in turn, aim to illuminate a deconstructive trend towards the erosion of species difference in the children's animal narrative. To illuminate this shift in the context of deconstructive theory, Barbara Johnson explains that

Instead of a simple "either/or" structure, deconstruction attempts to elaborate a discourse that says *neither* "either/or", nor "both/and" nor even "neither/nor", while at the same time not totally abandoning these logics either. The very word *deconstruction* is meant to undermine the either/or logic of the opposition "construction/deconstruction". Deconstruction is both, it is neither, and it reveals the way in which both construction and deconstruction are themselves not what they appear to be. Deconstruction both opposes and redefines; it both reverses an opposition and reworks the terms of that opposition so that what was formerly understood by them is no longer tenable.<sup>7</sup>

Grahame's novel depicts the human and animal characteristics of his protagonists in a state of fluctuation and occasional convergence; or, to apply more deconstructive terms, Grahame's animals embody an *either/or* structure which tends towards a *both/and* structure in certain, more ambiguous, passages of the novel. Potter's tales develop the *both/and* structure even further, depicting her animal characters using a technique of what I will elaborate as her 'dual' anthropomorphism, or 'double perspective'. As we proceed to explore Adams' novel, we shall see that the *both/and* structure between the human and the nonhuman tends toward the *neither/both* structure of the 'humanimal'. The deconstruction of the human-animal relationship that I am proposing in these texts applies in significant ways, of course, to the child-adult distinction, although this will be a subsidiary concern in my analysis.

The animal narratives of Grahame, Potter and Adams have generally been relegated to the domain of children's literature studies, and while the overtly anthropomorphic tropes of these texts have been explored, the more overarching questions of what constitutes anthropomorphism in the first place have yet to be fully examined in the context of, specifically, the 'children's' animal story. Modernist or postmodernist animal narratives such as Kafka's short stories, Virginia Woolf's *Flush* (1933), or Paul Auster's *Timbuktu* (1999), which attempt to portray nonhuman (very often canine) subjectivities, have received more

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 12-13.

serious attention partially on the basis that they are works of ‘adult’ fiction; i.e. not categorised as ‘children’s’ fiction. These works are perceived to challenge, perhaps even escape, the anthropocentric manifestations of anthropomorphism in fictional narratives. Conversely, animal stories generally regarded as being written for children are perceived to be lacking, by the very nature of their supposedly juvenile audience, in this more sophisticated depiction of nonhuman subjectivities. The animals which populate these stories are usually perceived as merely humans, often children, in disguise. It is the central aim of this thesis to dispel such notions and to reconfigure these texts within the context of a posthumanist approach to anthropomorphism and narrative.

## Chapter 1

# Anthropomorphism: A Historical Overview

### What is Anthropomorphism?

This chapter will provide a historical overview of the changing definitions and manifestations of anthropomorphism, as well as the human attitudes and beliefs which have shaped representations of the nonhuman animal from antiquity to the present. Firstly, I shall explore the different definitions and categories of anthropomorphism and terms which are critically related to the concept, namely *theriomorphism* and *mechanomorphism*. Secondly, I shall explore the place of animals in the cosmic and scientific orders of living beings which have prevailed in the Western philosophical and theological traditions and the natural sciences. Finally this chapter will briefly discuss the recent posthumanist trend towards destabilizing our preconceptions of human uniqueness, and the deconstruction of the concept of anthropomorphism that has accompanied this perspective. Whether or not an attributed trait is judged to be anthropomorphic always entails or presupposes major cultural, religious and philosophical decisions or presuppositions about what defines the human.

The OED definition of ‘anthropomorphism’ (first known use: 1753) describes it as the ‘attributing of human qualities to a deity’.<sup>8</sup> In 1858, a year before the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, the definition broadened to encompass all nonhuman animals, plants and non-living objects. While some of the earliest literary evidence of what is considered anthropomorphism can be found in Aesop and the ancient Indian ‘beast fables’, the *Panachantra* and *Jataka Tales*, earlier in history we encounter examples of anthropomorphism in cave paintings depicting animal or human-animal hybrid figures as far back as 30,000 years ago. ‘Since then’, writes Douglas Fox, ‘anthropomorphic figures have been ubiquitous in folk-lore and religion, and many of them are still going strong. Think Jack Frost, Mother Nature and, of course, God’. Arguably, since human culture has made its mark on the world, so has anthropomorphism. Moreover, Fox asserts that anthropomorphism, as a concept if not a term, dates back to ancient Greece: ‘Xenophanes [...] coined the term anthropomorphism 2600 years ago. He observed that people worshipped gods that resemble themselves: Greeks kowtowed to white-skinned gods, while the Ethiopians preferred theirs a

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<sup>8</sup> <<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=anthropomorphism>> .

bit darker. From this observation, he predicted that if horses and donkeys believed in gods, theirs would trot on four legs.’<sup>9</sup>

Before we embark on a genealogy, however, we should identify the debates that have beset the concept of anthropomorphism itself. In recent criticism, various manifestations of anthropomorphism in both the natural and social sciences and the humanities have been discussed, and challenges levelled against the use of anthropomorphism in these disciplines. Mary Midgley asserts the word itself is ‘not only clumsy but really misleading as soon as we get away from its literal application to shape or form.’<sup>10</sup> We must consider other attributions implied by the term, such as the attribution of consciousness, reason and language, traits which have all been traditionally invoked in distinguishing the human from other animal species.

It is important to deconstruct anthropomorphism as a term, or to disambiguate, to use John Fisher’s term. Fisher identifies two major types of anthropomorphism: *imaginative* and *interpretive*. From interpretive anthropomorphism he distinguishes two further types: *categorical* and *situational*. Within the sub-category of *categorical* anthropomorphism, Fisher argues that this strand functions either with recourse to a particular species or a particular mental predicate, which he calls an *M-predicate*. He writes: ‘Categorical anthropomorphism is applying M-predicates to creatures to which they do not apply under any of the behavioural circumstances in which the creature is ever situated [...] By contrast, situational anthropomorphism happens when we, as we sometimes do, misinterpret an animal’s behaviour in ways that could correctly apply to that animal, but which do not apply in the situation in question.’<sup>11</sup>

Fredrik Karlsson, meanwhile, identifies not only two distinct types of anthropomorphism, *psychological* and *cultural*, but also the ‘anthropocentrism of anthropomorphism’, which he calls *embodied* and *value-theoretical* anthropocentrism. *Embodied* anthropocentrism ‘results in a completely or partially anthropomorphical outlook on the world. The degree of completeness of anthropomorphism depends on to which degree people’s perception can reach outside our own species’.<sup>12</sup> An example of this type of

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<sup>9</sup> Douglas Fox, ‘In our own image: Why we treat things like people’, *New Scientist magazine*, Issue.2788 (29 November 2010), p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1983), p. 128.

<sup>11</sup> John Andrew Fisher, ‘Disambiguating Anthropomorphism: An Interdisciplinary Review’, *Perspectives in Ethology*, Vol.9: *Human Understanding and Animal Awareness*, eds. P.P.G. Bateson and Peter H. Klopfer (New York: Plenum Publishing Corporation, 1991), p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> Fredrik Karlsson, ‘Critical Anthropomorphism and Animal Ethics’, *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, Vol.25, No.5 (2012), p. 709.

anthropocentrism is Thomas Nagel's argument in 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?' (1974), which speculates on the attribution of human ontological awareness to bats. Nagel identifies this attribution as anthropomorphic (although he does not apply the term anthropomorphism *per se*; he also demonstrates here an *embodied* anthropocentrism in his choice of animal subject: 'I have chosen bats instead of wasps or flounders because if one travels too far down the phylogenetic tree, people gradually shed their faith that there is experience there at all.'<sup>13</sup> Embodied anthropocentrism, therefore, rests on the presumption that the species of animals deemed closer to humans morphologically and anatomically will also possess higher degrees of intelligence and experience their own lives in a meaningful way.

*Value-theoretical* anthropocentrism, meanwhile, 'is a possible, but not necessary, theoretical consequence of describing the world by standards formulated in the permanent state of embodied anthropocentrism'.<sup>14</sup> Value-theoretical anthropocentric views are reflected in the dominant approach in Western philosophy that humans are morally superior to animals because of their ability to reason, to speak, or to demonstrate any other distinguishing faculty. Such faculties, and their resultant moral implications, are denied to animals according to this view. Karlsson emphasizes the importance of the distinction between these two types of anthropocentrism because 'it is quite possible to defend the idea of animals as equals and even rights holders, while still being (embodiedly) anthropocentric as well as anthropomorphic'.<sup>15</sup> Karlsson's point is most evident in the liberal humanist conceptions of animal ethics posited by Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Martha Nussbaum, and others, which extend human conceptions of morality and ethical practices to nonhuman animals, but do not consider the animal on its own terms. This notion of representing the animal 'on its own terms' will prove central to this study as we continue to probe hitherto held assumptions about anthropomorphism.

There is another important distinction to emphasize when approaching questions about anthropomorphism: *homology* and *analogy*. While representations of animal behaviour as *homologous* imply that the behavioural traits in question are likely the same due to a close phylogenetic relationship between species (e.g. humans and chimpanzees or whales and dolphins), representations of behaviour as *analogous* imply that traits result from evolutionary convergence, i.e. they have evolved in two species independently but appear similar. This distinction calls into question whether some 'anthropomorphic' representations

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Nagel, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol.83, No.4 (Duke University Press, Oct 1974), p. 438.

<sup>14</sup> Karlsson, p. 709.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

are anthropomorphic at all. Homologous representations of behaviour would not imply anthropomorphism because the shared trait does not belong exclusively to humans. Brian Keeley writes that

it is a category error to speak of such a trait as ‘anthropomorphic’ at all. Instead, it is more accurately thought of as ‘primatomorphic’ (a trait shared by and perhaps largely unique to primates) or ‘mammalomorphic’ (a trait shared by and perhaps largely unique to mammals). For humans to lay primary or exclusive claim to a trait shared between our nonhuman evolutionary relatives and us is to make the anthropocentric basis of this charge of anthropomorphism most evident.<sup>16</sup>

Analogous representations, on the other hand, would imply anthropomorphism in the sense of a ‘category error’ because while the trait resembles a similar trait in humans it is not the same. Keeley emphasizes the difficulty in deciding on which traits exhibited in other animals are homologous or analogous to our own because of the ambivalence of categories such as ‘human’, ‘primate’ or ‘mammal’. ‘In large part’, he claims, ‘the debate over theory of mind is a debate over what it means to be a human or a chimpanzee or an ape. As traditionally understood, the charge of anthropomorphism presupposes that such categories are well-understood and then attempts to make use of that alleged fixed point’.<sup>17</sup>

There are two additional terms which are almost if not equally as critical to this study as anthropomorphism. The first is *theriomorphism*, often referred to as *zoomorphism*, which signifies the attribution of animal characteristics onto humans. The second is *mechanomorphism*, which signifies the attribution of machinic qualities to living organisms. All three terms taken by themselves seem to imply very different modes of representation, but a closer look reveals that these terms can be understood as occupying a spectrum of modes for representing the nonhuman other.

‘Theriomorphic’ is a term first coined in 1882 (‘zoomorphic’ in 1872), around the time that Darwin’s theories of evolutionary continuity between species had already sparked contentious debate about the scientific plausibility of anthropomorphic descriptions of animals. Extreme examples of theriomorphic attributions during the last century include the dehumanization of ethnic minorities, such as the Nazi regime’s representation of Jews as vermin and the Hutu representation of Tutsis as cockroaches during the Rwandan genocide, but they are also manifest in commonly used expressions, often insults, such as ‘snake in the grass,’ ‘greedy as a pig,’ or ‘weasel’. However, the theriomorphic impulse pervades culture

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<sup>16</sup> Brian Keeley, ‘Anthropomorphism, Primatomorphism, Mammalomorphism: Understanding Cross-Species Comparisons,’ *Biological Philosophy*, 19 (2004), p. 535.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 537.

on a much deeper level than propaganda or idiomatic phrases. The most developed recent discussion of theriomorphism is in Roberto Marchesini's 'The Theriosphere'. According to Marchesini,

[C]ulture has a substantially hybrid character, even if it is not immediately discoverable because it is mixed in an amalgam of theriomorphic loans; such that we can say that our human existence is not separable from our theriomorphically contaminated being. Animal appeal is therefore something more than a fascination worked from the outside on humans, if it is true – as I believe – that a pure human does not exist, or, to be precise, one that is not theriomorphized by culture. Our life as humans is surrounded by animal knowledges, is sustained on hybridization with animals, is founded on animal signs.<sup>18</sup>

Anthropomorphic and theriomorphic representations often intersect and the distinction between the two terms is blurred, as we shall observe on several occasions throughout this study. Both modes of representation illustrate the 'substantially hybrid character' of culture. Anthropomorphism and theriomorphism are mutually implicative in human representations of ourselves and other animals. Perhaps this is what Giorgio Agamben had in mind when he asserted that '[t]he total humanization of the animal coincides with the total animalization of man'.<sup>19</sup>

'Mechanomorphic,' meanwhile, is a term first used by R.H. Waters in 1948 to describe the technical language used in descriptions of animals by the behaviourists, whom we shall come to later.<sup>20</sup> Mechanomorphic descriptions of animals were popularised long before the behaviourists, however. The most glaring historical example of the mechanomorphic representation of animals is René Descartes' concept of the 'beast-machine'. In its modern sense, however, mechanomorphism is inextricably tied to language, and Eileen Crist discusses the differences between what she calls 'technical language' and the 'language of action' (i.e. language which is considered anthropomorphic) in the work of naturalists, behaviourists and cognitive ethologists:

These linguistic mediums lead down very different paths of understanding animal life. In virtue of its affiliation with everyday reasoning about human action, the use of the ordinary language of action reflects a regard for animals as acting *subjects*; the immanent, experiential perspective of animals is treated as real, recoverable, and invaluable in the understanding of their actions and lives. Technical language, on the other hand, paves the way toward conceptualizing animals as natural *objects*; animals are constituted as objects in the epistemological sense, through conceptions that are extrinsic to their

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<sup>18</sup> Roberto Marchesini, 'The Theriosphere', *Angelaki*, 21.1 (2016), p. 115.

<sup>19</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 77.

<sup>20</sup> See R. H. Waters, 'Mechanomorphism: A New Term for an Old Mode of Thought', *Psychological Review*, 55.3 (1948), pp. 139-42.

phenomenal world of experience. The epistemological constitution of animals as objects is agnostic and often inimical toward the idea that animals have an experiential perspective.<sup>21</sup>

Language itself has been widely considered to be one of the major distinguishing traits which elevate humans above other animal species. Language was evidenced as proof that humans could reason and articulate their reasoning through structured, meaningful speech. Darwin's theory of evolutionary continuity posed some challenges to this view, although the debate over whether animals possess something analogous to the human language faculty persists to this day. I shall return to the concept of language as a distinguishing human trait later in this chapter.

### **Anthropomorphism vs. Anthropodenial**

Anthropomorphism has been identified as a 'charge', or a category mistake, usually by critics who attempt to defend anthropomorphic representations or better explain or disambiguate the term, such as Fisher and Karlsson. Rather than gaining credence as a plausible device for obtaining knowledge of animal behaviour, the 'label' of anthropomorphism, writes Eileen Crist, 'is used to undermine the credibility, or realist force, of accounts that in some way picture animal life and human affairs as permeable to one another.'<sup>22</sup> Another term one might use to describe this heterogenous perspective is 'anthropodenial', coined by primatologist Frans de Waal in 1997 to describe 'blindness to the human-like characteristics of other animals and to our own animal-like characteristics'.<sup>23</sup>

De Waal identifies two types of parsimony that critics of anthropomorphism apply in their reasoning: *cognitive* and *evolutionary* parsimony. Cognitive parsimony, writes De Waal, 'tells us not to explain things in terms of higher mental capacities if we can explain them with "lower" ones. Thus you end up favouring a simple explanation, such as a conditioned response, over a more complex one, such as deception'. Evolutionary parsimony 'considers shared phylogeny: it argues that if closely related species act the same then underlying mental processes are probably the same'.<sup>24</sup> There is an inconsistency, he argues, in the way we think about animals:

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<sup>21</sup> Eileen Crist, *Images of Animals: Anthropomorphism and Animal Mind* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Frans de Waal, 'Animals and us: suspicious minds', *New Scientist magazine*, Issue.2502 (4 June 2005), p. 48.

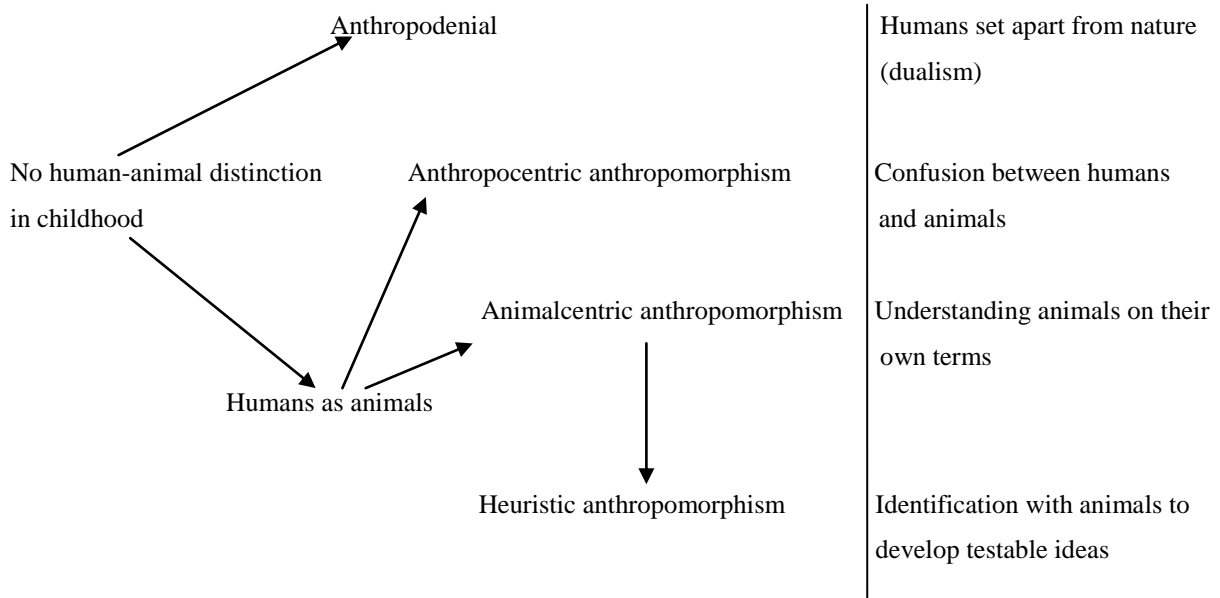
<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

To say that an animal follows its “instincts” is as much a matter of interpretation as to say that it acts “intentionally”, yet it is only the second kind of description that gets one into trouble. Given that the absence of intentionality is as hard to prove as its presence, and given the lack of evidence that animals differ from people in this regard, such caution would be acceptable if human behaviour were held to the same standard. But, of course, it is not. Cries of anthropomorphism are heard particularly when a ray of light hits a species other than our own.<sup>25</sup>

However, he does not advocate an unchecked use of anthropomorphism in descriptions or representations of animals, particularly in popular literature and culture: ‘Modern culture bombards us with humanizations of animals that confound serious debate about the role of anthropomorphism in science.’<sup>26</sup> He asserts that the ‘tradition going back to the folktales, Aesop, and La Fontaine’ is anthropocentric, and ‘serves human social purposes: to mock, to educate, moralize, and recreate. Most of it satisfies the picture, cherished by many, of the animal kingdom as a peaceable and cozy place’.<sup>27</sup>

De Waal includes in his discussion a model showing how attitudes towards animals develop ‘from the child’s lack of distinction to various degrees of differentiation’ (262). This model is shown below (Figure 1):

Figure 1. Frans de Waal’s model depicting differentiations of anthropomorphism



<sup>25</sup> Frans de Waal, ‘Anthropomorphism and Anthropodenial: Consistency in Our Thinking About Humans and Other Animals’, *Philosophical Topics*, 27.1 (1999), p. 256.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 260.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 261.

Anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism are thus not opposed phenomena. Rather, varying manifestations of anthropomorphism – some anthropocentric, some ‘animalcentric’ – may be positioned on a spectrum with anthropodenial at one end and anthropomorphism(s) at the other. De Waal’s argument, however, tends to favour anthropomorphism insofar as it is used heuristically to develop scientific hypotheses, while dismissing its use in popular culture. His model suggests that the former use of anthropomorphism is better in somehow more plausible and less confused. De Waal particularly objects to what he calls the “Bambification” of animals in popular culture:

Walt Disney made us forget that Mickey is a mouse and Donald a duck. Sesame Street, the Muppet Show, Barney: television is populated with talking and singing animal representations with little relation to their real counterparts. Popular depictions are pedomorphic; that is, they follow ethology’s *Kindchenschema* by endowing animals with enlarged eyes and protectiveness. Some believe that that entertainment industry’s massive “Bambification” of animals runs parallel to the modern animal rights movement.<sup>28</sup>

One of the most crucial arguments against anthropomorphic representation is that it results from a narcissistic human tendency, rather than representing the animal objectively. Daston and Mitman summarize this critique of the anthropomorphic process:

There is a moral as well as an intellectual element to critiques of anthropomorphism. On this view, to imagine that animals think like humans or to cast animals in human roles is a form of self-centred narcissism: one looks outward to the world and sees only one’s own reflection mirrored therein. Considered from a moral standpoint, anthropomorphism sometimes seems dangerously allied to anthropocentrism: humans project their own thoughts and feelings onto other animal species because they egotistically believe themselves to be the centre of the universe.<sup>29</sup>

How do we know for certain, however, whether a particular attribute we are projecting onto animals is most assuredly human? Deciding on whether representations of animals are anthropomorphic has often been determined by our preconceptions of the differences between humans and other animal species. We shall now explore the changing conceptions of the human-animal distinction throughout the history of Western philosophy and science.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 260.

<sup>29</sup> Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, ‘Introduction’, *Thinking With Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, eds. Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 3-4.

## Ancient and Medieval Representations of Animals

Mary Midgley writes: ‘What finally (you may ask) does distinguish man from the animals? [...] unless we take man to be a machine or an angel, it should read “distinguish man *among* the animals”.’<sup>30</sup> This difference between distinction and kinship lies at the heart of the anthropomorphism debate, and the conflict between anthropomorphism and anthropodenial. Those who would deny the kinship between humans and other animals have usually justified their views on the grounds of one or several distinguishing ‘human’ traits. These traits differ depending on the philosophical, theological, or scientific contexts in which attitudes towards animals emerge. It is widely accepted that the Western philosophical tradition, which began in ancient Greece, is largely responsible for perpetuating a dominant anthropocentric discourse of species distinction.

The Aristotelian tradition in particular became the dominant mode of philosophical thought throughout the classical and medieval ages in Europe. However, in all ages the degree to which humans are distinguished from, or among, nonhuman animals, is a point of contention and ambiguity. Furthermore, while anthropomorphic modes of describing animals are abundant throughout history, anthropomorphism did not emerge as a fully recognized concept until the nineteenth century, at least in relation to nonhuman animals (as opposed to just deities). As such, the ancient debate about the human-animal relationship as one of either distinction or continuity provides at least some sort of foundation for exploring the evolution of anthropomorphism in human culture. The fact that sources differ on which traits distinguish humans from animals, or on which traits are at least quantitatively different, further emphasizes the impossible task of deciding which human attributes are anthropomorphic and which are not.

Prior to the ascendance of the Western metaphysical tradition, ancient non-European cultures are often credited with comparatively non-anthropocentric attitudes towards nonhuman animals and the natural world. Such cultures tended to be homogenized in eighteenth and nineteenth-century primitivist discourse. Western representations of ‘primitive’ cultures include notions of inherent beliefs in the spiritual kinship between humans and other animals. The deities worshipped by these cultures often took nonhuman forms. In ancient Egypt, people worshipped deities in the form of human-nonhuman animal hybrids. They ‘usually had humanoid bodies and nonhuman heads’, writes Richard Ryder:

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<sup>30</sup> Mary Midgley, *The Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 203.

‘Later, it was the other way around when the Greeks gave human heads and torsos to their animal-bodied centaurs, mermaids and harpies, and the Mesopotamian civilizations did likewise. Such hybrids seem to imply a basic assumption of the physical inter-relatedness of humans and nonhumans, as Hindu religious scripture does to this day.’<sup>31</sup> The symbolic use of animal imagery proliferated in the ancient world, even in Greek and Roman philosophy and mythology. Linda Kalof writes: ‘With the creation of cities, the accumulation of wealth, and increased trading and fighting, humans deployed images of wild, ferocious animals to symbolize struggle, violence, and warring kingdoms.’<sup>32</sup> However, this overtly symbolic use of animals was supplanted by more naturalistic depictions which ‘provided details of the physical and behavioural characteristics of a diversity of animal species [...] Most likely based on firsthand observations, Mesopotamian artists began to sculpt lifelike, naturalistic animal representations, using their skills to convey the essence of individual species’.<sup>33</sup>

The symbolic use of animals within primitive societies is often described as *totemic*. *Totemism*, explains Jim Mason, ‘derives from the Algonquian (Chippewa) word for brother-sister kin, *ototeman*, which, in its original context, referred to the lineal descent of a clan’s members from its founding spirits – animal, plant, or other natural or supernatural beings’. Mason emphasizes the centrality of animals to the creation myths of totemic cultures: ‘Universal in creation stories is the prominence of animals, especially the most fascinating species of the region.’<sup>34</sup> ‘Whatever the origins of the land and seas,’ asserts Mason,

the First Beings in them are usually animals. Typically, they are animals with human abilities: They have animal forms, but they speak and behave like humans. The subject of a great many stories and tales, they are often the creatures who transformed and shaped the earth to its present condition, and in many cultures, they are the ancestors of human beings. Generally, this First Being is the most wily and intelligent animal in the tribal area. Among North American peoples, it is the mink, raven, or blue jay in the Northwest; in the Plains, it is coyote or grandmother spider; in the Northeast, it is the white arctic hare.<sup>35</sup>

If animals were such objects of reverence in totemic or ‘primitive’ cultures, why did they become objects of exploitation in ‘civilized’ nations? Mason posits that it was the gradual process of animal husbandry and domestication in agrarian societies that resulted in perceptions of nonhuman animals as inferior to human beings: ‘[I]t was the reduction of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> Linda Kalof, ‘Introduction’, *A Cultural History of Animals*, Vol.1: *A Cultural History of Animals in Antiquity*, ed. Linda Kalof (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Jim Mason, ‘Animals: From Souls and the Sacred in Prehistoric Times to Symbols and Slaves in Antiquity’, *A Cultural History of Animals*, Vol.1: *A Cultural History of Animals in Antiquity*, ed. Linda Kalof (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2007), p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

animals through husbandry that was the main driver of the radically different worldview that came with the transition from foraging to farming, for it broke up the old totemic ideas of kinship and continuity with the living world. This, more than any other factor, accelerated human alienation from the living world'.<sup>36</sup>

The human-animal relationship was a subject of contention in Greek and Roman philosophy. Attitudes towards animals are generally perceived as being divided into two schools of thought; the first, and supposedly more compassionate view, is attributed to philosophers such as Pythagoras, Plutarch, and Porphyry, the second to Aristotle and the Stoics. Pythagoras is associated particularly with the idea of metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls within the human realm and within the animal realm, although crucially not between humans and nonhuman animals. He also advocates a vegetarian diet, although with the view to improving the human condition rather than showing compassion towards animals. Aristotle, meanwhile, is largely attributed with emphasizing a clear distinction between humans and other animals in his works, based on the supposedly unique human faculties of, primarily, reason and speech.

However, Aristotle's works demonstrate a conflict between anthropomorphism and anthropodenial, even if it was the latter approach towards the human-animal relationship which prevailed in Stoic philosophy and the discourse of later Western thinkers. Gary Steiner asserts that 'Aristotle is well aware of the appeal of anthropomorphic language in characterizing animal behaviour, but he is equally sensitive to the limitations of such language. The limitations, as Aristotle understands them, are clearly sketched out in the ethical and psychological writings. In the zoological writings, Aristotle allows himself to slip into metaphor as a means for exploring the capacities of animals'.<sup>37</sup> With recourse to *History of Animals*, Steiner explains that

Aristotle says that many animals exhibit "resemblances of intelligent understanding...[S]ome characters differ by the more-or-less compared with man...while others differ by analogy: for corresponding to art, wisdom and intelligence in man, certain animals possess another natural capability of a similar sort." In some respects, the differences between human beings and animals are matters of degree ("more-or-less"), while in other respects the differences are differences in kind ("by analogy"). Aristotle says that characteristics such as "tameness and wildness, gentleness and roughness, courage and cowardice" differ by "more-or-less" in human beings and in animals. This suggests that human beings and animals differ only in degree with respect to qualities such as courage, and it leaves open the possibility that some animals surpass human beings in such qualities. With regard to intelligence in

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> Gary Steiner, *Anthropomorphism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2005), p. 72.

animals, Aristotle moves back and forth between treating it as different in degree from human intelligence and as merely analogous to human intelligence.<sup>38</sup>

Even in antiquity, the distinction between homology and analogy, sameness and difference, directed the shift in conceptions of our relationship with nonhuman animals. Ultimately, it is the faculty of reason as advocated in Aristotle's more anthropocentric works that is seized upon as the most distinguishing human trait by later classical and medieval philosophers.

Aristotle also classified living organisms according to five different types of soul: nutritive, sensory, appetitive, locomotive, and rational. Plants possess a nutritive soul, all nonhuman animals possess the sensory and appetitive souls, while only some nonhuman animals possess the locomotive soul. Humans, meanwhile, possess the rational soul in addition to the other four. It is through this classification of soul that Aristotle is able to articulate his argument that reason is the most distinguishing human faculty, although Steiner writes that 'the possession of a rational soul,' in Aristotle's view, 'does not set us radically apart from animals, but simply reflects a difference in the ways in which our bodies function in the world'.<sup>39</sup> In other words, body and soul (in all of its manifestations) are interdependent entities.

The medieval period in Europe was conspicuously abundant with symbolic representations of animals, and medieval philosophers and theologians drew on both the Aristotelian tradition and Christian doctrine in formulating their conceptions of the nonhuman realm. Representations of animals ranged from the purely fabular and allegorical to the naturalistic, with several genres of medieval literature occupying an ambivalent position between the two. Brigitte Resl emphasizes the difficulty in reaching conclusions about widespread medieval perceptions and attitudes towards animals from simply examining sources from the period:

The vast bulk of the extant textual, visual, and material data was produced by or at the command of a small minority of the population, namely the secular and ecclesiastical elites. Consequently, our perception of the cultural history of medieval animals is restricted and derives primarily from the concerns of the upper classes. The survival of a wealth of works of literature that feature animal protagonists, for example, ensures that the majority of studies of medieval animals are concerned with their textual manifestations. Reynard the Fox is therefore a much more frequent subject of scholarly inquiry than are medieval foxes, and research by literary historians is necessarily one of the key pathways that the cultural historian in pursuit of medieval animals must follow.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pp. 72-3.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>40</sup> Brigitte Resl, 'Introduction', *A Cultural History of Animals, Vol.2: A Cultural History of Animals in the Medieval Age*, ed. Brigitte Resl (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2007), p. 2.

Fables, bestiaries and heraldic treatises were all popular genres in the period. We shall explore classical and medieval animal fables in more detail in the next chapter, although it is worth briefly addressing the subject of anthropomorphic, and theriomorphic, representations in the genres of bestiary and heraldry.

‘[T]he use of animal symbols depended on the view that every living thing had some relationship to God and that the physical world was an expression of the thought of God, from which his teachings could be uncovered’, writes Sophie Page. ‘The significance of this approach to Creation is shown by the popularity of the bestiary, a genre based on the principle that the characteristics of animals had been determined by God to serve as a guide of moral conduct to reinforce biblical teachings.’ Moreover, while bestiaries were overtly symbolic, they could often transgress the boundary between symbolic and literal representations: ‘Bestiaries provided complex readings of the animal world that combined abstract ideas with legitimate observations about animal habits with interpretations of their moral significance. It was unnecessary for the didactic purpose of bestiaries that they presented accurate natural history, but recognisable animal characteristics made the moral message memorable and striking.’<sup>41</sup>

From late antiquity and throughout the medieval period, decorative bestiaries conveyed descriptions of the nature and religious significance of a wide array of animal species, both factual and fictional (such creatures as the dragon, the phoenix and the siren were included in some of these texts). The medieval bestiary testifies to the impact of Christianity on human perceptions of the animal kingdom. Debra Hassig explains how this increasingly popular form adopted tropes from pagan traditions:

Although the bestiary proper is a medieval invention, it depended on the accretion and appropriation of a rich tradition of ancient animal lore, both verbal and visual. Beginning with the Early Christian exegetical interest in nature codified in the *Physiologus* treatise, on which the medieval bestiaries were based, Christian compilers began a process of rewriting and transforming pagan knowledge of the natural world in order to serve a new, didactic purpose.<sup>42</sup>

The *Physiologus* (c.2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.) was the earliest and most popular bestiary from which later medieval texts would draw much of their inspiration. Other influential texts in the bestiary tradition included the *Etymologiae* (*Etymologies*), composed by Isidore, Bishop of Seville, in the seventh century, and the *Hexameron* (c.380) by Ambrose of Milan.

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<sup>41</sup> Sophie Page, ‘Good Creation and Demonic Illusions: The Medieval Universe of Creatures’, Resl, ed., p. 33.

<sup>42</sup> Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. xvi.

In *De Naturis Animalium*, a translation of the *Physiologus* into Latin verse, Bishop Theobaldus selects twelve species of animal as particularly ‘mystical and allegorical (also, they correspond in number to the twelve apostles)’:

They are: lion, eagle, serpent, ant, fox, stag, spider, whale, siren, elephant, turtle-dove, and panther [...] The lion represents Christ, whose earthly life, death and resurrection are pictured in the similitude of the lion’s (reputed) habits. The eagle’s changing his nature from feebleness and malformation to majesty by the healing power of a spring clearly portrays the salvation of man’s fallen state by grace. The ant provides the usual example of prudent industry in season that assures survival in a hard time so long as we continue on earth, with enough to spare for good works. The panther comes nearest to the lion as a representative of Christ. The serpent has high marks for exemplary performance, but elephant and whale rank low. The fox represents the devil, and doubles this role with his portrayal of deceitful man.<sup>43</sup>

Heraldry, meanwhile, was a genre popularized amongst the nobility. Crests of noble houses often bore an animal icon; powerful and ferocious animals like eagles, lions and stags provided obvious favourites, as well as mythical creatures like gryphons and dragons. ‘By the early thirteenth century’, writes Page, ‘heraldry had become a complex symbolic language with its own system and classification, and heraldic badges acted as symbols of individual identity and membership of a family, the class of knighthood, or a political faction’.<sup>44</sup> This notion of political or class affiliation implied by the use of animal symbols percolated down the ranks of medieval society: ‘As indicators of status, animal symbols were used to raise or lower an individual’s place in the social hierarchy [...] Animal symbolism was also used to express a sense of identity and status by nonnoble individuals and social groupings such as guilds, confraternities, and urban quarters, particularly during significant ritual processions, pageants, and carnivals.’<sup>45</sup>

Another popular use of animal symbolism in the classical and medieval periods, and which continued well into the early modern period and beyond, was physiognomy, which drew on the morphological similarities between certain animals and humans in order to point out the personalities, virtues or vices of individuals. De Leemans and Klemm explain the purpose of physiognomy in the medieval age:

The aim of physiognomy was to identify innate characteristics of the soul through the appearance of the body. Typically, a physiognomic text listed the parts of the body from head to foot, along with other natural operations, such as the way someone breathes or laughs. For example, ears that are narrow and oblong reveal an envious character; a hairy back indicates bravery. Animals are liberally dispersed throughout physiognomic texts because their features were linked to their character and then used to understand human behaviour. Deer and rabbits were recognized to be timid creatures; therefore

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<sup>43</sup> H. J. Blackham, *The Fable as Literature* (London: The Athlone Press, 1985), pp. 34-5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 41-2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 44-5.

deerlike or rabbitlike features in a person were trusted to be a sign of innate timidity. On the other hand, lionlike features signify bravery. Males are like lions, females are like horses. This use of animals is pervasive. The appearance of animals made a particularly fruitful area for the study of innate character because the traits of animals were taken to be constant; unlike humans, who would overcome innate tendencies, animals were bound to their character.<sup>46</sup>

In the Renaissance, theriomorphic tropes were often used to depict physiognomic similarities between humans and nonhuman animals, most famously in Giambattista della Porta's *De humana physiognomia* (1586). Della Porta 'compared the physiognomies of humans and animals, theorizing that if they shared certain physical elements, they must be similar in nature'. This theory was 'derived from the doctrine of signatures, which was the belief that God put a mark on all things and beings, and through careful study one could discover a natural signature'.<sup>47</sup> Sandra Cheng observes that

Della Porta not only compared the heads of men and beasts, he also studied other parts of the body, including feet, legs and hands. One illustration demonstrated how a foot with toes grown closely together resembled the cloven hoof of a pig. Della Porta inferred that a person with hoof-like feet was swine-like in nature and, consequently, shy, dirty, and deceptive. A section on hands included an illustration that compared the curved fingernails of a man to the claws of a crow, which, according to della Porta, showed an inclination for theft.<sup>48</sup>

As outlandish as such theories on physiognomy seem to us, such comparisons about the relationship between physiognomy and character persisted well into the nineteenth century. Even on a more deeply social level, people still make assumptions about character based on appearance. However, despite his use of theriomorphism, although della Porta 'stressed man's bestial nature, he shaped the visualisation of the monster toward a more anthropomorphic creature'.<sup>49</sup> Even in this early modern example, theriomorphism and anthropomorphism, the practices of animalizing the human and humanizing the animal, are mutually implicative.

What bestiary, heraldry and physiognomy seem to share in common is their presumption of the characteristics of other animals and their primary use of animals as symbolic representations of supposedly human virtues and vices. How did these classical, medieval and early modern traditions influence natural history texts and scientific methods of categorizing the animal kingdom?

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<sup>46</sup> Pieter De Leemans and Matthew Klemm, 'Animals and Anthropology in Medieval Philosophy', *A Cultural History of Animals, Vol.2: A Cultural History of Animals in the Medieval Age*, ed. Brigitte Resl (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2007), pp. 175-7.

<sup>47</sup> Sandra Cheng, 'The Cult of the Monstrous: Caricature, Physiognomy, and Monsters in Early Modern Italy', *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, 1.2 (2012), pp. 205-6.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 207.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 209.

## Animal Taxonomies

The medieval bestiary tradition introduced methods of categorizing animals that were adopted and reworked by naturalists from the early modern period onwards. By examining the diverse and often conflicting systems of classification which emerged from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, it is possible to understand the changing conceptions of the categories of “human” and “animal”, as well as the taxonomic schema that were applied to the animal kingdom which anthropomorphically, and often anthropocentrically, mirrored the human. As Keith Thomas points out, zoologists in the early modern period ‘inherited from Aristotle the practice of classifying beasts according to their anatomical structure, their habitat and their mode of reproduction. But they also considered their utility to man, and their value as food and medicine and as moral symbols’.<sup>50</sup>

A particularly common binary distinction that served as a means of neatly categorizing animals was the domestic/wild binary. This is, of course, a significantly anthropocentric distinction, as it groups animals according to their degree of utility to, or companionship with, humans. It was a distinction, however, in which there existed some degree of overlap regarding certain species. Thomas cites some examples: ‘In 1661 [...] Robert Lovell divided his class of viviparous *digitales* (mammals with toes) into the “wild” (e.g. tigers and wolves), the “wildish” (e.g. foxes, apes) and the “domestic” (cats and dogs). Bees, observed Thomas Muffett in his book on insects, were “neither wild nor tame”, but “of a middle nature”.’<sup>51</sup> The domestic/wild binary is crucial to understand how the more ambiguous human/animal distinction is played out in the systems of classification that were adopted in order to categorise nonhuman animals. Presumably the more domesticated an animal was perceived to be, the more that same animal tended to be anthropomorphized, not least because of its close proximity to humans. Conversely, more “bestial” traits were theriomorphically projected onto those animals perceived as “wild”. Thomas argues that this tendency is in fact a subliminal form of anthropomorphism: ‘Men attributed to animals the natural impulses they most feared in themselves – ferocity, gluttony, sexuality – even though it was men, not beasts, who made war on their own species, ate more than was good for them

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<sup>50</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983), p. 53.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

and were sexually active all the year round. It was as a comment on *human* nature that the concept of “animality” was devised.’<sup>52</sup>

One important implication of taxonomic systems was that animals belonged to a hierarchy, in which humans, of course, occupied the topmost position, if they were counted as animals at all. This was inherited from the medieval concept of the Great Chain of Being, which traditionally placed humans above the other animals, and below the angels. ‘Throughout the eighteenth century, the dominant visual metaphor of system was the chain of being, or the *scala naturae*’, writes Harriet Ritvo, ‘an ancient figure that organized nature as a linked, one-dimensional progression from the meanest animal [...] By the end of the century the chain of being had become so ingrained in zoological discussion that it could be used axiomatically, as the basis for further theorizing or interpretation’.<sup>53</sup> This hierarchical element of classification also had consequences for how humans perceived other animals in terms of moral standing and how far certain groups of animals qualified for humane treatment. While we are more concerned here with the anthropomorphic implications of classification, it is important to understand that the categorization of animals is inseparable from notions of what level of respect, if any, animals deserved according to contemporary views. Returning to the hierarchy of classification systems, Ritvo writes: ‘If their taxonomical structure confirmed the hegemonic relation of people to the rest of animate nature, a metaphor powerfully embodied in the language and content of the individual entries made a parallel point about the relations between human groups. The animal kingdom, with humanity in a divinely ordained position at its apex, represented, explained, and justified the hierarchical human social order.’<sup>54</sup> This reinforces the notion that systems of classification were dependent on both anthropomorphic and theriomorphic representations of humans and other animals. Thomas also explains that ‘[t]he work of many anthropologists suggests that it is an enduring tendency of human thought to project upon the natural world (and particularly the animal kingdom) categories and values derived from human society and then to serve them back as a critique or reinforcement of the human order, justifying some particular social or political arrangement on the grounds that it is somehow more ‘natural’ than any alternative’.<sup>55</sup>

Ultimately, most of the problems encountered by naturalists in their attempts to apply taxonomies to the natural world resided in the traits by which animals were grouped. Not

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, pp. 40-41.

<sup>53</sup> Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 28.

<sup>54</sup> Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 15.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas, p. 61.

only did philosophers seek to distinguish humans from other animals on the basis of certain supposedly unique human traits, but naturalists sought in equal measure to distinguish those traits that were unique to the group of animals to which humans belonged: mammals, or, as the group was also known, quadrupeds. To the present-day zoologist, the term ‘quadrupeds’ in reference to mammals is obviously misleading as such creatures as bats and whales do not conform to the reductive common trait of possessing four feet. However, the term was still used for a considerable length of time in early zoology. In the early modern period, animals that did not belong to the traditional realms of earth (mammals), air (birds) and water (fish) were regarded with ambiguity and often repulsion. ‘Reptiles, insects and amphibians were especially detested’, writes Thomas. ‘[M]any reptiles and insects moved ambiguously between earth, air and water, while snakes, though land animals, laid eggs and had no legs.’<sup>56</sup> This demonstrates how far categorical perceptions reflected human attitudes to certain animal species.

Of course, the human relationship with primates was the one that proved most contentious, although notions of our affinities with monkeys and apes were not entirely ordinary to Darwin. Ritvo writes that

In 1699 Edward Tyson published an anatomical comparison of a human being and a chimpanzee, to which he gave the Latin name *Homo sylvestris*, thus including it in the human genus. Probably as a result, the orangutan (with which the chimpanzee was frequently confused, not least by Tyson himself) was sometimes called by the English translation, ‘wild man of the woods,’ and this name may have been understood literally as well as figuratively in an age when there was no consensus that all human beings belonged to the same species.<sup>57</sup>

Ritvo explains that in the nineteenth century, human similarities with primates evoked a mixture of repulsion and fascination: ‘A few vocal people were simply repelled by the physical resemblance between wild primates and people. But most apparently found it engaging. Not only did they flock to see live apes on display, they also enjoyed the illustrations of apes in natural history books, which often exaggerated the humanness of the primates’ proportions and visages.’<sup>58</sup> In anthromorphising primates in this way, people rendered our simian relatives more reassuring in their familiarity with humans.

These categorical ambiguities persisted in systems of classification for centuries, although there seemed to be a greater sense of order emerging in Carolus Linnaeus’ *Systema naturae* in 1735, which, writes Anita Guerrini, ‘presented a scheme for classifying animals,

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>57</sup> Ritvo (1987), p. 31.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 38.

organizing them in six broad classes: quadrupeds, birds, amphibians, fish, insects, and worms. In the 1779 edition [...] he described nearly six thousand species of animals'. However, Linnaeus' system was 'artificial, aimed at establishing order rather than reproducing nature's plan', even though 'its use of the binomial nomenclature was widely adopted, as well as his hierarchical grouping that included Kingdom, Class, Order, Genus, Species, and Variety'.<sup>59</sup> The Linnaean system, although it was widely adopted by naturalists, was also challenged by such figures as the Comte de Buffon, who 'argued that any system of classification was by definition arbitrary and artificial, and that reality resided in individuals, not in species'.<sup>60</sup> This consideration of the individual animal as well as its species would be adopted by Darwin in much of his own natural history.

In *The Platypus and the Mermaid* (1997), one of the most recent and detailed accounts of classification in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Harriet Ritvo explains many of the alternative taxonomies which emerged in response to Linnaeus, Buffon, and others. The 'quinary system', for example, proposed by William MacLeay in *Horae Entomologicae* (1819), was 'an elaborate and eccentric attempt to represent the complex, overlapping sets of resemblances among animals. From the quinary perspective', she writes, 'the compounded linearity of the taxonomic tree was as unsatisfactory as the simple linearity of the taxonomic chain, because it similarly constrained the number of formal connections between animals. That is, it privileged similarities of what was known as "affinity" – anatomical likenesses – over similarities of what was known as "analogy" – primary likenesses reflecting shared habits, such as the convergent aquatic adaptations of whales and fish'.<sup>61</sup> In other words, many previous taxonomies considered only morphological similarities between species and ignored shared, or at least similar, behavioural traits. While it was not the most popular system of classification amongst contemporary naturalists, MacLeay's quinary system considered other gradients along with animals could be classified, even those that belonged to different classes, such as marine mammals and fish.

All taxonomic systems are artificial, and species categories are, for the most part, the products of language. However, the various methods by which animals are grouped reveals much about the way we perceive animals in relation to ourselves. Even Deleuze and Guattari,

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<sup>59</sup> Anita Guerrini, 'Natural History, Natural Philosophy, and Animals, 1600-1800', *A Cultural History of Animals, Vol.4: A Cultural History of Animals in the Enlightenment*, ed. Matthew Senior (New York: Berg, 2007), pp. 142-3.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 143.

<sup>61</sup> Ritvo (1997), p. 31.

despite their explicit avoidance of fixed categories of being in ‘Becoming-Animal’, cannot evade the appeal of categories:

We must distinguish three kinds of animals. First, individuated animals, family pets, sentimental, Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, “my” cat, “my” dog. These animals invite us to regress, draw us into a narcissistic contemplation, and they are the only kind of animal psychoanalysis understands, the better to discover a daddy, a mommy, a little brother behind them [...] And then there is a second kind: animals with characteristics or attributes; genus, classification, or State animals; animals as they are treated in the great divine myths, in such a way as to extract from them series or structures, archetypes or models [...] Finally, there are more demonic animals, pack of affect animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming, a population, a tale...<sup>62</sup>

Donna Haraway points out that their ‘associational web of anomalous becoming-animal feeds off a series of primary dichotomies figured by the opposition between the wild and the domestic’.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari seem to condemn animals which belong to the first two groups based on their literal and symbolic appropriation by human culture. ‘All worthy animals are a pack; all the rest are either pets of the bourgeoisie or state animals symbolizing some kind of divine myth’, writes Haraway.<sup>64</sup> It should be noted, however, that Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that any species of animal may be ‘treated in all three ways’. ‘There is always the possibility’, they claim, ‘that a given animal, a louse, a cheetah or an elephant, will be treated as a pet, my little beast. And at the other extreme, it is also possible for any animal to be treated in the mode of the pack or swarm [...] Even the cat, even the dog’.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Cartesian Beast-Machine**

In the seventeenth century there emerged the mechanomorphic representation of animals as automata, popularised by French mathematician and philosopher René Descartes, whose notions of nonhuman animals as mere machines also facilitated the denial of emotional response, the capacity to feel pain, and an immortal soul. The appearance of such capacities, according to a Cartesian view, signalled only a mechanical stimulus-response process. This view in turn justified an array of experimental practices on animals, namely vivisection, as

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<sup>62</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, ‘Becoming-Animal’, *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, eds. Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald (New York: Berg, 2007), p. 40.

<sup>63</sup> Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 28.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>65</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 40.

moral scruples regarding cruelty towards animals were cast aside. In his *Discourse on Method* (1637), Descartes describes the nonhuman animal thus:

[A] machine made by the hands of God, which is incomparably better arranged, and adequate to movements more admirable than is any machine of human invention [...] were there such machines exactly resembling in organs and outward form an ape or any other irrational animal, we could have no means of knowing that they were in any respect of a different nature from these animals; but if there were machines bearing the image of our bodies, and capable of imitating our actions as far as it is morally possible, there would still remain two most certain tests whereby to know that they were not therefore really men.

The first of these tests, argues Descartes, resides in language: '[T]hey could never use words of other signs arranged in such a manner as is competent to us in order to declare our thoughts to others.' Descartes' second test resides in the faculty of reason, 'for while reason is an universal instrument that is alike available on every occasion, these organs, on the contrary, need a particular arrangement for each particular action; whence it must be morally impossible that there should exist in any machine a diversity of organs sufficient to enable it to act in all the occurrences of life, in the way in which our reason enables us to act'. Furthermore, according to Descartes' view, the faculty of language depends solely on that of reason; the two faculties are inextricably tied.

Descartes' ideas marked a particularly volatile turning point in the anthropocentrism of Western philosophy. However, as even Ryder notes, whether Descartes' 'influential contribution [...] helped to expand the practice of vivisection [...] or whether his argument that animals do not feel pain was an attempt to justify an expansion which had already occurred and in which he participated, is not easy to ascertain.'<sup>66</sup> Philip Armstrong also argues that 'the extent and manner of the adoption of the Cartesian paradigm within the larger cultural milieu must be measured with great care [...] while some devout proponents of the 'new science' advanced the Cartesian model, the greater part of English writing on the topic scrutinized it sceptically and, more often than not, rejected it'.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, it is widely argued that Descartes, and his mechanomorphic mode of describing animal behaviour, signifies the most stringent opposition to anthropomorphic thinking. Crist notes that Descartes was 'pivotal in elaborating the foundations of a view of radical discontinuity between animals and humans. As he developed the idea [...] mind or soul is strictly a

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<sup>66</sup> Richard D. Ryder, *Animal Revolution: Changing Attitudes Towards Speciesism* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000), p. 52.

<sup>67</sup> Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 7.

possession of human beings. Descartes' specific conceptualization of animal-human discontinuity is kept alive in the contemporary antithesis between behaviour and action'.<sup>68</sup>

### **Anthropomorphism in the Cognitive Sciences**

With the emergence of evolutionary theory in the mid-nineteenth century and psychoanalytic theory in the early twentieth century, concepts of the human-nonhuman relationship, of humanity and animality, began to disavow more than ever the anthropocentric view that humans and other animals were essentially different. It is the twentieth century which saw the emergence of a more tangible conflict in natural history, behaviourism and cognitive ethology between the defenders of species difference and the advocates of kinship. As anthropomorphic language abounded in the natural history of Darwin and George Romanes (who extended the definition of anthropomorphism), Freud's theories of the unconscious encouraged notions of the internalized human conflict between the civilized and the primitive. Any distinctions that had been previously asserted regarding the mental composition of human and nonhuman animals were challenged by the theories of Darwin, Freud, and their respective advocates.

Eileen Crist provides perhaps the most detailed exploration of Darwin's anthropomorphic mode of describing animal behaviour. The language used by Darwin and his disciple, George Romanes, is widely regarded as demonstrating an *anecdotal* form of anthropomorphism. Darwin's depictions of animal life are a consequence of his theoretical assertions, especially those found in *The Descent of Man* (1859). Not only did he claim that 'there is no fundamental difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties', but also that '[t]he difference in mind between man and the higher animals, great as it is, is certainly one of degree and not of kind'.<sup>69</sup> Crist points out that Darwin 'rejects polarities traditionally summoned to draw a sharp boundary between human and animal life. Specifically, he did not accept that distinctions between instinct and reason, instinct and intelligence, invariability and plasticity of behaviours, or involuntary and wilful action support a saltus between animal and human nature'.<sup>70</sup> The polarities that Crist identifies as being inimical to Darwin's theories of evolutionary continuity form the linguistic basis of the

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<sup>68</sup> Crist, p. 211.

<sup>69</sup> Cited in Crist, p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> Crist, p. 19.

human-animal distinction for many thinkers, both before and after Darwin. Crist emphasizes the centrality of language, itself a trait traditionally invoked in advocating the divide between human and nonhuman animals, in formulating either anthropomorphic or mechanomorphic impressions of animal life.

The reason-instinct binary was one of the many rejected by Darwin, who saw the two terms as interchangeable, rather than as ‘discontinuous or mutually exclusive bases of action. For instance, he writes that “the anthropomorphous apes, guided probably by instinct, build for themselves temporary platforms; but as many instincts are largely controlled by reason, the simpler ones, such as this of building a platform, might easily pass into a voluntary and conscious act”.<sup>71</sup> This mutual dependency of reason and instinct, two terms used to describe very similar processes in Darwin’s view, directly contradicts Descartes’ mechanomorphic, dualist view of the mortal, animal body and the immortal, human soul as separate entities. Further, Darwin’s anthropomorphic representations are not confined, in spite of the above claim from *The Descent of Man*, to the ‘higher mammals’. Even those animals that are positioned furthest away from humans on the phylogenetic scale are depicted as subjects in Darwin’s descriptions. Crist writes:

Far from being fuzzy or impressionistic, the idea of subjectivity encompasses two dimensions: it refers to the meaningfulness of experience and action of sentient life and it implicates the authorship of action. Darwin’s vision of animal life as meaningful and authored extends to the entire animal kingdom, as may be seen in his beautiful description of ant life:

[...] Ants communicate information to each other, and several unite for the same work, or games of play. They recognize their fellow ants after months of absence. They build great edifices, keep them clean, close the doors in the evening, and post sentries. They make roads, and even tunnels under rivers. They collect food for the community, and when an object, too large for entrance is brought to the nest, they enlarge the door, and afterwards build it up again. They go out to battle in regular bands, and freely sacrifice their lives for the common weal. They emigrate in accordance with a preconcerted plan. They capture slaves. They keep Aphides as milch-cows. They move the eggs of their aphides, as well as their own eggs and cocoons, into warm parts of the nest, in order that they may be quickly hatched; and endless similar facts could be given.

This description of an ant community is quite literally anthropomorphic, as ant life is portrayed in terms equivalent to human life: substitute a human community for the ants and, with only a few alterations, the intelligibility of the passage would be preserved intact.<sup>72</sup>

Subjectivity as both *meaningful* and *authored* is central to Crist’s study, and significantly attributes the concept of narrative to the lives of animals.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, pp. 29-30.

However, for many opponents of Darwin's theories, the faculty of language still implied an irreducible divide between humans and the other animals. 'To some of Darwin's critics', writes Robert Boakes,

it was self-evident that human language was so different from any form of animal communication that it could not be the result of evolution. Darwin's reply was to point out that several basic elements of language exist in the non-human world – the development of song in birds resulting from both learning and an instinctive tendency, vocal mimicry in parrots and other birds, repertoires of calls in monkeys indicating various affective states – and that such elements, combined with a high development of mental powers, could well have led to the development of human language. The parallels that seemed to exist between biological evolution and what was known then about the historical development of languages added to his argument.<sup>73</sup>

While the Darwinian tradition of using anecdote in studies of animal cognition relied on anthropomorphic language, Darwin's theory has been misappropriated to serve more anthropocentric ends. Such misappropriation is usually a reaction against the implications of both evolutionary and psychoanalytic theory for the position of the human in the species hierarchy. Discussing Freud's theories, Margot Norris writes: 'In recounting the three great shocks inflicted upon the human ego by science – the Copernican revolution, Darwinism, and psychoanalytic theory – Freud reveals modern man as displaced from the center of his universe three times over, from cosmos, earth [...] and the human mind itself.'<sup>74</sup> The impact of the implications of evolutionary and psychoanalytic theory on notions of the ontological status of the human was felt vigorously throughout the first half of the twentieth century, and both theories would be dangerously misconstrued. Particularly in *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin dismissed the notion that humans held some divinely ordained place in the species hierarchy in favour of evolutionary continuity. While his theory disrupted long-standing metaphysical, Christian, and humanist traditions, which excluded nonhuman animals from the moral sphere, it also succeeded in perpetuating the nineteenth-century colonial ethos, as Ritvo explains: 'Although it eliminated both the divine sanction for human domination and the separation between man and beast, it did not diminish human superiority. On the contrary, it described the very process by which that superiority had been established.'<sup>75</sup>

Human evolution from primates allowed masters of the colonial project to liken this process to the evolution of white Europeans from the lesser, darker, 'primitive' races. At the time it was thought that the human racial groups had evolved according to the same model of

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<sup>73</sup>Robert Boakes, *From Darwin to Behaviourism: Psychology and the Minds of Animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 7.

<sup>74</sup>Margot Norris, *Beasts of the Modern Imagination: Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst & Lawrence* (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 21.

<sup>75</sup>Ritvo, p. 40.

continuity, not convergently. While nineteenth-century notions of racial hierarchy may have bridged the gulf somewhat between humans and animals in the colonial mindset, by likening Africans, even the Irish, with primates, it also widened the gulf between human groups. With a more restricted sphere of humans qualifying for civilized humanity, the boundary between the civilized and the primitive became ever more necessary to enforce, and theriomorphic symbols were deployed in this endeavour. Roberto Marchesini writes that

Historically, theriomorphism was always used as revelatory of individual or ethnic inferiority or as a symptom of dangerous metamorphic tendencies, where the reference to similarity with animal character is translated in negative terms, or, to be precise: (a) participation in the nonhuman world and its laws, (b) expression of incomplete or ancestral humanity, (c) hybridization with alterity and therefore contamination, and (d) potential transition into animality. Founding itself on an oppositional paradigm, humanistic anthropocentrism used theriomorphism as a motor of separation.<sup>76</sup>

Darwin's anthropomorphism faced its fiercest criticism after the emergence of behaviourism, which gained popularity during the 1920s and 1930s. Behaviourism takes its cue from the earlier ideas of Conwy Lloyd Morgan, whose famous 'canon' from his *Introduction to Comparative Psychology* (1894) stated: 'In no case may we interpret the action as the outcome of the exercise of a higher psychological faculty, if it can be interpreted as the outcome of the exercise of one which stands lower in the psychological scale.'<sup>77</sup> Morgan's canon is immediately problematic as it divides faculties according to a scale of 'higher' and 'lower', a distinction generally avoided by Darwin, as such terms imply evolutionary discontinuity. Morgan's canon is perhaps the clearest example in animal psychology of De Waal's 'cognitive parsimony'.

Behaviourism, unlike previous theories of the mind, rejected the existence of consciousness in both humans and nonhuman animals. However, human consciousness was at least perceived as being within closer reach of empirical proof, due to the supposed higher mental faculties of the human species. 'Controlled experiments rather than field observations', writes Jamieson and Bekoff, 'provided the primary data, and basic concepts were supposed to be grounded in direct observation. Against this background, *animal* consciousness came to be seen as "...mystical, unscientific, obscure, and not amenable to study".'<sup>78</sup> There are viable reasons why one might support a behaviourist argument. There is no proof as to which cognitive processes signal the presence or activity of consciousness, or

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<sup>76</sup> Roberto Marchesini, 'The Theriosphere', *Angelaki*, 21.1 (2016), p. 130.

<sup>77</sup> Cited in Boakes, p. 40.

<sup>78</sup> Dale Jamieson and Marc Bekoff, 'On Aims and Methods of Cognitive Ethology', *Readings in Animal Cognition*, eds. Dale Jamieson and Marc Bekoff (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), p. 66; emphasis added.

where it is situated in the brain, and thus it remains a matter largely subject to speculation. While he denies consciousness to nonhuman animals, perhaps Descartes does not go far enough, according to the behaviourist position; he should have denied consciousness (or ‘soul’, in Descartes’ terms) to humans as well. It was as a result of behaviourism that the term *mechanomorphism* first appeared in a 1948 article by R. H. Waters. Waters ridiculed behaviourism for its mechanistic language: ‘To think of the organism as a machine is to adopt a premise and a method that leads the investigator into a blind alley – a blind alley that precludes the observation of certain types of evidence clearly indicating the presence of activities or capacities which are included in our concept of a conscious human being’.<sup>79</sup>

With the arrival of cognitive ethology in the 1970s, anthropomorphic representations began to gain the level of respectability that had previously been held by Darwin and Romanes prior to behaviourism. The term ‘cognitive ethology’ was coined in 1976 by Donald Griffin to describe a discipline which incorporated both empirical data obtained from studies of animal behaviour with observations and anecdotes. While it sought to avoid making category mistakes typical of misappropriated anthropomorphism, it still embraced anthropomorphic thinking as a prescriptive language device in its methodology, and did not reject it entirely as the behaviourists had done. Griffin summarizes this attempt to achieve a respectable but progressive middle ground: ‘There are two pitfalls to be guarded against. The first has been to ignore the problem of animal thoughts and feelings because such phenomena are considered beyond the reach of scientific investigation [...] The second pitfall is to leap enthusiastically to firm conclusions and to advocate positions that cannot be convincingly supported by the available evidence.’<sup>80</sup>

Marian Dawkins argues, however, that cognitive ethology threatened to tip the balance of respectability from an empirical rejection of anthropomorphism to a hypothetical, unempirical embracing of it. She identifies the key questions which arose from the dangers of identifying too completely with either side of the debate:

Some behaviourists may have gone too far in their rejection of animal feelings but does this mean we now have to choose between rejecting feelings altogether and allowing anthropomorphism to run riot, aided and abetted by some startling anecdotes and a few colourful analogies? Are there to be no standards, no objective ways of testing hypotheses? Are ethologists now to be ridiculed for daring to

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<sup>79</sup> Waters, p. 142.

<sup>80</sup> Donald Griffin, ‘Progress Toward a Cognitive Ethology’, *Cognitive Ethology: The Minds of Other Animals: Essays in Honor of Donald R. Griffin*, ed. Carolyn A. Ristau (Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), p. 6.

question anthropomorphic interpretations of animal behaviour on the grounds that it shows they don't care for animals or that they are denying the possibility of conscious experiences in other species?<sup>81</sup>

While it provides a useful foundation, the appeal of anthropomorphism to sentimentality and to anecdote can lead to its misuse. However, we often find that those who endorse this negative view of anthropomorphism will filter out any anthropomorphic language used in a scientific context, even if a preinscribed, anthropomorphic way of approaching certain questions is often the most pragmatic method.

Marc Bekoff advocates the use of anthropomorphic language in the cognitive sciences, appealing not only to its prescriptive value but also to common sense. 'If we decide against using anthropomorphic language', he argues, 'we might as well pack up and go home because we have no alternatives. Should we talk about animals as a bunch of hormones, neurons, and muscles absent of any context for what they're doing and why? Anthropomorphism is inevitable and involuntary'.<sup>82</sup> Bekoff even supports his argument with reference to evidence that 'anthropomorphism may be a hardwired mode for conceptualizing the world in general, not just other animals'. He goes on:

Recent research by Andrea Heberlein and Ralph Adolphs shows that the brain's amygdala is used when we impart intention and emotions to inanimate objects or events, such as when we talk about 'angry' weather patterns or 'battling' waves. Their research suggests that the 'human capacity for anthropomorphizing draws on some of the same neural systems as do basic emotional responses.' My reading of this research and my own experience with animals is that 'We feel, therefore we anthropomorphize.' And we're programmed to see humanlike intentions and mental states in events where they cannot possibly be involved.<sup>83</sup>

## Posthumanist Perspectives

Anthropomorphism by its very definition is still bound by anthropocentric constraints. While the anthropocentric tradition of Western philosophy is generally informed by a humanist outlook, some twentieth-century philosophers on the question of the animal, in particular Jacques Derrida, the French deconstructionist, have approached the human-animal relationship from a *posthumanist* perspective. Cary Wolfe articulates the posthumanist position when he writes that 'posthumanism means not the triumphal surpassing or unmasking of something but an increase in the vigilance, responsibility, and humility that

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<sup>81</sup> Marian Stamp Dawkins, *Why Animals Matter: Animal Consciousness, Animal Welfare, and Human Well-Being* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 26-7.

<sup>82</sup> Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals* (Novato: New World Library, 2007), p. 124.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130-1.

accompany living in a world so newly, and differently, inhabited'.<sup>84</sup> This contradicts commonly held assumptions about posthumanism implying an *anti*-humanism in the sense of completely overturning humanist binaries in a dialectical reversal of categories.

Wolfe's posthumanism in particular deeply challenges the concept of animal rights as articulated in the philosophy of humanist animal advocates like Singer, Regan, and others. Wolfe explains the inherent problem of rights-based philosophy in approaching the animal question:

Just because we direct our attention to the study of nonhuman animals, and even if we do so with the aim of exposing how they have been misunderstood and exploited, that does not mean that we are not continuing to be humanist – and therefore, by definition, anthropocentric. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of humanism – and even more specifically that kind of humanism called liberalism – is its penchant for that kind of pluralism, in which the sphere of attention and consideration (intellectual or ethical) is broadened and extended to previously marginalized groups, but without in the least destabilizing or throwing into radical question the schema of the human who undertakes such pluralisation. In that event, pluralism becomes *incorporation*, and the projects of humanism (intellectually) and liberalism (politically) are extended, and indeed extended in a rather classic sort of way.<sup>85</sup>

In other words, animal rights philosophy, according to Wolfe, is simply an extension of the category of the human and of human concepts of rights, justice, morality, and so on.

Categories of species are significantly placed under scrutiny in Derrida's 'The Animal That Therefore I Am' (2002), in which he exclaims: 'The animal, what a word!'<sup>86</sup> Derrida argues that the entire Western philosophical tradition has homogenized nonhuman animals under the umbrella category of 'animal', which indicates a wilful disregard of differences between other species while reinforcing the distinction between all other animals and humans. Derrida writes:

Confined within this catch-all concept, within this vast encampment of the animal, in this general singular, within the strict enclosure of this definite article ("the Animal" and not "animals"), as in a virgin forest, a zoo, a hunting or fishing ground, a paddock or an abattoir, a space of domestication, are *all the living things* that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbours, or his brothers. And that is so in spite of the infinite space that separates the lizard from the dog, the protozoon from the dolphin, the shark from the lamb, the parrot from the chimpanzee, the camel from the eagle, the squirrel from the tiger or the elephant from the cat, the ant from the silkworm or the hedgehog from the echidna.<sup>87</sup>

Donna Haraway also resists categories in the *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) and *When Species Meet* (2008). Her concepts of "companion species" and "becoming with" the animal suggest an interrelation between species which surpasses even notions of hybridity.

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<sup>84</sup> Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 47.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>86</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', *Critical Inquiry*, 28.2 (2002), p. 392.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 402 (Derrida's emphasis).

She writes: ‘Through their reaching into each other, through their “prehensions” or grasping, beings constitute each other and themselves. Beings do not preexist their relatings.’<sup>88</sup> Haraway describes interspecies relatings as made up of “partial connections”, or ‘patterns within which the players are neither wholes nor parts’.<sup>89</sup> This notion of the interrelation between species encapsulates the concept of the “humanimal”. The human is neither wholly nor partially human, neither wholly nor partially animal. Neither the human nor the animal is made up of composite parts; both exist in a state of continual flux.

Haraway also discusses the interrelations between organisms which are manifest in our own human bodies, noting that ‘human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm’.<sup>90</sup> ‘To be one is always to *become with many*’, she writes.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, we should also note that over 90% of our DNA is shared with the vast majority of mammal species, over 98% with our closest primate relatives, chimpanzees and bonobos. The symbiosis that Haraway draws our attention to shapes her concept of “companion species”, which she explicitly distinguishes from “companion animals” such as dogs, cats, horses, and so on. While many such animals ‘do fit readily into the early twenty-first-century globalized and flexible category of companion animals [...] “companion species” is less shapely and more rambunctious than that’. The concept is ‘less a category than a pointer to an ongoing “becoming with,”’ and a ‘much richer web to inhabit than any of the posthumanisms on display after (or in reference to) the ever-deferred demise of man’.<sup>92</sup>

Rosi Braidotti argues that a non-anthropocentric, and possibly non-anthropomorphic, mode of representation has emerged in animal studies. ‘The old metaphoric dimension’, she claims, ‘has been overridden by a new mode of relation’. ‘Animals are no longer the signifying system that props up humans’ self-projections and moral aspirations. Nor are they the keepers of the gates between species. They have, rather, started to be approached literally, as entities framed by code systems of their own.’<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp. 3-4.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>93</sup> Rosi Braidotti, ‘Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others’, *PMLA*, Vol.124, No.2 (March 2009), p. 528.

Christopher Peterson explains the paradox implicit in a posthumanist break from the dialectics of humanism in ‘The Posthumanism to Come’ (2011). He argues that ‘the assertion that humanism can be decisively left behind ironically subscribes to a basic humanist assumption with regard to volition and agency, as if the “end” of humanism might be subject to human control’.<sup>94</sup> ‘The rhetoric of posthumanism, moreover, implies a progressive narrative that ironically mirrors the Enlightenment principles of perfectibility that it would oppose’.<sup>95</sup> Peterson goes on to discuss the compromising function of anthropomorphism in configuring our relationship with nonhuman animals:

If the absolute separation of human from animal seeks to assert human superiority, it also has the consequence of exacerbating the animal’s menacing alterity. In this regard, the human tendency towards anthropomorphism emerges as a compromise formation that works to diminish this threat, even as it guards against any complete collapse of the human/animal distinction. After all, the anthropomorphic animal is by definition not fully animal but also not quite human. Anthropomorphism thus functions as a fetish that produces the animal as both the same and different.<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusion

Peterson’s claim about posthumanism is crucial to our understanding of the ambiguous function of anthropomorphism across the disciplines. Anthropomorphism can be seen as a tendency which transgresses the ambiguous boundary between humanist and posthumanist approaches to conceptualizing humans and their relations to other animals. Anthropomorphic projections call into question presupposed distinctions between human and nonhuman animals while endorsing such distinctions by the very fact that they are anthropomorphic, attributions of human characteristics. It is thus impossible to divorce anthropomorphic representations from either humanist or posthumanist approaches to questions about other animal species.

The next chapter will consider how anthropomorphic tropes demonstrate the constant shift between humanist and posthumanist approaches, between anthropomorphic tropes used to represent the animal as human and those which attempt to represent the animal on its own terms. The discussion will also consider, of course, the ambiguous in-between space in which anthropomorphism can often demonstrate representations of *both* the animal as human *and* the animal on its own terms. This doubleness which can often characterize anthropomorphic

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<sup>94</sup> Christopher Peterson, ‘The Posthumanism to Come’, *Angelaki*, 16.2 (2011), p. 128.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p. 130.

representation is not always so discernible, however; sometimes anthropomorphism blends human and animal tropes in ways which render the animal a product of *neither* anthropomorphic or naturalistic representations, even if they are products of *both* at the same time.

## Chapter 2

### Narrating the (Non)Human: Anthropomorphism as a Literary Device

In his reading of D.H. Lawrence's poem 'Snake' (1923) alongside Virginia Woolf's 'The Death of the Moth' (1942), Derek Ryan argues that such modernist texts demonstrate 'an anthropomorphism that comes after the nonhuman, an anthropomorphism that seeks to follow the snake and the moth in order to find a conception of life that is not centred on human subjects'.

This nonanthropocentric anthropomorphism allows Woolf and Lawrence to here articulate nonhuman worlds – to use language to create environments that are nonetheless not centred on humans – but to do so while acknowledging that some anthropomorphism may be necessary in any attempt to make sense of these worlds [...] Refusing to run the risk of anthropomorphism at all simply allows the perceived hierarchy between human and nonhuman, and settled anthropocentric understandings of ethical encounters, to remain unchallenged.<sup>97</sup>

While it is treated with more skepticism in the sciences, anthropomorphism in literature does not depend on accurate representation. Instead, the animal fable and other forms of anthropomorphic fiction rely more upon techniques of anthropomorphic representation to appeal to the reader. Animal protagonists may appeal for a number of reasons, whether merely for comedic value or to advocate a more serious, compassionate worldview. They may also simply appeal to our fascination with concepts of animality, both human and nonhuman. However, Karla Armbruster writes: 'Given the dangers and challenges of understanding and representing the experiences and perspectives of our animal others, it is important that critics interested in literature that gives voice and mind to animals explore what constitutes a responsible approach to the talking animal. For some critics, the antidote to the risk of misrepresentation and erasure of difference is accuracy.'<sup>98</sup> How might anthropomorphism produce narratives which approach the animal subject *responsibly*, and what constitutes accuracy in a literary context? We should therefore avoid conceiving of accuracy in a strictly scientific sense and instead focus on how anthropomorphism within a text might, to cite the above passage from Ryan, 'use language to create environments that are nonetheless not centred on humans'.

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<sup>97</sup> Derek Ryan, 'Following Snakes and Moths: Modernist Ethics and Posthumanism', *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 61.3 (2015), p. 294.

<sup>98</sup> Karla Armbruster, 'What Do We Want from Talking With Animals? Reflections on Literary Representations of Animal Voices and Minds', *Speaking for Animals: Animal Autobiographical Writing*, ed. Margo DeMello (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 23.

Anthropomorphism in literature has been dismissed on the grounds that it portrays animals sentimentally, and thus is suitable only for children. Another criticism of anthropomorphism is that rather than representing the nonhuman animal as a subject, such fiction only attests to the narcissistic human tendency to perceive nonhuman animals as measured against the human, or as symbolic of the human. John Simons writes: ‘All representations of animals are...a facet of the speciesism which bedevils the human relationship with the nonhuman and undermines our ability to live in the environment which has been created for us.’<sup>99</sup> It is true, I will argue, that the focus of much anthropomorphic fiction is on human concerns and patterns of behaviour, and animal protagonists provide a convenient outlet for the author. On the other hand, many animal narratives written over the last fifty years or so have depicted the lifeworlds of other species, representing animals on their own terms, while conflating such naturalistic depictions with overtly anthropomorphic tropes.

The main concern implicit in the title of this chapter, ‘Narrating the (Non)human’, is how animal narratives are able to portray both human and animal tropes simultaneously in animal characters while at the same time disrupting the very categories of ‘human’ and ‘animal’ to which such tropes are presumed to be assigned. In subsequent chapters I offer ‘posthumanist’ readings of the animal, or “humanimal” narratives, of Grahame, Potter, and Adams. However, first we should establish what is meant by a posthumanist reading, a question posed by Stephen Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, who assert that

[A] posthumanist reading may identify oppositions between the human and the non-human at work in a text or practice and demonstrate how the vital difference between the two has to be strategically breached in order to trouble protection of the “essential purity” of the categories [...] It aims to show that another and less defensive way of thinking about the human in its posthuman forms and disguises, and in its implication within the posthumanizing process, may be not only possible but pre-inscribed within texts.<sup>100</sup>

In advancing our understanding of animal narrative and its susceptibility to a posthumanist reading, it is important to situate all variations and forms of such literature on a continuum of sorts. David Herman draws our attention to ‘the assumption – widely shared by narrative theorists – that a focus on human or human-like characters constitutes a necessary condition

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<sup>99</sup> John Simons, *Animal Rights and the Politics of Literary Representation* (London: Palgrave, 2002), p. 87.

<sup>100</sup> Stephen Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, ‘What is a Posthuman Reading?’ *Angelaki*, 13.1 (2008), p. 97.



Animal Allegory (AA), the most ‘course-grained’ strategy for representing nonhuman experiences, includes texts, from Aesop’s fables to George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, which use animals as symbols almost solely for the purpose of pointing out human foibles and representing human concerns. Anthropomorphic Projection (AP) is less course-grained than allegory in that it attributes supposedly human characteristics to animals while retaining some level of naturalistic representation; the animal is partially represented on its own terms. Zoomorphic Projection (ZP) is more ‘fine-grained’ (i.e. less anthropocentrically anthropomorphic) than anthropomorphic projection, because it entails a metamorphosis from the human to the animal, rather than the other way round. Texts which we would include in this category, such as Kafka’s ‘The Metamorphosis’, imagine nonhuman experience through the perspective of a character who is at the same time becoming less human. Umwelt Exploration (UE), the most fine-grained strategy, tries to represent the animal entirely on its own terms, without the use of any overtly anthropomorphic tropes or representation of human experiences.

Herman elaborates on his model by explaining that ‘[a]s one moves rightward from the left end [...] one finds less and less human-centric ways of figuring nonhuman encounters with the world. Further, the model accommodates shifts of narrative strategy that occur *within* individual texts featuring nonhuman agents’, implying that we need not shelf certain texts according to one of the strategies shown in the continuum.<sup>104</sup> In general, the texts I will discuss in this study gravitate towards Anthropomorphic Projection (AP), the narrative strategy second from the left on the continuum. However, a text such as *The Wind in the Willows* arguably features at least two or three if not all of the strategies above. Herman’s continuum provides a more concrete model for reading tropes of animal narrative within a posthumanist framework. I shall use this model as a point of reference in subsequent chapters. Firstly, it would be productive to identify some core characteristics of fable, the form most traditionally associated with animal narrative, and from which subsequent symbolic representations of the animal – in allegory or epic, for example – have emerged.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, pp. 97-8.

## Fabular and Allegorical Animals

Regarding narrative form, some distinction should be made first between the fable form and other forms of animal narrative. In *The Fable as Literature*, H.J. Blackham defines the fable as conveying a general truth, which is not bound to a sociopolitical context or literary genre:

What makes a fable is the peculiar purpose and implied comparison that govern and shape the material. The type of story is not a criterion. The use made of it is. As fable developed and longer narratives were used, those in current vogue were often adopted and adapted, as voyages, travellers' tales, Eastern folk-tales or fantasies, and, latest, science fiction. These examples are of narratives which rather easily take human behaviour out of its normal contexts.<sup>105</sup>

If context mattered in fable, then conveying moral meanings through the medium of animal figures would prove problematic. Where confusion about form might arise is when we begin to examine the various narratives that adopt the stories of fable but depart from the fable form itself. Medieval bestiaries are certainly not fables, nor is the 'beast-epic', *Reynard the Fox*, or its later adaptations. Blackham remarks that 'although Bestiaries', for example, 'were so different from fables in structure and function, what is obviously the same material does occur in both'.<sup>106</sup> This adaptability of fable accounts for its continuing relevance, even if the animal narratives of today diverge from the Aesopic fable form.

On the distinction between fable and allegory, Blackham is very specific as to their different purposes. While *Animal Farm*, for example, has been generally regarded as an allegory of Stalinist Russia, he draws our attention to the fabular form in which it is written. Orwell's novella is amongst those narratives which can 'easily take human behaviour out of its normal contexts'. 'An allegory in narrative', writes Blackham, 'may seem close to a fable [...] the principal difference is that the allusion in allegory is to something particular, and in fable something general'.<sup>107</sup>

How effective is allegory compared to fable in representing the animal on its own terms? Arguably, both forms risk the 'misrepresentation and erasure of difference'. Jill Mann asserts that

The humanized animals of the beast fable do not [...] represent an attempt to trace the 'bestial' elements in human beings, even less to read anthropomorphic qualities in animals. Unlike the bestiary, which brings two existing realities, the animal and the human, into meaningful relation, and which implies a divinely programmed pattern in their similarities, the fable narrative is fundamentally and

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<sup>105</sup> Blackham, p. xvii.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, pp. 35-6.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p. xv.

avowedly a fiction. It can therefore make no serious claims to reveal what animals and humans have in common. For the same reason, it is misleading to classify beast fable as allegory.<sup>108</sup>

Allegory, meanwhile, poses deeper questions regarding the human-animal relationship. Onno Oerlemans writes:

On the one hand, allegory represents the idea that humans and animals are fundamentally different – that we, in a sense, are the signified, the heart of the matter, whereas animals are always lesser beings, non-humans, mere representations, ciphers that we fill with our meaning. Thus, allegory effectively reinforces the anthropocentric hierarchy. On the other hand, allegory also allows us to express glimmers of likeness, connections that lie below the surface. Allegorists choose kinds of animals because we understand them to be different from each other, to possess distinct qualities that we apprehend. Because animal signifiers are not in fact empty, animal allegories reflect our sense that animals in general and species types in particular, might stand for qualities we share with them.<sup>109</sup>

As we shall see, however, there are many examples of animal stories which contain elements of both the allegorical and the purely fabular, and the diverse uses of anthropomorphic techniques play a crucial part in communicating the allegorical or fabular meanings to the reader.

The tradition of casting different species of animal as models of virtue or vice can be traced back at least to Aesop, author of the most renowned ancient Greek animal fables. Aesop's fables tell of interactions not just between nonhumans but also across the human-nonhuman divide or between nonhuman animals and the gods. Most of the fables convey simple moral messages, and from them many stereotypes, such as the cunning fox or the proud lion, emerge as popular elements of the beast fable. The 'Aesopic' tradition percolated through numerous narrative forms in later centuries, perhaps not keeping particularly close to the form of the fable itself, but the medieval bestiaries and the beast-epic, for example, adopted tropes central to the narrative of many of the fables included in collections of Aesop. These diverse adaptations testify to the universal appeal of Aesop's fables.

One conspicuous feature of the fables where human-animal interactions occur is the animals' ability to communicate through the supposedly human faculty of speech. In *The Fox and the Woodcutter*, the fox shows more reason than the woodcutter, and reprimands him for his deceit. The woodcutter agrees to hide the fox, who is being chased by huntsmen. When the huntsmen approach the woodcutter, asking if he has seen the fox, he replies he has not but with hand gestures signals to where the fox is hiding. The huntsmen take no heed of this and

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<sup>108</sup> Jill Mann, *From Aesop to Reynard: Beast Literature in Medieval Britain* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 31.

<sup>109</sup> Onno Oerlemans, 'The Animal in Allegory: From Chaucer to Gray', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*, 20.2 (2013), p. 300.

continue on their way. When he reproaches the fox for not thanking him for the hiding-place, the fox retorts: ‘I would thank you if your gestures and your conduct had agreed with your words.’<sup>110</sup> Another example of the animal gaining the upper hand over the less perspicacious human is *The Man and the Lion Travelling Together*. It is one of the shorter fables and worth quoting here in full:

A man and a lion were travelling along together one day when they began to argue about which of them was the stronger. Just then they passed a stone statue representing a man strangling a lion.

‘There, you see, we are stronger than you,’ said the man, pointing it out to the lion.

But the lion smiled and replied:

‘If lions could make statues, you would see plenty of men under the paws of lions.’

This fable conveys much more than its surface message: ‘Many people boast of how brave and fearless they are, but when put to the test are exposed as frauds’.<sup>111</sup> It also conveys the much wider philosophy that history is written by the victors. It provides us with a neat little metaphor for a critique of anthropocentrism.

The collection as a whole tends to blur the boundaries of species identity and difference, especially when it integrates species from across the Mediterranean, species which would have been very rarely, if at all seen in ancient Greece. Such species include the lion, the camel, and the scarab beetle, all suggestive of a strong African, and particularly Egyptian, influence. Not only do the fables display a cultural diversity in terms of their foreign elements, but also seem to resonate with social groups outside of the educated minority – shepherds, ploughmen and fishermen, for example.

In Aesop’s tale, *The Lion, the Wolf and the Fox*, the wolf convinces the sickly lion-king that the fox is a disloyal subject. The fox, just so happening to have entered the cave and overheard the conversation, exacts revenge by divulging to the lion-king how he has searched far and wide for a cure to lift his ailment. The only certain cure he has found is to flay the skin of a wolf and wear it over his own. The lion, trusting the fox’s words, commands the wolf to be flayed alive. The moral reads : ‘if you speak ill of someone, you yourself will fall into a trap’.<sup>112</sup> Of all the Aesopic fables, this particular example provides the foundation for the most popular and widely adapted ‘beast-epic’, *Le Roman de Renart*.

The medieval origins of this ‘beast-epic’ lie in mid twelfth-century Ghent. *Ysengrimus*, a long satirical Latin poem composed by Nivard de Gand, a Flemish cleric, in 1149, was the foundational text for the Reynard cycle. Twenty-eight ‘branches’ of *Renart*

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<sup>110</sup> Aesop, *The Complete Fables*, tr. Olivia and Robert Temple (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 29.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, p. 153.

were composed between 1174 and 1250. Kenneth Varty expands on Reynard's status as a beast-epic:

The title *Beast Epic* is given by literary historians to a genre which depicts an animal kingdom of the feudal kind ruled by a lion-king. In the medieval French model his name is Noble, and that of his queen is Fiere (who, from time to time, reveals her amorous feelings for Renart). One of the most powerful barons at Noble's court is the wolf, Ysengrim (as his name suggests, a man of iron, but not a very clever one). He has a notoriously lascivious wife, Hersent. (The Latin for she-wolf is *lupa*, slang for prostitute).<sup>113</sup>

Noble, Ysengrim and Renart are Aesop's lion, wolf and fox, respectively. The basic sequence of events is also adopted in one Branch of *Renart*, but with a vast social and religious commentary attached to its meaning, as well as to the epic as a whole.

In the 1390s Geoffrey Chaucer adapted the episode from *Reynard* in which the cock Chanticleer saves himself from the perilous jaws of the fox and deceives Reynard by appealing to his vanity. This passage from *Reynard* is in turn an adaptation of another of Aesop's fables, *The Fox and the Crow*, in which the fox tricks the crow into dropping a piece of cheese it has in its beak into the fox's mouth, again by the use of flattery. Chaucer's version of this fable is *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, a poem which incorporates additional elements of rhetoric in the philosophical discussion of dreams which takes place between Chauntecleer and 'faire Damoisele Pertelote' (104). Chauntecleer dreams of a fox, or what he perceives as a beast 'lyk an hound' (134) with hues 'betwixt yelow and reed' (136), that will come to cause him grievous harm, and speaks of his dream vision to Pertelote. She dismisses any notion of meaning in reality that this dream holds, and appeals to his sense of masculine reason and manly courage with ridicule: 'How dorste ye seyn, for shame, unto youre love / That any thing mighte make you afeard? / Have ye no mannes herte, and han a berd?' (152-4)

Chaucer's avian protagonists are heavily anthropomorphized in the poem in terms of speech. As Nicholas Howe remarks, readers are 'likely to forget that Chaucer's text is in fact spoken by chickens. They display all the features of learned speakers in medieval texts: they bolster their arguments by alluding to honoured authorities; they score debaters' points; they talk to hear the sound of their own voices'.<sup>114</sup> The fox, named Russell by Chaucer and renamed Renard in later versions, shows up on the scene as Chauntecleer's dream foresaw, and proceeds to assuage his fears as Pertelote had done; an appeal to (masculine) vigilance

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<sup>113</sup> Kenneth Varty, 'Introduction', *Reynard the Fox: Social Engagement and Cultural Metamorphoses in the Beast Epic from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Kenneth Varty (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000), pp. xiv-xv.

<sup>114</sup> Nicholas Howe, 'Fabling Beasts: Traces in Memory', *Social Research*, Vol.62, No.3 (Fall 1995), p. 653.

pervades the poem. Russell then aggrandizes the power and beauty of Chauntecleer's voice: 'For trewely, ye have as myrie a stevene / As any aungel hath that is in hevene.' (525-6) As Chauntecleer stretches out his throat in order to ring out his merry strain, Russell seizes him in his jaws and flees into the woods. Chauntecleer tricks the fox into letting him escape from his mouth when he suggests that Russell declare his defiance in the face of his pursuers. As soon as Russell utters the words, 'In feith, it shal be don' (648), the cock makes his escape and settles high up in a tree. Russell attempts to coax him down but to no avail. The fox loses his dinner but keeps his life.

Chaucer's moral preaches, first and foremost, against vanity. A general consensus would argue that vanity is not inherent in nonhuman animals; displays of dominance are motivated solely by a necessity for survival in a competitive world. To convey displays of vanity through the figures of Chauntecleer and Russell is to open this trait to further scrutiny. In his introduction to the text, Maurice Hussey remarks that

Whereas the Cock is a prince among cocks and a lion among birds, the humans in comparison are both poor and lowly. Yet they have a contented life and offer no targets for tragedy. They are the agricultural working classes, counterparts of Chaucer's Plowman, capable of leading the good life without ostentation or pride. In these respects they are perfect foils for the Cock, who imagines himself a member of the nobility of his race and nearly loses his life for his vanity.<sup>115</sup>

This misguided sense of self-worth that Chauntecleer exhibits is characteristic of much of the human vanity that is rife not only amongst the wealthy and high-born, but supposedly intrinsic to the human condition itself. In the species hierarchy, Chauntecleer is not as mighty as he perceives himself.

Oerlemans remarks that 'Not much [...] has been written about [the] representation of actual animals' in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*; 'the critical assumption is that animals in fables and medieval literature will always be entirely figurative in meaning'.<sup>116</sup> In regards to the tale's place in the tradition of medieval beast literature, it is significant that Chaucer's poem was written almost a century before William Caxton's translation of *Reynard the Fox* in 1481, which brought the Reynard cycle from the continent to England. The fable, especially the animal fable tradition, was inherently popular in England from before Chaucer's time and has continued as such into the present. Perhaps the most well-known adaptation of Chaucer's tale is John Dryden's *The Cock and the Fox* (1700). Tom Mason remarks that Dryden's

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<sup>115</sup> Maurice Hussey, 'Introduction' to Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, ed. Maurice Hussey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 12.

<sup>116</sup> Oerlemans, p. 303.

version, appearing three centuries after *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, has been perceived 'to exhibit a brutality, a vulgarity, a marked misogyny, a loss of characterizing voice, a hardening of sensibility and coarsening of pathos wholly alien to the original'.<sup>117</sup> How does Dryden's adaptation of Chaucer's tale demonstrate a shift in attitudes toward the treatment of animals in the early modern period?

Dryden makes more apparent the moral against vanity as embodied in the figure of the cock, named Chanticleer in this version. Chanticleer looks upon human beings and naively elevates himself above them in the species hierarchy by interpreting the upright gait of the human as a deformation:

...and I with pleasure see,  
Man strutting on two legs and aping me!  
An unfledged creature of a lumpish frame,  
Endued with fewer particles of flame. (459-62)

Dryden's own remarks on the cock's vanity follow shortly after this self-aggrandizing speech: 'The crested bird shall by experience know, / Jove made not him his masterpiece below' (469-70). This suggests that we humans are the species that Jove intended as his masterpiece, or it might be critiquing such anthropocentric views, exposing them through the perspective of the cock. Chanticleer's cock-centric views seem farcical; and yet anthropocentric views not so.

While English literature in the medieval period seems rife with anthropomorphic, in particular *speaking* anthropomorphic animals, the early modern period seems confined to more rigidly symbolic representations of nonhuman animals. In *The Modern Bestiary* (1996), D. B. D. Asker writes:

The fable has proved an enduring literary form; successive generations discover it and extend its repertoire. But animal literature in general, makes its presence felt rather more sporadically – if at all. In the European tradition, it is the Medieval period that one thinks of as especially important in the history of Bestiary literature. From the early "The Owl and the Nightingale" to Chaucer's "The Nun's Priest's Tale" and Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, animals fulfil an important role in figuratively representing the events of human society [...] Certainly, the example which Chaucer sets should dissuade anyone from assuming too easily that Bestiary literature is low-genre. The Medieval period was unusual in its interest in animal literature and as the period gave way to the Renaissance, its popularity declined.

Asker claims, however, that a revival of animal literature took place in the Victorian period: 'Since the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century [...] Bestiary literature has once again become

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<sup>117</sup> Tom Mason, 'Dryden's *The Cock and the Fox* and Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*', *Translation and Literature*, Vol.16, No.1 (Spring 2007), p. 1.

evident, though not necessarily within the confines of Medieval forms.’<sup>118</sup> Asker is not entirely wrong in his claim that the early modern period saw a decline in anthropomorphic literature. Any significant examples that can be found from this period, Dryden’s poem amongst them, would be adaptations of older fables, just as Chaucer’s tale was an adaptation of both Aesop’s fable and the episode from *Reynard*, the beast-epic, fusing both the allegorical and the fabular.

Kenneth Varty writes: ‘Although the name Reynard will probably make many Britons think of the fox, and that of Bruin will be associated with the bear, and Tibby or Tabby are names they give to cats, they have forgotten Noble and his animal-courtiers, they have lost sight of Reynard and of his descendants, unless one of them is Beatrix Potter’s Mr Tod, or Roald Dahl’s (any many another’s) Mr Fox.’<sup>119</sup> Using the figure of the fox as an example, we find a common example of a species of animal used simultaneously in theriomorphic and anthropomorphic representation. Cunning foxes abound in the anthropomorphic fable from Aesop to the present. From the outset, a cunning nature has been attributed to the fox, the result of an oral tradition which held great sway in small farming communities, where poultry were favourite prey for foxes. This is a prime example of where humans have surmised a definitive, in this case negative moral character from a particular animal’s pattern of behaviour. In anthropomorphic literature, this has set the paradigm for the fox’s character. There are several notable examples of vulpine villains in twentieth-century works of literature, from Beatrix Potter’s *Tale of Mr. Tod* (1912) to Brian Jacques’ *Marlfox* (1998). More heroic but no less cunning portrayals of foxes include Roald Dahl’s *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970) and Colin Dann’s *The Animals of Farthing Wood* (1979).

In the introduction to a modern translation of Caxton’s *Reynard*, James Simpson writes:

Animal stories generally tend to work in two basic ways: they suggest either that animals are like humans, or that humans are like animals. When the animals are like humans, the stories are often cute, like Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1901), in which we can instantly recognize the touching behaviour of small children in the innocent adventures of Peter. If, by contrast, the suggestion is that humans are like animals, then the stories offer dark accounts of how humans are savage, like Book 4 of Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), where the humans are so savage as to suffer badly in comparison with more civilized animals. George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945) falls somewhere in the middle of these two extremes, since we feel sympathy for the humanlike suffering of some animals, and antipathy

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<sup>118</sup> D. B. D. Asker, *The Modern Bestiary: Animals in English Fiction, 1880-1945* (Lewiston; Queenston; Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>119</sup> Kenneth Varty, ‘Reynard in England: From Caxton to the Present’, *Reynard the Fox: Social Engagement and Cultural Metamorphoses in the Beast Epic from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Kenneth Varty (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000), p. 174.

toward the heartless, unkind viciousness of others. Stories where the animals are like humans are generally for children, whereas stories where the humans are like animals are written for adults.<sup>120</sup>

Simpson recognizes that animal narratives cannot be simply categorised as either stories about theriomorphic humans or stories about anthropomorphic animals. There is a middle ground, occupied by narratives such as *Animal Farm* and countless others. Harking back to David Herman's continuum of strategies for representing nonhuman experiences, we can see that anthropomorphic projection and theriomorphic (Herman uses the term 'zoomorphic') projection occupy the middle ground. While most critics of Orwell's novella would situate the text at the far left on Herman's continuum, as Animal Allegory (AA), Simpson suggests that the text should be situated somewhere in the centre. Thus there is disagreement between critics as to the extent of theriomorphism and anthropomorphism in some animal narratives.

*Animal Farm* demonstrates an interesting play on common theriomorphic tropes. Orwell's pigs rise up the chain of command in the narrative to occupy the place of humans, while keeping the dogs subordinate to them; this facet of the status quo is essential in configuring the boundaries of power. The pigs engage in human practices from the start of the revolution, the most significant being this continued domestication of our canine companions. The use of pigs as symbols of corrupt human authority is also present in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980-91), where pigs represent non-Jewish Poles. Steve Baker makes the point that, despite Spiegelman's Jewish heritage, he has been accused of 'trivializing the Jewish experience of fascism by his mode of representation- the Holocaust is "reduced to" a comic-strip. It has also been suggested that to portray social or racial groupings in animal form is inherently insulting, and unwittingly lends credence to fascist views on racial superiority'.<sup>121</sup> These critics are rather missing the point of Spiegelman's graphic novel; the use of animal forms does not reinforce Nazi ideology, but emphasises its racist, dehumanizing agenda.

Simpson's contention that the more anthropomorphic an animal narrative is, the more suitable it is for children, and the more theriomorphic a narrative, the more suitable it is for adults, is an interesting one. Arguably it has less to do with an inherent preference on the part of children or adults and more to do with the didactic function of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century animal stories, which were mostly aimed at child readers. However, the aesthetic appeal of animals for children, especially cute furry animals, which many animal narratives

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<sup>120</sup> James Simpson, *Reynard the Fox: A New Translation* (New York: Liveright, 2015), p. 22.

<sup>121</sup> Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 140.

feature, could well factor into Simpson's assertion. Animals that behave like humans are still essentially human, and thus more familiar to the child reader.

### Sentimental Animals and Children's Literature

'Whether as a concept (*animality*) or as a brute reality (*actual animals*)', writes Philip Armstrong, 'nonhumans play a constitutive role in the preoccupations of the modern enterprise'.<sup>122</sup> While animals had played largely fabular or allegorical roles up to the eighteenth century, poetry and prose was concerned far more with conveying messages to the reader which reflected the increasingly popular, often didactic, discourse of sentiment. Oerlemans argues that examples from Romantic poetry 'depend on reader sympathy for actual animals for their allegorical potential – that is, unlike traditional fables, these poems are literally about concern for or interest in animals, so that their hidden meanings [...] depend on the reader seeing through or beyond a seemingly trivial interest in an animal'.<sup>123</sup> As pet-keeping became a more popular practice throughout this period, elegies and epitaphs were written for deceased pets, to whom their owners had formed a strong attachment. Ingrid Tague writes that

As ideas about animals and nature were transformed, satires increasingly gave way to works dominated by sentiment and by an emphasis on close bonds between human and beast. Throughout this period, writing about animals helped people to write about themselves, but the use of such works changed. Pets were used less to point up human follies than to demonstrate human virtues, including the virtue of experiencing a special bond with animals. Over time, there was also an increasing emphasis on the individual animals themselves, not just on the universal virtues and morals they were believed to exemplify. With the spread of modern pet keeping in the eighteenth century came poetry that celebrated animals simply for being loved companions and friends.<sup>124</sup>

Tague points out that over 'a hundred epitaphs or elegies for pets were published in the British Isles during the [eighteenth] century, including at least six for monkeys, twelve for canaries, seventeen for cats, and fifty-three for dogs'.<sup>125</sup> Despite the questionable artistic merit of many of these elegies and epitaphs, and their primary focus on the emotional response of the human owner to the loss of their pet, such works were 'clearly inspired by specific animals and by the impact that those animals had on their owners. It is the animal as

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<sup>122</sup> Armstrong, p. 5.

<sup>123</sup> Oerlemans, p. 313.

<sup>124</sup> Ingrid H. Tague, 'Dead Pets: Satire and Sentiment in British Elegies and Epitaphs for Animals', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 41.3 (2008), pp. 289-90.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, p. 291.

an individual that matters most, rather than the animal as embodying universal moral characteristics'.<sup>126</sup> Tague's remark about representations of animals as individuals with personalities of their own rather than as symbols of human concerns and practices is crucial to understanding the turning point that occurred in the eighteenth century with regard to the shift away from fabular and allegorical representations of animals to more sentimental depictions, particularly in didactic children's stories.

Tess Cosslett draws a distinction between the two key philosophical influences on education of the day: John Locke (1632-1704) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78). While Locke asserted that education about the animal kingdom was crucial in moulding compassionate attitudes from an early age, Rousseau believed that educational institutions were a corrupting influence on the young, and that the natural world had more to instruct on compassion and other social values. Essentially, Rousseau's and Locke's views embodied the nature-versus-nurture debate, although Cosslett does remark that the influence of both philosophers can often be found in certain children's animal stories.

Eighteenth-century writers attempted to educate their readers, especially children, in compassion towards the 'brute creation'. Examples of such didacticism can be found in Romantic poetry, from William Blake's fly to John Keats's nightingale to John Clare's badger, as well as the poetry and prose of many women writers of the age, including Anna Letitia Barbauld, Dorothy Kilner, and Sarah Trimmer. It is the latter sub-genre that commands importance in the tradition of speaking anthropomorphic animals. A notable example is Dorothy Kilner's *The Life and Perambulations of a Mouse* (1783), in which a mouse relates the events of his life to the human narrator, who in turn relates what she has heard to the reader. The story of the mouse's life is one of ill-treatment at the hands of humans, and thus Kilner's story is a perfect example of the didactic function characteristic of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century animal stories for children, in which compassionate values are advocated in the narrative.

### **Late Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Animal Characters**

Catherine Elick writes that 'English-language children's fantasies of the modern period [...] present talking animal characters struggling to become true subjects, not objects, whose

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p. 301.

worth and welfare are not entirely dependent upon humans and whose power relations with people are more productively unstable than hierarchical. These modern fictional worlds reflect the sea change from animal-welfare to animal-rights advocacy that occurred in the twentieth-century social arena'. Elick asserts that Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) is the 'children's fantasy that initiates this revolutionary revision of literary animal-human relations'.<sup>127</sup> The advent of Darwinism is often credited with marking a corresponding turning point in the tradition of animal narratives in literature. While citing evolutionary theory as a major catalyst of such a turning point is a contestable assertion, there are undoubtedly some significant shifts in the styles of writing employed by authors from Lewis Carroll to Rudyard Kipling to Kenneth Grahame and beyond. The first major author to produce an animal narrative in the wake of Darwin was, strangely enough, Lewis Carroll, whose Alice books, as Akita Mizuta Lippit notes, 'engage a broader set of assumptions about the existence of the human species' that at first appears. At the first appearance of the White Rabbit in the opening chapter of the first Alice book, Carroll tells us that, according to Alice,

There was nothing so *very* remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so *very* much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!" (when she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural); but, when the Rabbit actually *took a watch out of its waistcoat-pocket*, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it...<sup>128</sup>

Alice does not at first question the White Rabbit's capacity to speak with human language, and only considers the strangeness of his attire when he draws out the watch to check the time. The watch is the catalyst of Alice's realization that there is something unusual about the White Rabbit. Time, of course, signifies order in the human realm, while language transgresses the supposedly fixed boundary between the human and the nonhuman. 'Carroll published the original *Alice* on the heels of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859); the publication of his later work, [*Through the*] *Looking-Glass*, coincided with the appearance of Darwin's *Descent of Man* (1871)', writes Lippit. 'Carroll's two works show the rapid impact that evolutionary thought had on the literary culture of that period. Also apparent in Carroll's

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<sup>127</sup> Catherine Elick, *Talking Animals in Children's Fiction: A Critical Study* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015), p. 1.

<sup>128</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass* (London: Penguin, 1998) p. 10.

writings are the reconceptions of animal and human morphology that Darwin's conclusions made possible'.<sup>129</sup>

Following on from such "sentimental" didactic tales as Kilner's *Life and Perambulations of a Mouse*, the genre of the animal autobiography, meanwhile, evoked a deeper sense of the nonhuman animal as an experiencing subject, as well as overtones of animal advocacy, in late nineteenth-century fiction. Two of the most famous examples of animal autobiography from this period are Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877) and Margaret Marshall Saunders's *Beautiful Joe* (1893), featuring equine and canine narrators respectively. Cosslett remarks that

While the genre invited human readers to 'change situations' with the animal protagonist, and imagine its feelings, this is done in a realistic mode, not in the fantastic, comic mode of the *Topsy-Turvy* poems. The only fantastic element in the animal autobiography is the ability of the animal narrator to speak to the reader. Animals speak, but they do not turn round and force humans into animal situations, though they may take their revenge in more realistic ways, by throwing off a cruel rider for instance.<sup>130</sup>

The impact of animal autobiography on the diverse tradition of nonhuman animal narratives lies mainly in its homodiegetic narration; that is, the narrator of the work is also the protagonist of the plot. We are well aware that Sewell is the author of *Black Beauty*, but she includes a particular detail in the text: that it is translated from Equine – horse-language. Translation provides an 'apt metaphor for the way that Sewell imagines a human voice for animal experiences. It does not, however, account for the horses' ability to understand human language'.<sup>131</sup>

Cynthia Anne Huff explores the form of animal autobiography within a posthumanist framework:

The impulse to speak for animals, to write exhaustively about animals, and to research and speculate about how an animal thinks, feels, and experiences the world would seem to be a posthumanist impulse: a longing to cross the species divide, to construct the world from the perspective of a different set of experiences and senses, to escape the anthropocentric, rational, scientific, Enlightenment framework that defines one kind of humanism that posthumanists critique.<sup>132</sup>

However, Huff confines animal autobiographies, or 'animalographies', to 'popular' rather than 'critical' posthumanism. While the former 'aims to describe and colonize, through

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<sup>129</sup> Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 137.

<sup>130</sup> Tess Cosslett, *Talking Animals in British Children's Fiction, 1786-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p.63

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, p. 69.

<sup>132</sup> Cynthia Anne Huff, 'His Master's Voice: Animalographies, Life Writing, and the Posthuman', *Biography*, 35.1 (2012), pp. 154-5.

human language and perception, the subjectivities of other species’, the latter ‘analyzes the relationships between subjectivities, and studies how those subjectivities transform in the process of engaging each other’.<sup>133</sup> Therefore, while animal autobiographies appropriate the subjectivity of the nonhuman protagonist through first-person narration, perhaps it is in other forms of anthropomorphic fiction that we may discover a more ‘critical’ form of posthumanism.

Discussing the role of animals in North American fiction for young adults, Walter Hogan distinguishes three major periods of writers. The “founders” – Jack London, Ernest Thompson Seton, and Charles G.D. Roberts – were ‘active from the 1890s through the 1920s. They portrayed mammals (and sometimes birds) as sensitive, intelligent creatures, and frequently used anthropomorphic language to best express the rich mental lives they attributed to the higher mammals’. Generally the animal characters in the fiction of these authors do not speak, and the stories are told in a heterodiegetic narrative (third-person). Such naturalistic animal narratives, including Ernest Thompson Seton’s *Wild Animals I Have Known* (1898) and Jack London’s *Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906) were popular in North America at this time, while in Britain, similar works included J.W. Fortesque’s *The Story of a Red-Deer* (1897) and Henry Williamson’s *Tarka the Otter* (1927). Meanwhile, children’s animal fantasies were also gaining popularity around this time: Joel Chandler’s Uncle Remus stories were published from 1880 onwards in the United States, and examples from British authors include Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* (1894), Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), Walter de la Mare’s *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* (1910) and Beatrix Potter’s tales (1902-30).

Regarding North American animal stories, Hogan identifies a second major phase in literature: ‘[D]uring the middle of the twentieth century, roughly from 1930 to the 1970s, such anthropomorphism fell into disfavour, and most writers of animal stories in this period are categorized [...] as “traditionalists.” These midcentury authors are careful not to ascribe complex mental states to animals, and they avoid representing any animal’s thoughts and feelings as if they were equivalent to those of humans.’ While he is referring primarily to companion animal narratives, in which human protagonists play an equal if not greater role, there are also much fewer texts in the tradition of animal fantasy published around the period that Hogan mentions, although notable examples include E. B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p. 155.

(1952) and Margery Sharp's *The Rescuers* (1959). Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) was also published in this middle period, although it is much more allegorical in form.

Hogan writes that in the 1970s, 'the animal rights movement, along with feminism and other liberation philosophies, began to influence the writers of animal stories'. In animal fantasies, this shift is evidenced in such narratives as Robert C. O'Brien's *Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (1971), Richard Adams' *Watership Down* (1972), and Colin Dann's *The Animals of Farthing Wood* (1979). Differing animal narrative traditions also began to converge in interesting ways during this period. Ann Swinfen writes that

In the post-war period, writers of animal fantasies [...] had a five-fold tradition on which to draw: folklore, in which animals are the equals or even the superiors of men; animal fable, which employs animals as expressive symbols for human behaviour; animal satire, in which animal groups or communities provide a framework for social or political satire; naturalists' tales, which attempt to present an accurate and faithful picture of animal life itself; and finally earlier modern fantasies, which might combine elements from any of the animal tale traditions with other literary forms.<sup>134</sup>

Animal narratives also began to focus on specific categories of nonhuman spaces, formed by human society for the domestication and exploitation of animals. While narratives like *Tarka the Otter* explored the fictional experiences of a creature of the British countryside, other narratives portrayed the fictional lives of nonhumans in the spaces of the farm and the laboratory. Amongst literary works which explored the lives of animals in a farmyard setting, Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) is by far the most famous narrative. Other such narratives, which tend toward a much younger audience, are E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952) and Dick King-Smith's *The Sheep-Pig* (1983), upon which was the film *Babe* (1995) was based. Regarding laboratory animal narratives, Robert C. O'Brien's *Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (1971) and Richard Adams' *The Plague Dogs* (1977) are notable examples.

Narratives of animals in the wild, whether predatory or game animals, can be found in such works as *Watership Down* and William Horwood's *Duncton Wood* (1980), texts which complement each other in terms of their mythologizing of the worlds of rabbits and moles respectively. Marion Copeland notes that '[t]he most striking literary device of these novels is their verisimilitude. Their animal characters do not wear clothes, live in houses, or necessarily provide direct allegorical commentary on human affairs. Their anthropomorphism is confined to areas of behavior still in question'.<sup>135</sup> Animal protagonists became increasingly

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<sup>134</sup> Ann Swinfen, *In Defence of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature since 1945* (London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 17-18.

<sup>135</sup> Marion Copeland, 'Crossover Animal Fantasy Series: Crossing Cultural and Species as well as Age Boundaries', *Society & Animals*, 11.3 (2003), p. 293.

popular in fictional series from 1970 onwards. Robert C. O'Brien and William Horwood are but two of the novelists to have produced at least one sequel to their first work. A.R. Lloyd's *Kine Saga* (1982-90) features a weasel protagonist, one of the most traditionally demonized species, and Kenneth Oppel's *Silverwing* series (1997-2007) features a cast of bat protagonists.

One of the most popular authors of an animal fantasy series in the closing quarter of the century is Brian Jacques. Jacques's Redwall novels were published from 1986 until his death in 2011, and featured the most diverse array of animal protagonists ever to appear in such narrative. Mice, rats, rabbits, foxes, badgers, weasels, stoats, ferrets, hedgehogs, squirrels and otters populate Jacques' world. Though certain groupings of novels within the series are significantly linked in terms of their plot, they were not written chronologically. This diverges from, for example, the beast-epic, although in many other ways the series recalls certain elements of the Reynard cycle, not least its medieval setting. The familiar species of the British wild that Jacques's vibrantly depicts in his novels wear medieval costume and armour and speak in archaic English. Furthermore, particular species are assigned their roles in the good/evil dichotomy. While most of the creatures in Jacques are depicted as morally just, five species in particular – rats, foxes, weasels, stoats and ferrets – are excluded from this moral sphere. Always the villain of each tale will belong to one of these species.

Before I discuss the humanimals of Grahame, Potter and Adams, authors whose works have greatly influenced the animal fantasy tradition mentioned above, I will now turn to an author who occupies an ambiguous position in the history of literary animals: Franz Kafka. Amongst the many short stories Kafka produced featuring animal – indeed, humanimal – protagonists, is 'Investigations of a Dog' (1931), a text which subtly reflects or preempts many of the ambiguities which surface from a closer reading of *The Wind in the Willows*, the tales of Beatrix Potter, and Watership Down.

### **Franz Kafka's 'Investigations of a Dog'**

I have chosen to demonstrate, with an analysis of Kafka's short story, the diverse uses and limitations of anthropomorphic projection in fiction, and how other *morphisms* are subtly brought into play. Although this text diverges from the works I have chosen from English fiction, not only in terms of the nationality of the author but also of its homodiegetic narration

and philosophical preoccupations, it remains an apt locus of many of the debates concerning anthropomorphism and its use as a literary device. The text has become a crucial and well-known reference in debates about the human/animal difference as expressed in literature, and thus provides an interesting point of comparison with the supposedly less complex tales we will explore later. Marianne DeKoven actually applies the term “humanimal” to Kafka’s short fiction, noting that ‘Kafka used the uncanny interpretation of realism and the fantastic that modernist formal freedom allows to create oscillating characters who neither/both human and animal. These figures radically challenge notions of human uniqueness and dominance’. Kafka’s ‘constantly oscillating humanimals’, writes DeKoven, ‘depart from more conventionally stable, non-oscillating narrating animals’.<sup>136</sup>

Firstly, let us consider Kafka as an author of animal narrative in a more general sense. ‘Investigations’ is one of many short stories featuring nonhuman protagonists that Kafka wrote in his lifetime, including ‘The Metamorphosis’ (1915), ‘A Report to an Academy’ (1917), ‘The Burrow’ (1931), and ‘Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk’ (1924). Read together, Kafka’s animal stories explore the whole spectrum of tropes that Ann Swinfen argues are essential components of animal fantasy:

At a more sophisticated level, animal tales can be used to explore the whole range of human character and relationships, by examining human society from the point of view of the animal; or animal metamorphosis may provide an enhanced vision of primary world reality; or the search may be widened to explore not only the individual but the community – how it is created, how it operates, what are its philosophical, religious and political assumptions – through the medium of the animal community.<sup>137</sup>

While ‘Investigations’ conforms to the first of the strategies listed above, ‘The Metamorphosis’ conforms to the second and ‘Josephine’ to the third. One might argue that a general overview of animal narrative could be accomplished simply by exploring Kafka’s short fiction.

There is discrepancy among critics as to what Kafka’s animals mean, and whether or not his stories conform to the characteristics of the fable form. Deleuze and Guattari discuss Kafka’s animal stories in the context of ‘becoming-animal’. They argue that Kafka assumes the perspective of nonhuman narrators as a means of escape: ‘To the inhumanness of the “diabolical powers,” there is the answer of a becoming-animal: to become a beetle, to become a dog, to become an ape, “head over heels and away,” rather than lowering one’s head and

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<sup>136</sup> Marianne DeKoven, ‘Kafka’s Animal Stories: Modernist Form and Interspecies Narrative’, *Creatural Fictions: Human-Animal Relationships in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Literature*, ed. David Herman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 20.

<sup>137</sup> Swinfen, p. 12.

remaining a bureaucrat, inspector, judge, or judged.’<sup>138</sup> June Leavitt writes that ‘Kafka was adamant that if they were given a title at all, it should be “animal stories” (Tiergeschichten). His discomfort with the designation “parable” implies he did not conceive of his narratives as analogies in which animals represented something else. They were stories in which animals signified animals’.<sup>139</sup> However, this has often not been the way in which Kafka’s tales have been interpreted by critics. Roy Pascal argues that ‘these stories are not “about” animal life but about human life considered through the transparent fiction of animal masks. In this respect the animals concerned – the ape, the dog, the mouse, the badger – perform the function of the animals of traditional fable’.<sup>140</sup> Such a misreading of the author’s apparent intentions for his animal stories invites us to consider what we might regard as both the human and posthuman elements in Kafka’s animal narratives.

‘Forschungen eines Hundes’, or ‘Investigations of a Dog’, was written in 1922, and published posthumously in 1931. The story, narrated in the first-person through the unnamed philosopher-dog’s perspective, follows Kafka’s inquisitive canine as he sets out to discover the source of his nourishment, and the nourishment of his whole species, since food seems to appear out of nowhere from above. He is prompted to embark on his investigations by an encounter with some strange dancing dogs, who seem to be performing to a hypnotic music. Of course, the dog’s investigations are necessitated by the fact that humans do not seem to appear or even exist as visible entities in the dog’s lifeworld, and so the origins of food, he concludes, can only be the result of the actions of his own species. As his investigations proceed, Kafka’s narrator gradually becomes more estranged from other dogs, fasting himself even to the point of near-death in order to prove or disprove his theories. The story ends with the dog’s investigations having been inconclusive; while the dog’s reasoning is sound enough, his limited understanding of the world prevents him from reaching the right answers to his questions.

Homodiegetic animal narratives, including ‘Investigations’ as well as animal autobiographies like *Black Beauty*, despite their adoption of a nonhuman subjective viewpoint, are considered to offer less scope for a posthumanist reading. Cynthia Anne Huff, as we have seen, is amongst critics who support this view, as is William Nelles, who argues that ‘first-person or homodiegetic examples do pose the problem of assigning human

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<sup>138</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 12.

<sup>139</sup> June O. Leavitt, *The Mystical Life of Franz Kafka: Theosophy, Cabala, and the Modern Spiritual Revival* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 142.

<sup>140</sup> Roy Pascal, *Kafka’s Narrators: A Study of his Stories and Sketches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 189.

language to animals, who by definition cannot speak'.<sup>141</sup> In capturing nonhuman experience in narrative, Nelles claims that amongst the best examples are third-person, heterodiegetic narratives such as Jack London's *White Fang*: 'London brilliantly supplements features of the animal's mental perspective (focalization proper) with features of his physical perspective [...] as he emphasizes the dog's "field of vision" and the height of objects relative to the level of the canine gaze.' 'While heterodiegetic narration is not a sufficient condition for the closest congruity in animal focalization, it does seem to be a necessary condition. Homodiegetic narration, constrained to attribute the implausible capability of human language directly to a nonhuman narrator, compromises the verisimilitude required for a convincing illusion of representation'.<sup>142</sup>

While Kafka's text might be considered an example of Umwelt Exploration (UE), the least anthropocentric strategy for representing nonhuman experience on Herman's continuum, there are also elements in the text which fall under Animal Allegory (AA). The text, as Harel has pointed out, has been read allegorically by several critics, although with different allegorical interpretations, which negates any reading of 'Investigations' as an 'allegory *per se*'. In a similar vein, *Black Beauty*, while adopting a horse's viewpoint, has often been read as analogous with human slavery. While 'Investigations' potentially spans the whole continuum of narrative strategies proposed by Herman, this complicates either a reading of, or a reading against, Kafka's short story through a posthumanist lens.

Another category of animal narrative altogether is heterodiegetic narration in which animals speak in dialogue. While this category differs from animal autobiography in terms of its narrative person, it also differs from examples like *White Fang* in which the text conveys the consciousness of the animal via thought report but does not grant the animal speech. As such, these narratives fall somewhere in between the two, and it is such texts that this thesis is concerned with exploring and situating in terms of their scope for a posthumanist reading. Do anthropomorphic techniques employed in such texts, not least the endowment of human language, expand or limit this scope? Perhaps it is their luminal status that allows the animal characters of such narratives to be read as "humanimals", neither speaking nor communicating, and yet both; neither responding nor reacting, and yet both; in ways which confuse the ontological categories of the human and the other species onto which supposedly human attributes are projected.

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<sup>141</sup> William Nelles, 'Beyond the Bird's Eye: Animal Focalization', *Narrative*, 9.2 (2001), p. 188.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, p. 192.

According to Kurt Fickert, ‘Investigations’ ‘has been, in the opulence of Kafka criticism, rather neglected. A likely explanation for this tendency to slight the work can be found in the patency of its didactic tone and its propensity to be allegorical’.<sup>143</sup> Naama Harel identifies various interpretations of the text, almost all of them allegorical:

Like the rest of Kafka’s animal stories, the work was also read first and foremost as an allegory of inner-human issues, which exclude other animals at its thematic level. Some critics have even considered this story an animal fable. The allegorical interpretations of “Investigations of a Dog” are varied and include, among many others, claims that the story focuses on Jewish identity, homosexual identity, the limitation of the human consciousness, the attempt to examine human ability to establish its own existence, and the relations between the author- or any individual- and society.<sup>144</sup>

However, she concludes: ‘The very fact that the story...has so many different allegorical interpretations indicates that it is actually not an allegory *per se*.’<sup>145</sup> Another indication of these various interpretations that Harel sites in her essay is that the possibility of an intended displacement of the human in the text has been attributed little consideration. ‘Investigations’ is an example of where a work of anthropomorphic fiction does not necessarily imply an animal fable, as some critics have argued.

From the beginning of ‘Investigations’, Kafka uses his canine narrator as a means to convey a critique on not only the flaws of anthropomorphism, but of anthropocentrism as well. While his choice of first-person inevitably ascribes sophisticated language use to his inquisitive dog, the dog’s perception of the world is merely a canine interpretation of our own; the dog thinks anthropocentrically. As absurd as this may sound, Kafka’s narrative method offers a strong rebuke to the critics of anthropomorphism. The most notably fictional element of the story is the absence of humans, or rather the invisibility of humans in the eyes of the narrator and, by extension, man-made objects. As John Winkelman points out, the narrator ‘never mentions houses, doors, wagons, fire-hydrants, or any other human artefact which would normally play so prominent a part in a dog’s sphere of interest and awareness. To understand the story, one must at every point supplement the dog’s fragmentary account by supplying the missing reference to the human world’.<sup>146</sup> The first major instance in the story in which this invisibility of the human becomes apparent is when the narrator reflects upon the origin of music and his encounter with the seven performing dogs. While music is

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<sup>143</sup> Kurt Fickert, ‘Kafka’s Search for Truth in “Forschungen eines Hundes”’, *Monatshefte*, 85.2 (1993), p. 189.

<sup>144</sup> Naama Harel, ‘Investigations of a Dog, by a Dog: Between Anthropocentrism and Canine-Centrism’, *Speaking for Animals: Animal Autobiographical Writing*, ed. Margo DeMello (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 50-51.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, p. 51.

<sup>146</sup> John Winkelman, ‘Kafka’s “Forschungen eines Hundes”’, *Monatshefte*, 59.3 (1967), p. 204.

obviously produced by humans, their absence, or rather non-existence, in the eyes of the narrator, invites him to regard music as ‘a perfectly natural and indispensable element of existence’. Upon witnessing the performance – although the narrator would not regard it as such – he asserts that ‘from the empty air they conjured music’ (88). ‘He cannot see how the dogs produce the music, yet since he sees only them he has no choice but to conclude that the music somehow emanates from them.’<sup>147</sup> Instances such as these in the text offer a critique of our own human tendency to assume that anything to which we attach value is the result of human activity.

The investigations on which the narrator embarks following his mysterious encounter with the seven performing dogs concerns the origin of food – ‘What the canine race nourished itself upon?’ (94) – and he concludes that ‘the earth needs our water to nourish it and only at that price provides us with our food, the emergence of which [...] can also be hastened by certain spells, songs, and ritual movements’ (95). Of course, humans produce their food, but in the absence of humans the narrator is bound to conclude, using the only logic open to him, that food, like music, appears as the result of dogs’ actions. Michael Ossar ventures to claim that the absence of humans is intentional on the narrator’s part: ‘We may say that the dog’s failure to achieve a coherent, self-consistent world view is due less to inability than to refusal [...] He is blind to the presence of man because he will not see – will not, in order to preserve the illusion of freedom’.<sup>148</sup> Much of the meaning in Kafka’s tale hinges on how much we substantiate this claim. If the absence of humans is indeed a consequence of intent, which is doubtful considering the extent to which the narrator’s questions drive him on in his investigations, then humans occupy a position of more importance in the text than if their absence was the result of the dog’s inability to see them. Either way, the absence of humans supplies the substance of the narrative, as without their absence there would be no need for the narrator’s investigations.

Regarding other non-canine species other than humans, the canine-centric viewpoint of the dog is conveyed early in the text, as the narrator disavows other animal species as inferior on the grounds that they lack language. The narrator’s language almost replicates, from another species’ viewpoint, Descartes’ notion of the beast-machine:

Indeed when I reflect on it- and I have time and disposition and capacity enough for that- I see that dogdom is in every way a marvellous institution. Apart from us dogs there are all sorts of creatures in

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p. 205.

<sup>148</sup> Michael Ossar, ‘Kafka and the Reader: The World as Text in “Forschungen eines Hundes”’, *Colloquia Germanica*, 20.4 (1987), p. 334.

the world, wretched, limited, dumb creatures who have no language but mechanical cries: many of us dogs study them, having given them names, try to help them, educate them, uplift them, and so on.<sup>149</sup>

A fundamental difference between the anthropocentrism of humans and the canine-centrism of the dog, however, is the limitation of moral consideration. There are no indications in the text as to the extent of moral consideration towards other species. In fact, the subject of ethics does not seem to arise at all; perhaps Kafka's canine-centrism, therefore, functions as a double-edged sword with regards to the human-animal distinction. It might also indicate to some degree Kafka's own stance on moralistic concepts. Like many of his contemporaries, Kafka was deeply influenced by Darwin's evolutionary theory, and contributed to a corpus of biocentric works which appeared during the period of literary modernism. In full support of Darwin, Kafka's narrator, as far as his canine knowledge of evolution permits, declares: 'One can safely say that we all live together in a literal heap, all of us, different as we are from one another on account of numberless and profound modifications which have arisen in the course of time. All in one heap!'<sup>150</sup> In fact the narrator, ill-informed as to pre-Darwinian, metaphysical concepts of humanity, seems, like his canine 'colleagues', to take evolutionary continuity as a given fact, without realizing he conceives of it as such.

Regarding the wider sphere of 'scientific matters' meanwhile, Kafka's dog demonstrates a vague understanding of the subject matter this phrase implies, but harbours 'no ambition to meddle' with them. Further than this, the narrator seems to grasp that, as a canine, there are many (human) qualities and privileges – 'the equipment, the diligence, the leisure, and – not least [...] the desire as well' – that he lacks in order to expand his knowledge. Not only does Kafka's dog ultimately prioritise his thinking around the baser survival instincts, but realizes he is discarding reason, and even dismisses reason as an overvalued and unnecessary faculty. 'I swallow down my food', he states, 'but the slightest preliminary methodical politico-economical observation of it does not seem to me worth while'.<sup>151</sup>

Language, by which reasoned concepts can be articulated, is denied to the narrator insofar as he attempts to communicate through questions to other canines, but not of course in his communication of thoughts to the reader. His several attempts at broaching questions are met with the presumption that he seeks attention, and is baffled by this reaction; he seeks

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<sup>149</sup> Franz Kafka, 'Investigations of a Dog', *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 86.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94-5.

through his own cognitive experimentation to figure out the reason behind this interpretation of his inquiries:

Was it my questions, then, that pleased them, and that they regarded as so clever? No, my questions did not please them and were generally looked on as stupid. And yet it could only have been my questions that won me their attention. It was as if they rather do the impossible, that is stop my mouth with food...than endure my questions. But in that case they would have done better to drive me away and refuse to listen to my questions. No, they did not want to do that; they did not indeed want to listen to my questions, but it was because I asked questions that they did not want to drive me away.<sup>152</sup>

By a methodical process of elimination, he figures out that asking questions is merited with attention, which rules out the possibility that it will merit an answer to the question.

A further instance of the canine capacity for human language in ‘Investigations’ is the narrator’s application of metaphor. What is significant about the particular metaphors which are invoked is that they conform to the logic of the dog’s *Umwelt*, while also disturbing the notion that nonhuman animals are incapable of relating to their immediate environment by use of metaphor. The example reads thus: ‘The hardest bones, containing the richest marrow, can be conquered only by a united crunching of all the teeth of all the dogs.’<sup>153</sup> This would of course be a preposterous metaphor in relation to a human situation. Furthermore, while the metaphor in human language is sufficient in itself to explain its relation to a concept, the canine use of metaphor requires further explanation, as if the narrator was compelled to explain an alien use of language he had just discovered for himself so his colleagues might better understand him: ‘That sounds monstrous, almost as if I wanted to feed on the marrow, not merely of a bone, but of the whole canine race itself. But it is only a metaphor. The marrow that I am discussing here is no food; on the contrary, it is a poison.’<sup>154</sup>

This example of the metaphor demonstrates a point of ambivalence at which Kafka withholds or slows down the anthropomorphism of the narrative. Without these checks on the proximity of canine mental faculties to those of the human, the text would unravel as a critique of anthropocentrism. His narrator might as well walk on his hind legs and smoke a pipe while he’s at it! It is this constant reconfiguring of the human-canine distinction that reaffirms Kafka’s critique. Elements which are more anthropomorphic, such as the dog’s notion of his middle-class identity, and that parents should teach their children to respect their elders, are counterbalanced by the various points at which the dog fails, as he ultimately does in the text as a whole, to articulate his thoughts sufficiently, or conclude his investigations.

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, pp. 96-7.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

While he is capable of constructing a metaphor, he is unable to pose questions which match his intention: ‘One question sounds like another; it is the intention that counts, but that is often hidden from the questioner.’<sup>155</sup>

## Conclusion

Kafka’s story anticipates many of the issues that will be revisited in the following chapters on the works of Grahame, Potter and Adams. First and foremost is the issue of realigning an anthropocentric perspective according to the perspective, best understood as animal-centric, of another species. This can be found especially in *Watership Down*, where the novel is narrated from the perspective of rabbits, and thus ways of understanding the world are imagined through the eyes of the nonhuman other. This reimagining of the world sometimes reflects the anthropocentrism of humans, but very often it does not. The estrangement of the dog protagonist from the rest of his species also anticipates the differences explored in Adams’ novel between different warren societies, as well as the tension between the group and the individual. The absence of humans as a strategic device in Kafka’s text is similarly employed in Grahame and Potter’s “arcadias” in order to imagine what supposedly human spaces would be like if they were populated solely by nonhuman animals. The absence of humans also allows an author like Grahame to leave the question of size and proportion open-ended throughout his story. Of course, the tension between “reason” and “instinct” is also inherent in Kafka’s narrative, and this trope appears again and again throughout the texts to be discussed. ‘Investigations’ remains ambivalent about where such concepts as “reason” and “instinct” begin or end as they blend into each other ambiguously. Grahame, Potter and Adams all play with the supposed dichotomy of reason/instinct in their narratives.

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid, p. 106.

### Chapter 3

## The Plurality of Anthropomorphism: Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*

Perhaps the most influential and complex animal narrative in English-language literature of the early twentieth century is Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908). This chapter will attempt to address the range and intersection of themes and the plurality of anthropomorphic tropes in Grahame's novel. Throughout the narrative, the animal characters reflect an *either/or* structure of relation between representations of characters as either human or animal. As we shall see, this *either/or* structure embodies the fluctuation that permeates Grahame's novel, and in some instances, it gives way to a more ambiguous *both/and* structure in which the species boundaries are blurred, and it is often unclear as to when a character is being represented in the most or least anthropomorphic manner. Of course, many other shades of anthropomorphism exist in between.

In terms of its precursor animal narratives, Grahame's novel adopts several historically popular tropes. First, it presents a world in which the animal characters are clothed in human attire. This particular feature of the literary animal has existed at least as early as the Reynard cycle, although Grahame's choice of attire reflects a more contemporary, Edwardian style of dress. The clothed animals of Lewis Carroll's Alice books or Potter's tales bear a closer resemblance to Grahame's costume in this regard. Secondly, the subject of class, in many ways connected with costume, comes into play. Although it is not overtly depicted there exists in Grahame's arcadia a hierarchy of sorts. We are given to understand that particular species enjoy more class privilege than others; hence the text provides a critique (or perhaps reaffirmation) of the class differences among human beings. Regarding the animal kingdom, however, the alignment of species with class is significant in itself. Nonhuman species hierarchies that can be found in Aesop and the fables of ancient India are also prominent in European tales from Reynard to the Redwall books. As we have seen in Chapter 1, it was common in Victorian England, the context in which Grahame grew up and in which he produced his earlier work, to draw analogies between the animal kingdom and the hierarchical structure of human society.<sup>156</sup> This chapter will explore how these contemporary notions of hierarchy are evident in Grahame's narrative.

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<sup>156</sup> See Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1987).

Grahame is also affiliated with a movement of neo-paganism in late Victorian and Edwardian literature and culture. This is conveyed in his seventh chapter, 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn', which features Pan, the Roman god of Nature. This neo-pagan element is crucial to understanding 'the animal' as Grahame conceives it. To fully appreciate how far his neo-paganism influenced the novel we need to examine Grahame's previous works, in particular essays from *Pagan Papers* (1884), as well as interpretations of Pan's role in both criticism and fictional rewrites. How does Grahame's text focalize through the figure of Pan his own conceptions of the animal and animality?

In terms of the anthropomorphism of the novel, John Simons argues that *The Wind in the Willows* falls under the final of three categories into which he divides animal narratives – fable, weak or 'trivial' anthropomorphism, and strong anthropomorphism. What exactly makes Grahame's novel an example of this particular anthropomorphic category? It is 'a category of representation', writes Simons, 'which deals with animals as if they were humans but does it in such a way as either to show how the non-human experience differs from the human or to create profound questions in the reader's mind as to the extent to which humans and non-humans are really different'.<sup>157</sup> On the whole Grahame's work deals with animals as if they were human – they speak, they interact with humans, they imitate human fashions. But what of instances in the text where animality appears more distinct? Is the novel so different in its anthropomorphism from the tales of Grahame's contemporary, Beatrix Potter, which Simons oddly categorises as 'weak' anthropomorphism? Not all of Grahame's, or indeed Potter's characters, are so heavily anthropomorphised. Grahame makes an effort to depict Otter and the rabbits, for example, in their natural habitat displaying what we perceive as their natural behaviour, although they do communicate through human speech like the rest of the characters. These particular characters, however, play only a minor role in the events of the tale.

The more we examine its anthropomorphic tropes throughout the discussion, the more we will find that '*The Wind in the Willows* has a particularly fascinating structure; there is more than one kind of book here, and the same characters function differently in each one, and mean different things'.<sup>158</sup> The most important method by which *The Wind in the Willows* attains this plurality is its ability to communicate to both adult and child readers, whether consciously or unconsciously on the part of the author. Of course, such terms as *adult reader* and *child reader* sit on a spectrum which incorporates a whole range of *implied* readers. We

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<sup>157</sup> Simons, p. 120.

<sup>158</sup> Peter Hunt, *The Wind in the Willows: A Fragmented Arcadia* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), p. 26.

cannot simply say that the book appeals in different ways to two firmly defined categories of readers. Similarly, we cannot expect that one particular reader or readership will interpret the text in any one specific way. While these statements apply to all works of fiction, part of the fascination of Grahame's novel is 'its many layers and levels, and the way in which it presents us with a model for understanding how literature works'.<sup>159</sup> I turn now to Grahame's earlier work and his relationship with the animal kingdom, before engaging with the body of the text itself.

### Grahame's Earlier Work

Any analysis of *The Wind in the Willows* must first address the earlier body of Grahame's work, since so much of the inspiration for the novel can be found lurking in its pages. His most recognised work prior to the publication of the novel is comprised of *Pagan Papers* (1893), *The Golden Age* (1895) and *Dream Days* (1898). The first is a collection of essays, in which, according to Peter Haining, can be found

many of the elements that later appeared in *The Wind in the Willows*, perhaps stated very simply and sometimes with less clarity, but there none the less; and when he began work on his tale of the river bank and its inhabitants he borrowed freely and unashamedly from these "pathways" – sometimes taking little more than a single idea for any one chapter, while in others embracing the whole concept of the original essay.<sup>160</sup>

Essays such as 'The Rural Pan' and 'The Lost Centaur' will bear particular relevance to the overall discussion in this chapter. I would like, however, to focus this section more upon *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*, texts in which Grahame compiles his childhood reminiscences into a series of short stories, maintaining a dual address throughout.

What do we mean by *dual address*? Barbara Wall, in *The Narrator's Voice*, identifies three specific forms of narrative address in children's literature – single, double, and dual address. With single address, 'narrators will address child narratees [...] showing no consciousness that adults too may read the work', while with double address, they will 'also address adults, either overtly [...] or covertly, as the narrator deliberately exploits the ignorance of the implied child reader and attempts to entertain an implied adult reader by

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>160</sup> Peter Haining, 'Introduction', *Paths to the River Bank: The Origins of The Wind in the Willows, from the Writings of Kenneth Grahame*, ed. Peter Haining (London: Blandford Press, 1988), pp. 22-3.

making jokes which are funny primarily because children will not understand them'. Finally, on dual address, Wall writes that 'More usually...writers who command a dual audience do so because of the nature and strength of their performance...confidentially sharing a story in a way that allows adult narrator and child narratee a conjunction of interests'.<sup>161</sup> This dual mode of address and the resulting conjunction of interests has been credited by critics as the reason for Grahame's success throughout his writing life.

Eric Becker writes that 'authors may not always *intend* to write for a dual readership. It may be revealed only *after* they are published that certain texts originally believed to be interpretable by one readership, can in fact be interpreted by a dual readership'.<sup>162</sup> This may attest to the initial reception of *The Wind in the Willows* when it was first published. Becker also asserts that rereading such texts as an adult after a first reading as a child lends more to its appeal in terms of the meanings the reader can deduce from the text. Adults returning to the book 'may find that their tastes have become more refined and that their recognition of the extratextual allusions [...] contained within the texts has progressed'.<sup>163</sup> Hence it may have been the case that Grahame's novel needed to age along with its readers so that its 'many layers and levels' could be discovered.

This does not seem to be the case with his earlier work, which was instead *praised* for its appeal to a dual readership. Peter Green, one of Grahame's biographers, is adamant on this point. He writes that

After *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* [...] the fictional child was never quite the same again. In all probability Grahame had no clear idea in his conscious mind of what he was doing. Half his imagination, throughout his adult life, remained that of a child: he simply wrote, as an artist, what he remembered and felt, moving effortlessly between the 'divided and distinguished worlds' of mature awareness and innocent vision. That the results [...] puzzled Grahame's contemporaries it is easy to deduce from his reviewers. The two things they all stuck on with virtual unanimity were, first, the scornful attitude to the adult world of Grahame's children; and second, the way in which Grahame himself shifted with fluid ease from the role of grown-up commentator to childish narrator, and even on occasion maintained both roles simultaneously.<sup>164</sup>

In *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*, Grahame does indeed scorn the attitude of adults but maintains sophisticated adult language to convey this feeling at the same time. A prime example is his Prologue to *The Golden Age*, titled 'The Olympians', the collective name Grahame bestows on the many aunts and uncles that tyrannise over the children of his

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<sup>161</sup> Barbara Wall, *The Narrator's Voice*, p.35; cited in Peter Hunt, *An Introduction to Children's Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), pp. 12-13.

<sup>162</sup> Eric Becker, 'Do You Read What I Read? A Case Study in the Translation of Dual-Readership Fiction' (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2012), p. 33.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Peter Green, *Kenneth Grahame, 1859-1932: A Study of His Life and Works, and Times* (London: John Murray, 1959), p. 177.

reminiscences. ‘They treated us, indeed’, he writes, ‘with kindness enough as to the needs of the flesh, but after that with indifference (an indifference, as I recognise, the result of a certain stupidity), and therewith the commonplace conviction that your child is merely animal’. Further into the prologue he writes: ‘This strange anaemic order of beings was further removed from us, in fact, than the kindly beasts who shared our natural existence in the sun’.<sup>165</sup>

We can see from such snippets as these that already the kinship between children and animals that Grahame was later to evince in *The Wind in the Willows* was a strong element of his earlier work. *The Golden Age* especially is also filled with recollections of childhood games in which they would pretend to be certain animals. One example is when one of the children, Edward, pretends to be a grizzly bear in ‘A Holiday’:

Sure enough an undeniable bear sprang out on us as we dropped into the road; then ensued shrieks, growlings, revolver-shots, and unrecorded heroisms, till Edward condescended at last to roll over and die, bulking large and grim, an unmitigated grizzly. It was an understood thing, that whoever took upon himself to be a bear must eventually die, sooner or later, even if he were the eldest born; else, life would have been all strife and carnage, and the Age of Acorns have displaced our hard-won civilisation.<sup>166</sup>

While these earlier texts are interesting in and of themselves, it is difficult not to immediately compare and contrast them to *The Wind in the Willows*. Around the time of its publication, critics often made comparisons favouring previous work. ‘Both publishers and later the public’, writes Haining, ‘conditioned by the success of *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* to expect more of the same, were taken aback by this story written, not like the other – for adults about childhood – but for people of all ages, describing a world in which animals spoke and acted like human beings’.<sup>167</sup> In the January 1909 issue of *The Bookman*, Arthur Ransome, another ‘golden age’ children’s writer, asserted that

*The Wind in the Willows* is an attempt to write for children instead of about them. But Mr. Grahame’s past has been too strong for him. Instead of writing about children for grown-up people, he has written about animals for children. The difference is only in the names. He writes of the animals with the same wistfulness with which he wrote of children, and, in his attitude towards his audience, he is quite unable to resist that appeal from dreamland to a knowledge of the world that makes the charm of all his books, and separates them from children’s literature. The poems in the book are the only things really written for the nursery, and the poems are very bad. If we judge the book by its aim, it is a failure, like a speech to Hottentots made in Chinese. And yet, for the Chinese, if by any accident there should happen to be one or two of them among the audience, the speech might be quite a success.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Kenneth Grahame, *The Golden Age* (Chicago: Stone & Kimball, 1895), p. 14.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Haining, p. 17.

<sup>168</sup> Cited in Hunt, p. 17.

Even Theodore Roosevelt, one of the most noted and famous fans of the novel, admitted that ‘at first I could not reconcile myself to the change from the ever-delightful Harold and his associates, and so for some time I could not accept the toad, the mole, the water-rat and the badger as substitutes’.<sup>169</sup>

It appears that the text initially attracted scepticism because of the perceived differences between the text and earlier work, rather than the similarities. One would not have thought, from looking at these early attitudes to the book, that *The Wind in the Willows* would become such a masterpiece. The question arises then, how did it become so? Green asserts that ‘Grahame’s highest gift was for characterization; and in *The Golden Age* he made children live as they were, not as their elders would wish them to be’, and that he ‘saw very clearly that any writer who wishes to give his characters permanency must work from inner, rather than external, characteristics; and in seizing on those perennial traits which embody the whole essence of childhood, he created a minor classic’.<sup>170</sup>

What Green claims about working from inner characteristics suggests that in any attempt to write about children, the author has only their own individual, and most importantly adult, conception of childhood to draw upon. While Grahame may have written about children ‘as they were’ and not ‘as their elders wished them to be’, it is still an adult perspective which determines the portrayal of children in his work. Jacqueline Rose asserts that

A number of oppositions are starting to emerge which have been crucial in determining how children’s fiction has been written since the eighteenth century and how it is still thought about to this day. The opposition between the child and the adult, between oral and written culture, between innocence and decay. These are structural oppositions in the strictest sense, in that each term only has meaning in relation to the one to which it is opposed. They do not reflect an essential truth about the child [...] instead they produce a certain conception of childhood which simply carries the weight of one half of the contradictions which we experience in relation to ourselves.<sup>171</sup>

How clearly are these oppositions discernible in *The Wind in the Willows*, and how are they applied to representations of animal, rather than child, characters?

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<sup>169</sup> Cited in Haining, pp. 17-18.

<sup>170</sup> Green, p. 191.

<sup>171</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 50.

## A Concept of the Animal

Grahame was commissioned to write an introduction to Sir Roger L'Estrange's *One Hundred Fables of Aesop*, published in 1899. In her biography of Grahame, Eleanor Graham writes: 'This he undertook chiefly because, looking back over the centuries through which the Fables had been published and read, he felt a strong desire to see justice done to the animals by showing how Aesop had misrepresented them in order to point his morals'.<sup>172</sup> Although accuracy in representing the animal subject is not the purpose of the Aesopic fable, Grahame's comments on the classical fable's use of theriomorphic types to demonstrate morals are revealing about attitudes toward the representation of the nonhuman in his own work.

Grahame laments that animals, rather than humans, are cast in such fables, not least because the animal kingdom, as he sees it, is represented in such a false light. He writes: 'The moment they were really studied they were seen to be so modest, so mutually helpful, so entirely free from vanity, affectation, and fads; so tolerant, uncomplaining, and determined to make the best of everything; and, finally, such adepts in the art of minding their own business, that it was evident a self-respecting humanity would not stand the real truth for a moment.'<sup>173</sup> In this bizarre statement, he lists the qualities he sees lacking in most humans but common to more enlightened humans (and most of them children) and animals – characteristics he also champions throughout *The Wind in the Willows*. While Toad, the character that encounters the most trouble in the tale, is very much subject to 'vanity, affectation, and fads', the other three heroes – Badger in particular – are in contrast far more 'tolerant, uncomplaining, and determined to make the best of everything'. Minding one's business is a virtue championed by Grahame in all of his work. What seems ambiguous about the qualities here listed by Grahame, however, is that they can be readily applied to either children or adults. They are merely qualities that for Grahame signify a good temperament, and as such they are demonstrated in the actions of the more sensible characters in his work.

Grahame works into his introduction to L'Estrange's edition a strange fiction in which the animals 'take a leaf out of the book of the fabulist, and compile a volume of their own'. He follows this up with the peculiar remark that, unlike much of humanity, content with its still very limited scope of knowledge, the beast is 'never above learning, never too proud to

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<sup>172</sup> Haining, p. 51.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, pp. 56-7.

take a hint; more than all, *he never thinks that what he doesn't know isn't worth knowing*'.<sup>174</sup> This apparent mindset of the animal runs contrary to the words of the conservative Water Rat, who tells Mole the exact opposite in the opening chapter of *The Wind in the Willows*. Both Mole and Toad find themselves opposed to Rat's narrower view of the world as their journeys develop over the course of the narrative. This world perspective results, however, in very different outcomes for the two protagonists. While Mole embarks on a journey of discovery within the limits of the nonhuman realm, Toad steers – quite literally – in the opposite direction, hazarding the human dangers of the Wide World. Geraldine Poss has noted this contrast, remarking that Toad's 'pursuit of activity and novelty for its own sake is [...] a mischanneling of a natural instinct. The other animals may travel less, but they seem to be experiencing much more'.<sup>175</sup>

Grahame's list of nonhuman virtues, however, is problematic to say the least. He presumes modesty, which could not exist without vanity. He presumes tolerance, which cannot exist without prejudice. Animals cannot attain these virtues as they are perceived in human terms because they are allegedly not aware of their respective opposites. Grahame's attribution of such virtues to animals reveals, however, less of a desire to represent the animal itself and more of a yearning to reclaim a childlike, almost prelapsarian innocence for the human. For Grahame, it all amounts to the animal's supposed incapacity for dishonesty. Grahame's wife Elspeth recalls him saying that 'Every animal, by instinct, lives according to his nature [...] No animal is ever tempted to belie his nature. No animal, in other words, knows how to tell a lie. Every animal is honest. Every animal is straightforward. Every animal is true – and is, therefore, according to his nature, both beautiful and good'.<sup>176</sup> So, according to Grahame, animals are incapable of dishonesty. If 'every animal is true' as he claims, however, can they be deemed morally superior, given that no animal is capable of being immoral by comparison? Human beings are capable of lying because they alone conceive of morality *as such*. The reality of one's actions or beliefs may make them seem immoral to another human being, so they lie to avoid reproach.

Supposedly, nonhuman animals do not deceive in the same way. As Michael Austin remarks in *Useful Fictions*, 'Deliberate deception requires a sufficiently advanced theory of mind to understand the difference between the truth and the beliefs of another person. Most

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, p. 57; my emphasis.

<sup>175</sup> Geraldine Poss, 'An Epic in Arcadia: The Pastoral World of *The Wind in the Willows*', *Children's Literature*, 4.1 (1975), p. 86.

<sup>176</sup> Elspeth Grahame, 'Introduction' to Kenneth Grahame, *First Whisper of 'The Wind in the Willows'* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1944), p. 28.

species lack the cognitive capacity to engage in such behaviour'. However, he goes on to say that

On the other hand, deceptive signalling – communication of inaccurate information – is considerably older than lying, storytelling, narrative sequencing, and human cognition in any form. Such communication pervades the animal kingdom (and is not unknown among plants) and provides numerous examples of the principle that information can be useful – to both signallers and to receivers of signals – without being true.<sup>177</sup>

Of course, Toad proves himself adept at lying in order to fool the several human characters he encounters on his escapades, although these forms of deception are more elaborate than mere signalling. In the River Bank, meanwhile, the truth, if not altered, is not always acknowledged.

'Animal-etiquette' is often invoked to avoid the discussion of difficult subject matter. When Otter vanishes into the river in the first chapter, the Rat merely 'hummed a tune, and the Mole recollected that animal-etiquette forbade any sort of comment on the sudden disappearance of one's friends at any moment, for any reason of no reason whatever' (24). In Chapter IV we also learn that 'No animal, according to the rules of animal-etiquette, is ever expected to do anything strenuous, or heroic, or even moderately active during the off-season of winter' (87). This is a roundabout way of explaining that most of the animals in Grahame's world would usually be hibernating in winter. This social custom of avoiding unpleasant topics, however, is less telling of Grahame's perception of animal nature and more telling about his conservatism, which he attributes to his ideal of the animal. John David Moore explicates this point when he writes that 'With these zoomorphic gentlemen, urbanity is a matter of instinct. Manners, customs portrayed as animal nature [...] bring the drawing room to the country, where the ideal natural man can be enclosed in domestic comfort'.<sup>178</sup> Laura Zaidman remarks in the same vein that

By insisting that his characters lead their own distinctively animal lives – lives which are determined by natural rhythms and an instinctive responsiveness to seasonal change – Grahame also, by implication, naturalises the human values and material conditions they represent. Since what is natural is, by implication, what is right, the ideology of the Edwardian middle class, with its comfortable world of velvet smoking suits and lobster salad, is exalted into a myth whose timeless validity is guaranteed by nature.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Michael Austin, *Useful Fictions: Evolution, Anxiety, and the Origins of Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), p. 102.

<sup>178</sup> John David Moore, 'Pottering About in the Garden: Kenneth Grahame's Version of Pastoral in *The Wind in the Willows*', *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 23.1 (1990), p. 53.

<sup>179</sup> Laura M. Zaidman, ed. *British Children's Writers, 1880-1914* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1994), p. 99.

We must keep in mind, moving forward with the discussion of Grahame's work, that animal 'nature' embodied a series of ideals for Grahame which had their roots in a particular class mentality as well as a nostalgic longing for the 'golden age' of childhood, which he was to champion in all of his writing. He sought to express these ideals as fully as his imagination would allow, and found a particular channel for this expression in the animal fable. These personal elements of his characterization in *The Wind in the Willows* complicate our reading of the anthropomorphism at work in the novel, namely its aims at representation, if any. Is it animality or humanity that Grahame attempts to represent, or both?

This leads on to the further issue of whether Grahame's text engages specifically with a readership that harbours sympathies for nonhuman animals beyond a basic emotional engagement. The above point regarding Grahame's more personal motives behind writing the novel suggests this is not the case. His attempts at representing what he conceives to be the true animal, both within and outside of the novel itself, ultimately reflect a specifically Edwardian, male, leisure-class ideal, albeit in the guise of animals. Further to this there have been few subsequent critical readings which focus in particular on the text as performing some didactic function with regards to animal advocacy. One exception is Tess Cosslett's reading of Grahame alongside the work of Beatrix Potter, which focuses on the educational purpose of anthropomorphic tales for children. While this reading is typical in its engagement with the text in terms of its underlying presumption that Grahame's work is intended for a child audience, Cosslett nonetheless brings to light some important points for discussion that other critics have neglected. She argues that ultimately Potter and Grahame's works are 'not interested in purveying an anti-cruelty message'. She writes further that

Both their texts, however, have been put to conservationist uses. If not Arcadias, they represent anti-urban, anti-industrial enclaves that provide a critique of the modern. In this respect, their descendents are Richard Adams' *Watership Down* (1972) and Colin Dann's *The Animals of Farthing Wood* (1979), while their dressed semi-human animals anticipate texts like Jean de Brunhoff's *The Story of Babar* (1934), in which the animality of the protagonists is no longer a real issue.<sup>180</sup>

While it is crucial that we understand Grahame's concept of the animal and animality, it is also important that we address exactly what kind of conception Grahame has of the child and childhood. Firstly, the terms *concept* and *conception*, as well as *children* and *childhood*, must be more clearly defined. Regarding the latter pair, David Archard states that

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<sup>180</sup> Cosslett, pp. 151-2.

...something more is indicated by speaking of 'childhood' rather than simply 'children'. The former is an abstract noun which denotes the state of being or the stage at which one is a child. Its use dictates a certain formal and sophisticated grasp of what and when it is to be a child, one that abstracts from the particularities of individual children. It is thus likely to be informed, at some level, by theory. A society could have an 'awareness' of the 'particular nature' of *children* without possessing a 'concept' of *childhood*.<sup>181</sup>

Regarding the former, he writes: 'The *concept* of childhood requires that children be distinguishable from adults in respect of some unspecified set of attributes. A *conception* of childhood is a specification of those attributes.' We have already examined Grahame's *concept*, indeed his *conception*, of the animal. The animal, as opposed to the human, is 'honest', 'straightforward', 'true'. A complete and inherent honesty, and with it the inability to deceive, appears to be the main attribute that, for Grahame, defines the nonhuman against the human. Does this same conception apply to children?

We should first establish a general understanding of conceptions of childhood across different cultures, which are equally as diverse as conceptions of animality. In *What is a Child?*, Nicholas Tucker draws upon an interesting distinction between conceptions of childhood in Russia (still the USSR at the time Tucker's study was published) and the USA:

Children in Russia are accustomed, from a very early age, to spend a large part of the day in the company of their peers. At school constant stress is laid on loyalty to the group; which in turn is heavily influenced by the norms set for it by the teacher, which reflect the basic ideals of Soviet society itself. In this situation it is quite common to find a striking uniformity of belief and behaviour in the young all over Russia. In America, the emphasis seems more on the individuality of the child and the socializing effect of the peer group, in itself much less under the influence of adult leadership and conscious norms of 'correct' behaviour. It would be rash for any critic to contend that one regime is more 'natural' than the other.<sup>182</sup>

Tucker's concluding remark is crucial. When we speak of what seems 'natural' or 'unnatural' pertaining to children, we tend to rely on a set of attributes that inform our conception of not only childhood but the adult/child distinction. Such thinking also mirrors anthropocentric arguments throughout history. Whether we are speaking of the adult/child or the human/nonhuman distinction, the former in each pair has sought to reinforce the distinction with recourse to a set of attributes or, indeed, a lack of attributes, to define the latter.

The ideal of children as inherently innocent, shielded from the sinful truths of the adult world, is in part a religious one. Archard expands on this childhood ideal as it was conceived in the nineteenth century, when, he writes,

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<sup>181</sup> David Archard, *Children: Rights and Childhood*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 25-6.

<sup>182</sup> Nicholas Tucker, *What is a Child?* (London: Open Books, 1977), p. 101.

...the child mirrors the original state of grace enjoyed by humanity in the beginning. The child is Adam or Eve before the Fall. The adult who wishes to be pure and saved must thus recover the state of childhood [...] Yet the prelapsarian condition is an artless one. Its purity is that of ignorance. The innocent do not sin because they do not know how to. The child cannot be tempted because she has no understanding of wrongdoing. Thus, the innocence of the child is, in an important sense, an empty one.<sup>183</sup>

The same statement applies to Grahame's conception of the animal. Animals cannot lie because they do not know how to. The ideal of the child outlined by Archard is elaborated in English literature of the Romantic period, elements of which were revived in the so-called golden age of children's literature, in which *The Wind in the Willows* often takes centre-stage.

In the space of time between the Romantics and this golden age, however, 'the celebration of childhood innocence deteriorated through the Victorian era into mere sentimentality. The child's innocence, frailty and vulnerability were exploited in order to expose and highlight the particular inhumanities of nineteenth-century society'. Archard cites Dickens as a prime example of this deterioration in literature, and goes on to claim that the twentieth century, by contrast, 'rediscovered a more realistic literary image of childhood – explored from within, no longer conceived as pure and innocent and recognised for its decisive influence on the adult character'.<sup>184</sup> It is arguable that Grahame's novel reflects elements of both the nineteenth- and twentieth-century conceptions of childhood that Archard discusses. With recourse to reader-response theory and notions of the implied reader, we shall now explore how the novel does in fact reflect aspects of both childhood ideals. Furthermore, what may become clear is that children are as much the objects of anthropomorphism as nonhuman animals, and are subject to the same categorization.

### **The Implied Reader**

There are several readings with which to contend in any critical approach to a text. In reader-response criticism, the term 'concretization', first used by Roman Ingarden and developed by Wolfgang Iser, 'designates the activity by which the text is put together in reading which leads to the reader's cognition of it as a meaningful experience'.<sup>185</sup> A generic example of where concretization takes place is when readers ascribe allegorical meanings to a text but these

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<sup>183</sup> Archard, pp. 49-50.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

<sup>185</sup> Mario J. Valdes, 'Concretization', *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*, ed. Irene Rima Makaryk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 527.

meanings vary widely across different interpretations. This diversity of response of course negates the text in question as an allegory at all; any such meaning ascribed to the narrative implies more about the reader than the author or their intention. A particular example of a text in which this has happened is, of course, Kafka's 'Investigations'. As Naama Harel has explained, Kafka's story has been read according to such supposed overarching themes as 'Jewish identity, homosexual identity, the limitation of the human consciousness, the attempt to examine human ability to establish its own existence, and the relations between the author- or any individual- and society'. This diversity of interpretation demonstrates concretization in practice, and we shall find evidence of concretization in readings of Grahame's novel as well as readings of Richard Adams' *Watership Down*.

One of the key debates which has emerged from readings of Grahame's text is regarding the implied reader and, more specifically, whether the text is intended for children or adults. In light of this, it would be useful to draw on Iser's notions of memory in *The Implied Reader* (1974). Iser writes that

Whatever we have read sinks into our memory and is foreshortened. It may later be evoked again and set against a different background with the result that the reader is enabled to develop hitherto unforeseeable connections. The memory evoked, however, can never assume its original shape, for this would mean that memory and perception were identical, which is manifestly not so. The new background brings to light new aspects of what we had committed to memory; conversely these, in turn, shed their light on the new background, thus arousing more complex anticipations. Thus, the reader, in establishing these interrelations between past, present and future, actually causes the text to reveal its potential multiplicity of connections.<sup>186</sup>

Iser's thoughts regarding memory and the implied reader bear relevance to the debate pertaining to the intended readership of *The Wind in the Willows*. A child reading the novel will commit to memory certain perceptions which will influence, and be influenced by, their perceptions of the text as an adult reader.

One reading which considers this mutual influence is Michael Steig's 'experiment' in biographical and autobiographical interpretation. Steig returns to the text as an adult reader while maintaining an appreciation of the influence of his previous childhood perceptions of the text:

On the one hand, *The Wind in the Willows* continues to be important to many who have read it, and my own childhood reading of it was an important event for me. On the other hand, there seem to be several reasons why I, and at least some of its other adult devotees, should really dislike it. One may note that this novel's fantasy seems to be a very narrow one as an analogue of the real world. Its

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<sup>186</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 278.

principal animal characters are all male, all bachelors, and all independently wealthy, conditions that obtain for few people and fewer wild animals.<sup>187</sup>

Steig's major criticism of the text, then, revisiting it as an adult reader, is its inaccurate representation of not only the nonhuman but the human as well. This is, argues Steig, due to its limited appeal. He remarks that while a wealthy, male bachelor in Edwardian Britain might 'find the book delightful [...] it is difficult to understand why it should have any appeal for modern readers who have some awareness of the exclusion of females and the class presumption of the four major characters'.<sup>188</sup>

Some critics like Michael Mendelson steer toward a convenient splitting of the text into narrative threads, one of which communicates more to children, the other to adults – the Toad sequence and the River Bank episodes respectively. In the decades following the publication of the text, it has been demonstrated by subsequent adaptations that Toad's tale held wider appeal, especially for a child audience. It is, Mendelson claims, 'centrifugal' to the text, 'an outgoing, Odyssean song of the open road.' He goes on to explain that 'Most other child readers remain devoted to the Toad, as we may deduce from adaptations of Grahame's story: A.A. Milne's unifocal dramatization of the story in "Toad of Toad Hall" [and] the 1949 Disney film, which claims that for children Toad is "the most fabulous character in English literature"'.<sup>189</sup> Toad is, as Mendelson argues, the most celebrated of Grahame's four heroes. He is the ostensible underdog, the vagabond, the anti-authoritarian rebel, and by far the most comical of the four; the coupling of the stereotypical dandy figure with a hopping, croaking, wide-mouthed amphibian would appeal to any child's imagination. He is the idea of a child but not a child at the same time. We find ourselves encouraging his rebellious impulse, cheering him on as he outwits his oppressors. However, perhaps Toad's appeal waned as child readers matured, and their new, adult sympathies lay with Mole. Mole is the true underdog of the tale, a novice to adventure, more humble and in many ways more courageous than the Toad.

Let us now consider the role of concretization in our understanding of the anthropomorphism in the text. Nodelman and Reimer claim that

Concretization is a skill often possessed by children. In fact imagining as literally and completely as possible the world and the people a text describes is the only way that many children know of building

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<sup>187</sup> Michael Steig, 'At the Back of "The Wind in the Willows": An Experiment in Biographical and Autobiographical Interpretation', *Victorian Studies*, 23.3 (1981), p. 308.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308-9.

<sup>189</sup> Michael Mendelson, 'The Wind in the Willows and the Plotting of Contrast', *Children's Literature*, 16 (1988), p. 127.

consistency from the texts they read. This seems to be the reason that so many children and other inexperienced readers worry about the logic and coherence of the worlds that texts enable them to concretize – why they so often get angry when there are inconsistent details in descriptions of places and people or confusions in the sequence of events.

On the other hand, concretization is a skill that many adults have forgotten. Many readers have been taught to focus so much on using texts as sources of factual knowledge or abstract meaning that they ignore the texts' potential for engendering sights and smells and sounds.<sup>190</sup>

According to this claim, it might seem that the child's concretization of *The Wind in the Willows* would hinder their appreciation of the work due to its many inconsistencies, not least in the depiction of anthropomorphized animal characters. This is, however, simply not the case. Elements of the text that we as adult readers might regard as inconsistencies child readers may find perfectly acceptable, not inconsistent at all. One reason for this difference in responses to the text may lie in our learned assumptions of the human-animal distinction, as opposed to the child's relatively vague notions. In many ways it is distinction that is taught rather than grounded in facts. Nevertheless, if there are inconsistencies in the text, where are the specific instances of them?

Firstly, Mendelson's 'plotting of contrast' proves unhelpful if we are examining the anthropomorphism of the text, which fluctuates throughout both the 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' narrative threads. We cannot fix certain episodes or chapters of the text as passages which depict characters as more or less anthropomorphic. Take the Toad sequence, for example. There are several indicators in this chapter sequence which suggest that Toad is the *most* anthropomorphic of the four major characters – he dons various human disguises, harbours a penchant for motorcars and encounters and converses with more human characters than the other River Bankers. On the other hand, his impulsive nature could suggest he is in fact the *least* anthropomorphic, as he is less constrained by social pressures, to which Rat, Badger and Mole tend to conform. Another interesting example is the Water Rat's encounter with the Sea Rat in 'Wayfarers All'. While the Water Rat's subsequent urge to migrate south might be regarded as more 'natural' to the animal than Toad's impulse to steal motor-cars, Rat ultimately suppresses these animal urges after listening to the cautionary advice of Mole: '[T]he Mole, now thoroughly alarmed, placed himself in front of him, an looking into his eyes saw that they were glazed and set and turned a streaked and shifting grey – not his friend's eyes, but the eyes of some other animal!' (230) Mole brings Rat back to his senses, to his anthropomorphic animal self, and to the realm of practicality, picnics, and other such sensible River Bank values.

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<sup>190</sup> Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer, *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), p. 58.

These contradictions are not so different, however, from common conceptions of the child, and therefore the implied child reader. Children in the nineteenth century ‘are either more angelic than adults or more wild. Even though these ideas contradict each other, they still have enough power in contemporary culture that many adults tend to act at different times as if each of them were true’.<sup>191</sup> In the context of Grahame’s novel, we might recognise representations of the angelic and the wild in the figures of Mole and Toad respectively. The examples of contradictions in behaviour listed above, then, may be more informed by conceptions of the child than a meandering attempt to represent the animal as naturally as possible. Of course, the angelic/wild dichotomy can also apply to animals. Animals are often perceived as either tame, submissive and loyal, or savage and fierce. There are fewer idealistic representations of animals that fall outside these two categories. This is another instance, then, of where the same anthropomorphizing tendencies are used to culturally construct both the animal *and* the child.

Within a single short passage, any one of Grahame’s characters could be perceived to behave in ways which seem natural to the human and the nonhuman alike. A character could be performing an action with *paws* one moment, and *hands* the next. Steig’s example of Mole’s return home in ‘Dolce Domum’ is just such a passage. Through his sensory communion with nature Mole finds his way home, only to fall back into meticulous domestic habits once he returns. Our glimpse of Mole’s animal nature is brief but effective, as Steig’s more autobiographical approach to reading the text suggests. The example Steig draws upon from the text is worth quoting in full here:

We others, who have long lost the more subtle of the physical senses, have not even proper terms to express an animal’s inter-communications with his surroundings, living or otherwise, and have only the word ‘smell,’ for instance, to include the whole range of delicate thrills which murmur in the nose of the animal night and day, summoning, warning, inciting, repelling. It was one of these mysterious fairy calls from out the void that suddenly reached Mole in the darkness, making him tingle through and through with its very familiar appeal, even while yet he could not clearly remember what it was. He stopped dead in his tracks, his nose searching hither and thither in its efforts to recapture the fine filament, the telegraphic current, that had so strongly moved him. A moment, and he had caught it again; and with it this time came recollection in fullest flood (111).

This passage is telling of the extent to which Grahame attempted to capture the mindset of the animal. In his inability to articulate through human language ‘what it is like to *be*’ a mole, he resorts to explaining the animal’s relation to its world as ‘mysterious fairy calls’, invoking associations with contemporary children’s narrative.

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

Steig offers an insight into this episode, commenting in particular on Mole's sense of smell. He describes smell as 'an important part of the secret, the Heimlich, the forbidden':

Smell is the sense in children most subject to conditioning and suppression by adults. It is closest to an animal sense, at least initially lacking in conceptual discrimination, but in a child's development it is most closely allied with feelings of shame, guilt, and disgust. It is perhaps for these reasons that I have no precise memories associated with Mole's smelling of his home, but retain a strong feeling that this is related to some of my most basic childhood experiences. And thus for me the replacement of smell by sight as the dominant feeling in Mole's return to his home is akin to a shift from early childhood to more adult, conceptual ways of thinking and feeling.<sup>192</sup>

This reading of Grahame's fifth chapter invites us to regard the anthropomorphism of the narrative in direct relation to the child-adult spectrum of experiences. Is Grahame's humanization of his animal protagonists an attempt to render the narrative more accessible to the child or the adult reader? The association of the primal senses with conditioning in childhood could suggest that the passages in which characters commune more with nature resonate as much, if not more, with the child reader, as the rebelliousness and flamboyance of a character like Toad.

Readings of *The Wind in the Willows* as a children's book, or about children in animal guise, risk an oversimplification of the plural anthropomorphic elements which overlap and blur into each other. It is not a simple case of the characters in Grahame's novel embodying a child/animal hybridity, although this is certainly implied in many instances throughout the text. There are other parallels to be drawn between Grahame's animals and human groups. The most important parallel, I would argue, is between different animal species and the social classes of Edwardian England.

### **Species and Social Class**

The particular class of an animal in the River Bank is determined by its species in most instances. It is made explicit from the start of the novel by the Water Rat that certain species enjoy a certain level of social privilege, namely those that live closer to the River Bank and further from the Wild Wood. 'The squirrels are all right', explains the Water Rat. 'And the rabbits – some of 'em, but rabbits are a mixed lot'. But there are 'others... Weasels – and stoats – and foxes – and so on. They're all right in a way [...] but they break out sometimes,

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<sup>192</sup> Steig, p. 311.

there's no denying it, and then – well, you can't really trust them, and that's a fact' (19). The notion that the Wild Wooders 'break out' suggests an underlying fear of revolution in the River Bank, which in turns aligns the Wild Wooders with the working classes, and the River Bankers with the middle and upper classes. Otter has been compared with the old aristocracy while Toad has been interpreted as a member of the *nouveau riche*. Meanwhile, Rat and Mole have been aligned with the bourgeoisie, that precarious middle ground in the class hierarchy from which most of the fears of the working class sprang in Grahame's time. It is also significant that the class divide in Grahame's text is also very much a divide of the masses from the elite. Bonnie Gaarden highlights this distinction between the collective and the individual:

That the four main characters are neither plain-and-simple animals nor disguised humans is indicated by their unique presentation in the text. In *The Wind in the Willows* there are many rabbits and field mice, [...] hordes of weasels and stoats, but only one Water Rat, one Mole, one Toad, and one Badger, whose species names and personal names are the same. Like the original hermaphroditic Adam of alchemy, they include all Ratness, Moleness, and so forth, in their own singular selves, standing out from the more ordinary multitudes of other animals like Platonic forms.<sup>193</sup>

However, Gaarden does not, unlike other critics, align the world of the River Bank with a particular class mindset, and her reading is more psychoanalytical. Meanwhile, others have remarked very specifically on the class affiliations of particular characters. Peter Hunt writes that while there is a 'tension or conflict between the sense of settled social harmony of the River Bankers and the subversive working-classes of the Wild Wood', there are also 'symbolic or actual conflicts between adults of different classes, between adults of the same class, between adults and children – and even between animals, each living "by instinct...according to his nature"'.<sup>194</sup>

Gaarden's reading, however, overlooks the fact that none of the four main protagonists are the only member of their species. We learn that Mole had an aunt and Toad had a father. In 'Wayfarers All', the Water Rat meets another of his kind. Badger reveals that long ago there was a whole set of badgers. This contradicts Gaarden's assertion that the four protagonists are presented as 'Platonic forms'. After recounting the rise and fall of human civilization on the site of his burrow, Badger informs Mole that 'There were badgers here [...] long before that same city ever came to be. And now there are badgers here again. We are an enduring lot, and we may move out for a time, but we wait, and are patient, and back

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<sup>193</sup> Bonnie Gaarden, 'The Inner Family of The Wind in the Willows', *Children's Literature*, 22 (1994), p. 43.

<sup>194</sup> Peter Hunt, 'Dialogue and Dialectic: Language and Class in The Wind in the Willows', *Children's Literature*, 16 (1988), p. 159.

we come. And so it will ever be' (102). In his reading of this particular passage, John David Moore contrasts Grahame's presentation of Mole and Badger as animals with their presentation as humans:

To a degree, they appear here as genteel tourists. But because Badger is also speaking as an animal, he and Mole represent the rustics in typical picturesque landscape who continue about their business with little regard to the images of transience that surround them. The image of the rustic merged with the countryside is only slightly removed from the image of the animal adapted to its environment. The price paid for seeing the rustic as part of the landscape is dehumanization.<sup>195</sup>

This perceived comparison between the image of the rustic and the image of the animal is suggestive of not only a prelapsarian nostalgia but also nostalgia for a simpler, preindustrial way of life, the latter carrying class connotations. Only the preindustrial classes can reside comfortably in the River Bank.

Badger is the character that seems to appeal most to both Grahame's contemporaries and later authors of anthropomorphic literature. Beatrix Potter expressed her preference for Badger, and C. S. Lewis wrote that 'The child who has once met Mr. Badger has ever afterwards in its bones a knowledge of humanity and of English social history which it could not get in any other way'.<sup>196</sup> It seems strange that the appeal of Badger for Lewis is rooted in his resemblance of humanity, considering Badger is possibly the least anthropomorphized of the four major characters. However, perhaps it is because Badger is presented as the character that remains the most true to his animal nature that he appeals to such authors of animal tales as Potter and Lewis.

Lois Kuznets offers an explanation in her reading as to why Grahame chooses to cast his characters as the species they are. Grahame's choices have very much to do, Kuznets argues, with the natural homes of the species in question. She writes that 'the interiors of their homes are no more naturalistic than the animals' characteristics', but 'the general position of their homes are'. In the case of Toad, his home is 'totally anthropomorphic and above ground, befitting the animal character that is going to have the most dealings with mankind; it is, however, an artificial position for a toad, a reptile that would not erect a Tudor or Georgian mansion but would burrow into the mud'.<sup>197</sup> I would argue that Grahame deliberately chooses the animals that he does because they do not conform to categories such as domestic or livestock animals. Of course, domestic and livestock animals do feature in the text, such as the caged canary and the horse that pulls Toad's cart in 'The Open Road', but

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<sup>195</sup> Moore, p. 52.

<sup>196</sup> C. S. Lewis, 'On Three Ways of Writing for Children'; cited in Hunt (1994), p. 66.

<sup>197</sup> Lois Kuznets, 'Toad Hall Revisited', *Children's Literature*, Vol.7, No.1 (1978), pp. 119-20.

they feature only in marginal relation to the non-domesticated animals, in the same way as they feature in the lives of humans. They are all animals considered wild, even fierce in the Badger's case, and they are animals which would not be traditionally grouped together; they are rather a mismatch, in fact. As a result, this leaves Grahame's characters more open to interpretation as the reader is not predisposed to read these animals as pets or, morbidly, as food.

Toad is arguably Grahame's most anthropomorphized character, situated at the opposite end of the spectrum from the Badger. As an animal, however, Toad is also the only character in the novel that is cast as a cold-blooded species, an amphibian amongst a community of mammals. In the early modern period especially, amphibians and also reptiles were often perceived as repulsive and unnatural, not least because it was difficult to categorise these animals by their natural habitat.<sup>198</sup> Were they creatures of earth or water, or both? Perhaps this conception of the toad species influenced Grahame's choice to cast his most transgressive character as one of their lot. Toad, after all, never truly belongs to either the open road or the riverbank. Of course this repulsion toward reptiles and amphibians also has its roots in Christianity, with Satan's temptation of Eve in the guise of a serpent. Toads as well as serpents have been cast in the role of the Devil. In Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes Satan as 'Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve' (IV.800). This association that toads, snakes and other reptiles and amphibians have acquired over centuries of Christian teaching resound today in theriomorphic insults such as 'greedy toad' and 'snake in the grass'.

Regarding interactions with humans, the Toad sequence is the narrative thread in which most of the human-nonhuman interactions take place. Mole, Rat and Badger remain relatively excluded from the Wide World. There are only two episodes in which Mole and Rat encounter humans, with Badger avoiding contact with them altogether. The first is when Toad's gypsy caravan is overturned in the wake of human motorists – 'road-hogs' (52), as Ratty calls them – who inspire Toad to take up with motorcars in the first place. In the second instance, Mole and Rat play the role of observers looking in upon a homely Christmas scene in which a human family are gathered round the table. Though it seems like the typical, idealistic model of the nuclear family, Grahame does not seem to view the scene as a wholly positive reflection of domesticity or the family unit, referring to the objects of Mole and Rat's observation as 'inmates' who possess 'the natural grace which goes with the perfect

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<sup>198</sup> See p. 35 n. 56.

unconsciousness of observation' (108). For a moment in the text, Grahame allows us to glimpse ourselves through the gaze of the nonhuman other, a technique similarly employed in 'The Olympians' with the child's perspective. Rat's nonchalant attitude as they pass through the village suggests he regards humans as much less intelligent beings than Mole and himself, reflecting an animal-centric perspective of the world similar to that of the philosophical protagonist of Kafka's 'Investigations of a Dog', which I discussed in the last chapter. As long as they avoid 'any bother or unpleasantness', Ratty and Mole can 'have a look at them [...] and see what they're doing' (107).

It would also be useful to note that while the animal characters in the text are named according to their species, humans are named according to their occupation – the washerwoman, the engine-driver, the Chief Magistrate, and so on. In both instances, this labelling reflects the ways in which both the human and nonhuman are classified by human society. We are quick to judge people by their occupation for all sorts of reasons, while animals are merely members of a species – an animal's individual value is secondary to this categorization. However, there is an important grammatical difference between the way Grahame names his animals and how he names the humans in the text, namely, the use of the definite article – *the* washerwoman, *the* engine-driver – while the names of the animal characters, albeit the names of their species, are still capitalized in the way that proper names are written. The result of this one crucial detail is that the humans are categorised while the animals in the text are more humanized; or, rather, they are granted a greater degree of personhood. Perhaps in the world of the Riverbank humans are classified as many species, only these are dependent more on occupation and less on biological composition.<sup>199</sup> We must also remember that Grahame's text advocates many leisure-class ideals, and the subject of occupation would not penetrate the utopian space of the Riverbank.

From Chapter VI onwards, interactions with humans acquire more significance in the text. The first of these interactions in the Toad sequence is with the 'brutal minions of the law' and the 'playful populace' that mocks and jeers at Toad as he is dragged towards his prison-cell. Here, Toad loses his Toadness beneath the harsh, judging gaze of the human. The crowd treat him as they would at the sight of any 'gentleman in difficulties'. Even the nonhuman subjects of the Wide World treat him with disdain. Significantly these are categorically domesticated animals, apart from the misfit creatures of Grahame's Riverbank.

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<sup>199</sup> The idea of occupation and species as interchangeable sets of categories is something which is explored much further in Gareth Lovett Jones' *The Wind in the Pylons* (2003-4), which I shall discuss briefly later in the chapter.

We are told that ‘mastiffs strained at their leash and pawed the air to get at him’ (160). The second interaction occurs between Toad and the gaoler’s daughter, the first human to recognize Toad as an animal, but not necessarily regard him as an equal. She regards him instead with pity and also, perhaps, amusement. ‘You know how fond of animals I am’, she tells her father. ‘I’ll make him eat from my hand, and sit up, and do all sorts of things.’ (185) While the male human characters in the text seem either not to acknowledge or not to bother with the fact of Toad’s toadness, the women in the text make their recognition of his animality explicit. Peter Hunt notes that ‘While the gypsy, or the car drivers, or the judge, or the people in the railway station, see nothing but a rather buffoonish, short, fat, country gentleman (or washerwoman), the females see an animal. This could scarcely be more degrading for the animals – quite apart from the self-image that human males have by implication’.<sup>200</sup> This human perspective of Toad as *either human or animal*, depending on the gender of the human character perceiving him, implies a further ambivalence about whether Toad is simply human or animal at any one particular point in the narrative, since gender itself is presented as ambiguous and fluid in Grahame’s novel. Toad can thus be seen in these episodes as *both human and animal*, or even, perhaps, *neither/both*.

It is puzzling that the gaoler’s daughter is so willing to liberate the incarcerated Toad given that she keeps a ‘canary, whose cage hung on a nail in the massive wall of the keep by day...and was shrouded in an antimacassar on the parlour table at night’, as well as ‘several piebald mice and a restless revolving squirrel’ (185). She is certainly not the strongest of animal advocates, although we must not forget that in ‘The Open Road’, Toad’s gypsy cart is transporting ‘a bird-cage with a bird in it’ (41). The lines we might draw between compassionate animality and oppressive humanity become blurred by Grahame’s use of the caged bird motif. When the cart topples over and the bird is ‘sobbing pitifully and calling to be let out’ – the only moment in the text where the caged bird is given a voice – we never discover whether the bird is released. Rat makes an effort to right the cart, unassisted by Toad, who is entranced in the onset of his motorcar mania. In Toad’s prison-cell, however, Toad and the canary are placed at the same level in the species hierarchy. In the Wide World, the animal hierarchy is suspended, and the human-animal power binary reinforced. This threatening difference asserts itself most during Toad’s interactions with female characters, as Hunt observes in the quotation above.

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<sup>200</sup> Hunt (1994), p. 85.

However we might read the presentation of species and social class in the text, in the Riverbank these two elements are intrinsically linked. While it is true that at least for the four main characters that neither gender nor occupation feature as distinguishable or threatening categories in the sanctuary of the Riverbank, class differences still permeate the novel, and these are informed very much by the species of the animals belonging to each class. There is, of course, one more immediately obvious element which is indicative of class, and that is the overtly anthropomorphic trope of clothing.

### **Animals in Clothing**

While we have established that there are few, if any, elements of Grahame's text which can be interpreted merely one way, one particularly complex aspect of the text is Grahame's use of clothes, not least for the obvious fact that nonhuman animals do not wear clothing. This particularly odd stylistic element of the text, though not confined to *The Wind in the Willows* (Carroll, Potter and Jacques are amongst the many other authors who dress their nonhuman characters), is nonetheless massively open to interpretation. While there are several indicators as to what Grahame *might* mean or intend by his use of clothes, it is up to us as the reader to interpret their function, to *concretize*, to fill in the blanks and gaps.

Before we can try to understand how clothes function in the novel, we should first establish how clothes function in the human world and, more specifically, how they functioned in late-Victorian and Edwardian England. 'Clothes as artefacts', writes Diana Crane, "'create" behaviour through their capacity to impose social identities and empower people to assert latent social identities'.<sup>201</sup> This is true of Grahame's characters, especially Toad, who is empowered by the several disguises he wears over the course of his adventures to assert different (albeit false) social identities. From a class perspective, Crane summarises Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) theory of class reproduction and cultural tastes:

Within social classes, individuals compete for social distinction and cultural capital on the basis of their capacity to judge the sustainability of cultural products according to class-based standards of taste and manners. Cultural practices which include both knowledge of culture and critical abilities for assessing and appreciating it are acquired during childhood in the family and in the educational system and contribute to the reproduction of the existing social class structure.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Diana Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

There are two important points to note here. The first is the competition for social distinction ‘on the basis of the capacity to judge [...] according to class-based standards of taste and manners’. The second is that these capacities are ‘acquired during childhood’ and ‘contribute to the reproduction of the existing social class structure’. If we were to maintain the argument that *The Wind in the Willows* is a book for consumption by children, then Grahame’s attentive detail to class-based fashions serves to reproduce the existing structure by familiarising children with particular standards of taste and manners. This pertains especially to fashion because we notice these tastes a lot more when animals are wearing the clothes.

Besides the washerwoman disguise worn by Toad for a significant portion of his journey, the attire, on the whole, mirrors many middle- and upper-class male fashions of the period. Crane writes that

the upper and middle classes wore several different fashionable styles of jackets and suits, including knee-length frock coats, tailcoats, and lounge coats and used numerous accessories. It was a style of clothing in which the luxury and ostentation of the previous century had been replaced by a deliberate asceticism, but presenting a fashionable appearance required time, taste, and money. Specific types of jackets and trousers were appropriate for different types of activities and times of day. Some outfits were suitable for the city and others for the country. Accessories such as top hats, silk ties, silk and satin waistcoats, gloves, canes, and watches were also important elements in constructing the appearance of the middle- and upper-class man.<sup>203</sup>

Several of the items mentioned above appear at different points throughout Grahame’s novel. A particularly revealing passage is in Chapter VIII when, ‘To his horror’, Toad ‘recalled that he had left both coat and waistcoat behind him in his cell, and with them his pocket-book, money, keys, watch, matches [and] pencil-case’. Grahame asserts that these items are ‘all that makes life worth living, all that distinguishes the many-pocketed animal, the lord of creation, from the inferior one-pocketed or no-pocketed productions that hop or trip about permissively, unequipped for the real contest’ (200). It seems as if Grahame is attempting to communicate his knowledge of middle- and upper-class fashion to the reader in order to reinforce his own class identity, actual or otherwise. On a deeper level, however, Grahame is ascribing clothes with a particularly human power. Humans are the ‘lord[s] of creation’, while other animals are ‘inferior’, less evolutionarily advanced, and can only ‘hop or trip about permissively’.

Thus is the human costume in which Grahame dresses his River Bankers explicitly indicative of class affiliation. As Moore argues,

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

Grahame's animals appear as "Ourselves in Fur", suggesting the instructive animals of beast fable. Yet with the possible exception of Mr. Toad, who has no fur at all, these animals are not didactic in any obvious sense. Nor are Grahame's animals accurately general humanity in fur. Over the fur Grahame's animals are decked out with a significant wardrobe of plus fours, tweed jackets, white flannels, and lounging slippers, sartorially denoting a social class and its sensibility.<sup>204</sup>

Clothing exemplifies the plurality of the anthropomorphism of the text more than perhaps any other aspect. Fashion indicates not only social class but a heightened self-awareness, the postlapsarian shame in nakedness that only human beings seem to have acquired over time. As such, to attribute this trope to animals disrupts Grahame's own convictions regarding the incorruptible virtues of the animal kingdom.

The first mention of clothing in the text is Rat's compliment on Mole's attire in the first chapter: 'I like your clothes awfully, old chap...I'm going to get a black velvet smoking-suit myself some day, as soon as I can afford it' (17). This is a telling remark on the Rat's part as it would suggest that in some ways Mole is more affluent than Rat. However, Grahame's joke is that the black velvet smoking-suit is in fact Mole's natural fur. Gauger's footnote to the passage also reads that 'The term "little gentleman in black velvet" has political and historical implications. In 1702, William III's horse stumbled over a molehill at Hampton Court Park, throwing the king to his death. William's enemies, the Jacobites, thereafter toasted the mole as that "little gentleman in black velvet" (17). Read in this context, Mole's attire reveals less about the suggested class difference between Mole and Rat, and more about Grahame's use of old anthropomorphic nicknames for the animals which comprise the cast of his tale.

When Mole's attempt to steer the boat results in him plunging into the river, Rat hauls him out and 'wring the wet out of him' as we would wring out wet clothes (26). While we imagine Rat wringing out clothes at first, the fact that Mole is an animal with a coat of fur suggests that Rat is actually wringing the wet out of Mole's fur. The ambivalence as to whether Mole's fur is part of him or whether he wears it like a smoking-jacket is an interesting early instance in the text of clothing, like other anthropomorphic tropes, playing an ambiguous role. Perhaps Mole never undresses in the text but rather takes of his mole's skin. We can never really be sure, although the latter suggestion seems rather grisly for what is supposedly a children's book. There is little in the text, meanwhile, which is directly suggestive of the particularities of Rat's clothing. Although we might assume that, given his predilection for boating, his outfit would perhaps reflect this pastime, there are passages in the text which discourage the idea that Rat wears clothes at all. Much like the Otter, he is

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<sup>204</sup> Moore, p. 52.

‘more in the water than out of it most days’ (26). In the second chapter, Grahame opens the passage with the Rat annoying a group of ducks. He ‘would dive down and tickle their necks,’ we are told (30).

Costume plays an increasingly crucial role as the narrative progresses, however. In ‘The Wild Wood’, Rat is concerned about Mole’s whereabouts, and first notices his absence when he sees that ‘Mole’s cap was missing from its accustomed peg. His goloshes, which always lay by the umbrella-stand, were also gone’. Grahame not only directly mentions items of Mole’s attire, but pays particular attention to detail: ‘The goloshes were new, just bought for the winter, and the pimples on their soles were fresh and sharp.’ Rat’s deductions in this passage suggest an imitation of Sherlock Holmes. Clothing thus plays a crucial role as it is connected with performativity. Once Rat resolves to look for Mole, he ‘re-entered the house, strapped a belt round his waist, shoved a brace of pistols into it, took up a stout cudgel in the corner of the hall, and set off for the Wild Wood at a smart pace’. The Rat obviously wishes to appear threatening in the Wild Wood, of which he is sensibly wary, unlike the Mole. Gauger notes that the illustrators understood the implied imitation of Holmes: ‘Payne, Shepard, and Rackham have taken the roles a bit further by dressing the Rat in winter clothes that Sherlock Holmes would have worn’ (68)

The next time Grahame conveys the description of costume is in his account of the Badger. As Mole listens at Badger’s door, it ‘seemed [...] like some one walking in carpet slippers that were too large for him and down at heel; which was intelligent of Mole, because that was exactly what it was’ (78). The recognition of the sound that particular items of clothing make is presented as second-nature, ingrained in Mole’s set of sensory experiences. Of course, Grahame may have included this ‘intelligent’ observation of Mole’s to perpetuate the sense of the Holmes-Watson relationship suggested by the interactions between Rat and Mole in the previous chapter. Once they both enter Badger’s home, costume has become a much more integral element of the text’s imagery.

The first scene in which clothing takes on negative connotations for the animal occurs in ‘Mr. Toad’. As Mole, Rat and Badger deliberate what to do about Toad’s motorcar obsession and reckless behaviour, Badger remarks that ‘At this very moment, perhaps, Toad is busy arraying himself in those singularly hideous habiliments so dear to him, which transform him from a (comparatively) good-looking Toad into an Object which throws any decent-minded animal that comes across it into a violent fit’. To confirm Badger’s guess, they find him only paragraphs later emerging from Toad Hall dressed in ‘goggles, cap, gaiters, and enormous overcoat’, and ‘drawing on his gauntleted gloves’ (141). Gauger makes the

observation that Toad's costume here is likened, with reference to the gauntlet – 'a glove, usually of leather, that is covered with plates of steel, and was often worn as part of medieval armor' – to the attire of a knight (142). The irony is evident: Toad's attire evokes notions of nobility and valour, while his reckless and conceited actions behind the wheel of the motorcar – his steed, of sorts – achieve quite the opposite effect. A scene follows in which the other three heroes wrestle Toad to the ground and remove his clothing, amidst Toad's fruitless protests. With this act of stripping away the persona of the crazed motorist, it seems that 'A good deal of his blustering spirit [...] evaporated with the removal of his fine panoply' (143). The act of undressing, in this scene, serves as a direct means of reaffirming Toad's animal nature, of restoring the balance which keeps the human and animal worlds separate.

In another episode of the text, however, clothing allows Toad to escape from the confines of his prison-cell and return to the familiar comforts of his ancestral home, and to the world of the Riverbankers. As a washerwoman, perhaps the most comical of his costumes, Toad makes good his escape by train, barge, horse, and motorcar. When the gaoler's daughter proposes the disguise, Toad is rather offended by the suggestion that he and her aunt, the washerwoman, are 'very alike in many respects – particularly about the figure' (192). However, once the plan is set in motion and the escape underway, Toad, 'the consummate con man', as Kuznets describes him, 'does exploit his feminine role for all its worth; nevertheless, the dress he wears becomes virtually a flirtatious woman who castrates him: "a strange uncanny thing that seemed to hold his hands, turn all muscular strivings to water, and laugh at him all the time."'”<sup>205</sup>

Later in the text, Mole wears the same disguise in order to frighten the stoats. This is the first point at which human clothing is used by one animal to deceive another, rather than animals deceiving humans. Recalling Milne's remark about the Mole's identity, we might see this point in the penultimate chapter as possibly the most ambivalent portrayal of an anthropomorphic character in the text. We assume that Mole is a mole, while the stoats think he is not only human, but female, a presumption of identity facilitated merely by a washerwoman's attire. Only through his performance as a human and a woman does Mole intimidate the stoats. As an animal he would not have been able to achieve the same effect. What this passage also highlights is the performative nature of human interactions. Clothing not only informs people of a person's taste in fashion but also very often their occupation and gender. Differences of gender and occupation are presented in *The Wind in the Willows* as

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<sup>205</sup> Lois Kuznets, 'Kenneth Grahame and Father Nature, or Wither Blows The Wind in the Willows', *Children's Literature*, 16 (1988), p. 178.

exclusive to the human realm, and female animal characters hardly included at all. Tastes in fashion, meanwhile, are reserved for the Riverbankers. The costume element in the text has of course provided much nourishment for the imagination of the text's subsequent illustrators, as we shall now observe.

## **The Illustrators**

For a few years editions of Grahame's text remained, on the whole, unillustrated, apart from a few contributions from W. Graham Robertson, the first to illustrate the novel: 'Readers on both continents contented themselves with Grahame's language and the power of his descriptions. By the time Paul Bransom illustrated the eighth edition in 1913, the characters had long been fixed in the public imagination' (lxi). Unlike children's picture books, where the illustrations accompany the text from the first edition, *The Wind in the Willows* was initially read as a text composed almost solely with words before illustrators set to work on bringing their own imaginative force to the text. This fixing of scenes in the public imagination may have allowed an array of impressions to form amongst Grahame's readership, and nowhere would this have been more conspicuous than in the work of illustrators. Perhaps the initial period of the text's circulation, free of the influence on the reader of anything besides Grahame's language, meant that afterwards Grahame felt satisfied that the impressions of his characters and scenes that most readers had already made were impressions he had at least partially intended. 'Perhaps that is why', hazards Gauger, 'the work of subsequent illustrators started to morph from naturalistic animals to cartoonish animals in foppish clothing, who lived in human homes' (lxi).

The illustrations themselves were drawn by an array of artists, from the initial renderings of W. Graham Robertson to the popular illustrations of the 1932 edition by E.H. Shepard, and even more recent illustrations such as those of Patrick Benson in William Horwood's *Tales of the Willows*, sequels to the original text. A remark from Horwood in the author's note to *The Willows in Winter* (1993) testifies to the impact of the illustrator on subsequent readers of the text: 'So it was that as Grahame inspired Ernest Shepard in 1931, sixty years later Shepard inspired me.'<sup>206</sup> The inspiration that Horwood draws from Grahame is transmitted through the power of illustration, Shepard's in particular.

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<sup>206</sup> William Horwood, *The Willows in Winter* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 291.

One significant and fluctuating aspect of the text, and one that is further complicated by the various illustrations, is the ambivalence of size. Characters are often drawn disproportionately to the size of their particular species in reality. Gauger outlines the differences between the actual size of each species of animal and the representations of Grahame and his illustrators:

A real otter and a real badger are closer in size to a small-to-medium dog – weighing twenty to twenty-five pounds – while a water rat is considerably smaller, four pounds at most. A mole and a toad are closer to each other in size, weighing only ounces. While Grahame gives his characters their natural habitat and attributes very much like *wild* animals, they are all nearly the same size. Badger and Mole can use the same furniture in Chapter IV. Mr. Toad’s Gypsy caravan is the same size as a motorcar built by human beings. Likewise, Toad is able to steal a horse and, on two occasions, a motorcar.<sup>207</sup>

This fluctuation of size seems the logical result of a narrative in which each of the characters transgresses, in some way or another, the divide between species. To take one example of where this divide is most clearly transgressed in the tale, the passage in which Rat, Mole and Toad are travelling along the highway in Toad’s Gypsy cart undergoes significant changes in its depiction by illustrators. While Paul Bransom’s 1913 illustration depicts the three adventurers as small as they would appear in reality, especially in relation to the old grey horse pulling the cart, whose head is half hidden, Arthur Rackham’s illustration of 1940 depicts the relative size of the protagonists as equivalent to a human’s when compared to the horse and cart. Bransom’s animals are also unclothed and walk with a hunched posture, while Rackham’s are distinctly clothed and walk upright.

As Gauger notes, Paul Bransom’s ‘interpretation of the riverbankers is unique because his animals often appear in their natural habitats [...] In comparison with later editions by other artists, Bransom’s animals are primitive’.<sup>208</sup> Bransom had also illustrated Jack London’s *Call of the Wild* in 1910, and following his illustrations of Grahame’s text, Kipling’s *Just So Stories* in 1932. These are also works in which the boundary between the civilized and primitive states of animal characters fluctuates. Although this attention to the details of actual size and habitat would have appealed to some readers, Tess Cosslett remarks on the flexibility of representation afforded by Grahame’s text, as shown by later, less realistic representations:

E.H. Shepard’s famous illustrations were not added until 1930. In the same year, A.A. Milne’s stage adaptation, *Toad of Toad Hall*, began the convention that the animals would be played by human actors with minimal animal disguise (tails, ears, colouring). Shepard and Milne have thus established two

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<sup>207</sup> Annie Gauger, ‘The Illustrators of *The Wind in the Willows*,’ in Grahame, p. lxiv.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, p. lxxv.

fixed visual interpretations of the characters: as animals in clothes, and as humans in animal costume. What the unillustrated 1908 text would have done is to leave both these possibilities open, and allow for their merging and transforming one into the other.<sup>209</sup>

A.A. Milne himself speaks to the flexibility toward visualization that Grahame's text offers, and his remark questions the preconception some readers might hold that his characters should be consistent, especially with regards to size on the illustrated page. In reading the novel, he writes that 'it is necessary to think of Mole, for instance, sometimes as an actual mole, sometimes as a mole in human clothes, sometimes as a mole grown to human size, sometimes walking on two legs, sometimes on four. He is a mole, he isn't a mole. What is he? I don't know. And, not being a matter-of-fact person, I don't mind.'<sup>210</sup> Milne's reading of Mole suggests the *either/or* structure that is implicit in Grahame's anthropomorphism. We 'sometimes' read Grahame's characters in one way, 'sometimes' in others, but never both at once.

For some critics, however, the illustrations are a crucial, as well as a risky, element of representation. In a comparative assessment of the illustrations of E. H. Shepard and Arthur Rackham, Albert Borden Stridsberg shows more favour to the former illustrator on the grounds that his drawings convey a more pleasant character in each of Grahame's four heroes. In Rackham's illustrations, 'The characters lose their innocence; there is something lecherous about this hairy mole [...] and something crafty about this Rat'. Stridsberg concludes that Rackham's shortcomings lie with an excess of detail: 'Elaboration has definite perils.' The illustrations of Shepard, meanwhile, are 'simple. They give a comfortable sense of realism to the anthropomorphic conception of the animals which Grahame gives us.'<sup>211</sup> While Stridsberg and others may prefer the illustrations of Shepard because they are more faithful to the text, another reason is that they leave open to the reader the possibilities of interpreting the anthropomorphic imagery in the text mentally rather than purely from the illustrated page. Even the personality of the characters, argues Stridsberg, is altered with too much attention to detail. This statement suggests that while the anthropomorphism of the novel is complex, is it also ambivalent and subject to change in the reader's imagination. Illustrations play a significant role in perpetuating this ambivalent quality. While older readers of Grahame who have read editions illustrated by several artists – Payne, Bransom, Rackham, Shepard – will be able to make judgements of character which rely more upon

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<sup>209</sup> Cosslett, p. 172.

<sup>210</sup> A. A. Milne, *Toad of Toad Hall: A Play from Kenneth Grahame's Book The Wind in the Willows* (London: Methuen, 1940), p. vii.

<sup>211</sup> Albert Borden Stridsberg, 'On Illustrating Kenneth Grahame', *The Yale University Library Gazette*, 24.1 (1949), p. 31.

Grahame's original text, child readers picking up any one of these editions – one illustrated by Arthur Rackham, for example – might formulate initial impressions of the Mole as 'lecherous' or the Water Rat as 'crafty', to use Stridsberg's terms. We should take into account, however, that whether we prefer the 'innocence' of Shepard's illustrations or the 'lecherous' and 'crafty' qualities of Rackham's, such traits are equally anthropomorphic, thus emphasizing the plurality of roles that anthropomorphism can play, even within a single illustration.

Stridsberg credits Shepard with providing a 'comfortable sense of realism' in his illustrations. Whether one can apply the term 'realism' to Grahame's work, and in particular the work of the illustrators, is debatable. Casting the fact that his characters are mostly fashionable and loquacious animals aside, Grahame's whole arcadia is founded on a multitude of idealistic perceptions of social class, modernity, domestic values, and so on. Grahame himself changed his opinion several times regarding the representation of his characters in illustrations. Responding to Bransom's illustrations, which appeared in the 1913 edition of the text, Grahame remarks that he 'was very much relieved to find no bowler hats or plaid waistcoats [...] They have charm and dignity and good taste, and I should think the book will have a satisfactory sale'.<sup>212</sup> However, when Wyndham Payne came to illustrate the text in 1927, and, according to Gauger, depicted the riverbankers as 'bowler-hat wearing dandies', Grahame expressed that he was 'greatly amused' by Payne's 'spirited little drawings'.<sup>213 214</sup>

This shift in the author's own opinion regarding the representation of his characters in illustrated form could suggest one of two things. Either Grahame's conception of the Riverbankers shifted in response to the changing conceptions of the reader (including the illustrator), or he was simply uncertain as to how he wished them to be illustrated: 'Grahame himself is said to not to have wanted illustrations because of the difficulties they posed. Peter Green writes: "When asked specifically (apropos the escape on the railway train) whether Toad was life-size or train-size, he answered that he was both and neither: the Toad was train-sized, the train was Toad-sized, and therefore there could be no illustrations".'<sup>215</sup> It is no wonder, then, that there has been such variation in the illustrations of Grahame's text, not least in their treatment of proportion of size, when Grahame himself seemed uncertain as to

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<sup>212</sup> Grahame, p. lxvii.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, p. lxix.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, p. lxx.

<sup>215</sup> Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Prichard, eds. *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 575.

how the size of his characters in relation to humans or objects should be imagined. This particular aspect, then, is left completely open to the interpretation of the reader, and the many illustrations that are featured in editions of *The Wind in the Willows* attest very much to Hunt's claim that it is 'more than one kind of book' with which we are dealing.

### **The Animal Appetite**

The most sensual passages of the text occur with the promise of food, often enticing Grahame's characters with alluring smells. Unlike the portrayal of Mole's sense of smell in 'Dolce Domum', these smells are less pertinent to assumptions about animal experience. There are two particular instances in the Toad sequence where descriptions of food disrupt any sort of rigid human-animal binary. First is the detailed description of the hot buttered toast the gaoler's daughter brings to Toad in his cell. We are told that the smell 'simply talked to Toad', and reminds him of, among other domestic comforts, 'the purring of contented cats, and the twitter of canaries' (189). This recollection brought about by the smell of the toast reminds us that Toad enjoys the company of domesticated animal pets as much as the gaoler's daughter does. Animals hold an amusement value for them both.

The exploitation of animals for consumption and amusement is, therefore, practiced by both human and animal characters in Grahame's novel, introducing another level to the animal hierarchy, one that falls outside of the realm of class difference attributed to the Riverbankers and the Wild Wooders. When the gaoler's daughter returns with a fresh tray of toast, this exploitation of animals by other animals is explicated further. Toad tells her about 'the boathouse, and the fish-pond, and the old walled kitchen-garden; and about the pig-styes, and the stables, and the pigeon-house, and the henhouse' (190). This line of comment makes the caution of the gaoler's daughter in mentioning the keeping of pets to Toad almost unnecessary.

The second instance in which Toad reveals his taste for an animal diet is in Chapter X, when the barge-woman mentions to Toad that her husband is out with the dog hunting a rabbit for dinner. Toad finds this an apt topic of distraction: "'O, never mind about the washing", said Toad, not liking the subject. "Try and fix your mind on that rabbit. A nice fat young rabbit, I'll be bound. Got any onions?"' (241). Note that the acts of hunting game and attending to laundry are blatantly opposed, belonging to the masculine and feminine realms

respectively. This is also not the first time Grahame invokes the serving of rabbits with onions. Mole jeers at some rabbits in the first chapter – ““Onion-sauce! Onion-sauce!” ’ (3) – and the particular portrayal of rabbits as a potential food source adds a disturbing element to the seemingly civilized social relations of the River Bank – particularly since rabbits are still acknowledged as active members of that society. Rat calls them a ‘mixed lot’, while Mole and Otter have chance interactions with the same rabbit in Chapters III and IV respectively. That rabbits might factor into the diet of Grahame’s heroes adds a violent, perhaps even cannibalistic, undercurrent to inter-species relations. We should also note that Grahame has chosen as his protagonists species which have never been considered edible in English society, even if otter, badgers, and even moles, have been hunted for sport.

Later in Chapter X, Toad encounters more pleasant food smells when he meets the gypsy. Grahame describes them as ‘warm, rich, and varied smells – that twined and twisted and wreathed themselves at last into one complete, voluptuous, perfect smell that seemed like the very soul of Nature taking form and appearing to her children, a true Goddess, a mother of solace and comfort. Toad now knew well that he had not been really hungry before’ (249). That the ‘soul of Nature’ should be found in a stewing broth ‘made of partridges, and pheasants, and chickens, and hares, and rabbits, and peahens, and guinea-fowls, and one or two other things’, suggests that Grahame might not share the same concept of an ideal relation with nature as more hardline animal advocates. He displays no qualms about the consumption of animals to satisfy our palates, or the domestication of them for our amusement. The exploitation of animals by other animals for consumption is likely not something that would have occurred to Grahame as such. However, to a present-day reader, its presence in the text serves as another element which renders the anthropomorphism of the text ambivalent.

Peter Hunt offers a different reading of the food theme in Grahame’s novel, suggesting it has a substitutive function regarding the novel’s child reader: ‘Certain aspects of adult life are not particularly or immediately relevant to child readers or, it must be said, to the child-in-the-adult (sexual activity being the most obvious example); these aspects tend to be addressed in children’s literature by replacing them with things that are relevant to children.’ Food, claims Hunt, ‘is a most obvious choice for such a substitution’.<sup>216</sup> This is an interesting reading, especially if we examine the theme of food and consumption in Potter’s tales, which acquires a far more sinister undercurrent. Examples of the substitution of food

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<sup>216</sup> Hunt (1994), p. 93.

for more taboo elements in Potter include *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers* (1908), where the enormous rat Samuel Whiskers attempts to add Tom Kitten to a roly-poly pudding, and *The Tale of Mr. Tod* (1912), where the badger, Tommy Brock, kidnaps the litter of Flopsy and Benjamin Bunny and plans to cook them in the oven. Potter often couples consumption in her tales with predation. I shall discuss this further in the next chapter.

Gareth Lovett Jones has likewise taken up the theme of nonhuman consumption of animals in the text as a problematic element. In his contemporary, dystopian adaptation, *The Wind in the Pylons*, Grahame's Mole digs through a tunnel that takes him to the bleak future of 1990s England, in which nonhuman animals subject others to their will and endorse the relentless destruction of the natural world in favour of monopoly capitalist ideals. The subject of vegetarianism is brought up between the Mole of Grahame's present and the Badger of his future (presumably a descendent of Grahame's Badger), who leads the Animal Restoration Front (A.R.F.):

“You're not a vegetarian, Mole, by any chance?”

“O! No, not really. I do buy the occasional half a pound of sausages, or a bit of bone to make a soup. And when I go on one of Ratty's picnics, of course, I eat all sorts of lovely things – cold tongue, cold ham, cold beef, potted meat, O, all sorts of things.”

“Shame on you! – Although, of course, I apologise. I should not say that. You are from the Past, after all.”<sup>217</sup>

Here, the enticing comforts of food which are meant to appeal so strongly to Grahame's audience are corrupted by the realization of ethical concerns regarding animal consumption. Lovett Jones demonstrates an understanding that issues of vegetarianism were not as strongly pronounced in Grahame's (and Mole's) time, but also suggests that 'the Past' is the realm in which ignorance of the virtues of vegetarianism belongs. Lovett Jones' representation of a badger as a staunch vegetarian, however, is equally as anthropomorphic as Grahame's animals dining on cold ham and rabbit stew.

Returning to the original text, however, Hunt also notes a connection between the consumption of food and the points of adventure in the narrative: 'It does not take a great deal of analysis to see that all these meals mark – celebrate – the end of an adventure, a wholesome, comforting, and satisfying resolution.'<sup>218</sup> Since there are indeed numerous episodes – picnics, Christmas dinners, banquets – in which Grahame's characters enjoy an ample feast, it would be worth examining this element of the text in relation to Bakhtin's

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<sup>217</sup> Gareth Lovett Jones, *The Wind in the Pylons, Volume I* (Aylesbury: Hilltop, 2003), pp. 235-6.

<sup>218</sup> Hunt (1994), p. 93.

discussion of banquet imagery in Rabelais: 'Man's encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man's advantage.'<sup>219</sup> The transgressive element of eating discussed by Bakhtin bears particular relevance to the animal characters of Grahame's arcadia. 'The limits between man and the world are erased'; or, rather, between man/animal and the world. His animals conquer their trials through the act of devouring. Consumption is not a marker of exploitation, but the fruit of victory.

While we have explored the significance of such themes as food, clothing and class hierarchy, there is one more intriguing theme in Grahame's text, one that has been perceived by some critics as seeming out of place in the narrative. Pan, the human-animal hybrid god of nature from Roman mythology, occupies only one strange chapter in *The Wind in the Willows*. I shall now discuss the deeper significance of Pan as a symbol of the ambiguous relationship between the animal and the human which exists across multiple themes and on multiple levels throughout the novel.

### **Grahame's Representation of Pan**

Laura Zaidman summarizes the twofold function, in literature of the *fin-de-siècle*, of the goat god Pan, 'a figure whose savage animal lusts could encapsulate a post-Darwinian version of the natural world but whose divine status could simultaneously invest nature with a spiritual presence'.<sup>220</sup> Pan, the Roman god of nature, makes his appearance in Chapter VII of Grahame's text, 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn', a chapter which was omitted in some editions. Gauger explains that

After Algernon Methuen's death in 1924, Methuen started a series of abridged books from their backlist. Their aim was to corner the market in class readers for elementary schools. Grahame, however, had very different ideas about abridgement. But Pan has his place in the history of the book even now, long after the Disney treatments have erased neo-paganism from *The Wind in the Willows* and other children's literature. Indeed, when modern readers think of *The Wind in the Willows*, they imagine the pastoral country, not a pagan deity. For Grahame, one evoked the other; they were interchangeable.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1968), p. 281.

<sup>220</sup> Zaidman, p. 90.

<sup>221</sup> Annie Gauger, 'The Illustrators of *The Wind in the Willows*,' in Grahame, p. lxiii.

This attempt to erase Pan from the text in favour of placing emphasis on the more comic, daring narrative of Toad of Toad Hall is significant in itself. It is telling, first and foremost, of the context of late-Victorian England. Peter Green remarks that ‘This was the period that could find no room for the grotesque [...] Sometimes, as in [Aubrey] Beardsley, Pan’s healthy phallicism was subtly converted into urban pornography’.<sup>222</sup> Grahame’s neo-paganism was of a more harmonious kind, different from that of Lawrence or the omnipotent Pan of Arthur Machen’s chilling tale, *The Great God Pan* (1894). Machen’s Pan is conveyed as ‘a presence, that was neither man nor beast, neither the living nor the dead, but all things mingled, the form of all things but devoid of all form’.<sup>223</sup> By contrast, Pan represented for Grahame a primordial state of natural harmony and perfection, as shown in passages from *Pagan Papers*. In ‘The Rural Pan: An April Essay’, Grahame writes that the deity ‘may be found stretched on Ranmore Common, loitering under Abinger pines, or prone by the secluded stream of the sinuous [River] Mole, abounding in friendly greetings for his foster-brothers the dab-chick and water-rat’.<sup>224</sup> Thus Grahame’s earlier work anticipated not only the appearance of Pan in *The Wind in the Willows*, but also the emergence of the Water Rat and probably other such characters from the later work.

Pan consistently appears in Grahame’s work not only as a ‘wild but benevolent force’, but also a leisurely, carefree deity, stretching and ‘loitering’ about the countryside.<sup>225</sup> Lois Kuznets remarks that Grahame ‘emphasizes the god’s good-natured sensibility rather than his randy goatishness’, while Moore argues that Pan is ‘made safe for a middle-class Arcadia, where instinct is equivalent to decorum and custom’.<sup>226 227</sup> ‘He is the god of nature certainly, but not nature red in tooth and claw’, writes Moore. ‘He is the Pan of *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic paganism, though much tamer than anything in Beardsley or even Swinburne. As an aesthetic version of the goat god, this Pan finally does fit into the middle-class menagerie of well-dressed animals; the ideal Arcadian aesthete is not merely half man, half animal, but half animal, half ageing dandy. According to Moore, Grahame’s Pan is a hybrid of two seemingly opposed categories of being, and significantly he is *both* human *and* animal at the same time, rather than existing, as Grahame’s animals do, in a state of fluctuation.

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<sup>222</sup> Green, p. 140.

<sup>223</sup> Arthur Machen, ‘The Great God Pan’ in *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, ed. Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 188.

<sup>224</sup> Kenneth Grahame, *Pagan Papers* (London: J. Lane, 1898), p. 68.

<sup>225</sup> Annie Gauger, ‘The Illustrators of *The Wind in the Willows*,’ in Grahame, p. lxii.

<sup>226</sup> Kuznets (1988), p. 179.

<sup>227</sup> Moore, p. 58.

I would argue that although Pan is desexualised as Kuznets suggests, he does not necessarily conform as Moore suggests to a ‘middle-class menagerie’. In fact, the chapter as a whole was subject to abridgement precisely because the pagan deity did not conform. He is a benevolent Pan, yes, but he still pervades over the riverbank with the majestic aura that such a deity commands. Furthermore, we only perceive Pan in this singular environment. Perhaps Pan would appear much differently to the more dubious characters of the Wild Wood. He is certainly a Romantic Pan. It is Rat, the lover of verse, who is the most enchanted by the call of the deity, to which Mole is oblivious until they draw closer to the clearing where Pan stands guard over Otter’s son, Portly. However, we glimpse the vivid form of Pan through the eyes of the near-blind Mole:

[Mole] looked in the very eyes of the Friend and Helper, saw the backward sweep of the curved horns, gleaming in the growing daylight; saw the stern, hooked nose between the kindly eyes that were looking down on them humourously, while the bearded mouth broke into a half-smile at the corners; saw the rippling muscles on the arm that lay across the broad chest, the long supple hand still holding the pan-pipes only just fallen away from the parted lips; saw the splendid curves of the shaggy limbs disposed in majestic ease on the sward...(174)

From this description we can see that perhaps Grahame did not entirely succeed in leaving Pan free of sexual elements. His ‘rippling muscles’ and ‘splendid curves’ suggest otherwise. However, the vision of Pan vanishes from the memory of the River Bankers. Mole and Rat leave the encounter with no clear recollection of it, Pan having bestowed on them ‘the gift of forgetfulness’ (179).

Simons writes that Mole and Rat are ‘left in a curious, quasi-hallucinatory state somewhere between doubt and hope’.<sup>228</sup> It is the moment at which they escape the human elements which pervade the presentation of Grahame’s characters throughout the rest of the text: ‘Although Rat and Mole have hitherto been portrayed as members of the Edwardian leisure class [...] and, as such, as humans in animal guise, the text suddenly begins to explore an entirely different dimension of their experience and this dimension appears entirely related to their being as non-humans.’<sup>229</sup> This claim hinges on the enhanced capacity in humans to retain memories of experiences from their distant past, a capacity which, despite its distinct advantages in terms of mental development, leaves us vulnerable. ‘The human’, Simons remarks, ‘cannot survive the panic and lives with life blighted by memory. The non-human,

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<sup>228</sup> Simons, p. 121.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

on the other hand, is resiliently oblivious to the force of Pan and can continue after the dreadful encounter with the god'.<sup>230</sup>

This distinction between the ability of animals, and inability of humans, to forget, provides much of the foundation for the overarching nostalgia of Grahame's arcadia, and for the motives which lie behind the creation of a whole idyllic landscape around the ideal of the animal, in which everything exists in the present. Says Grahame in 'The White Poppy': 'Let black, then, rather stand for hideous memory: white for blessed blank oblivion, happiest gift of the gods!'<sup>231</sup> This dichotomy between memory and oblivion preempts the longing to forget which is implied in Ratty and Mole's encounter with Pan.

### **Rewrites of the Text**

Hunt remarks that 'A good indication of the extent to which *The Wind in the Willows* has been assimilated into world culture is the way in which, as with a folk tale, each new generation remakes the book'.<sup>232</sup> Nowhere is this more pertinent than in rewrites of the text. *The Wind in the Willows* has inspired several adaptations and sequels, including Jan Needle's *Wild Wood* (1981), William Horwood's quartet, *Tales of the Willows* (1993-9), and Gareth Lovett Jones's two volumes of *The Wind in the Pylons* (2003-4). I shall now discuss these three rewrites in particular, although it should be noted that several versions of the tale have appeared on stage, including A.A. Milne's *Toad of Toad Hall* (1929), and several animated and live-action versions have appeared on screen.

An important question to consider as we explore each rewrite in turn is: who is the readership of these rewrites? Are these books written for children in the same way as, supposedly, *The Wind in the Willows*? We might also consider that rewrites may have been produced by child readers of the original text now writing as adults – most likely two generations on from the time Grahame's novel was published – which adds a whole new dimension to our concretization of the text. Christian Moraru's comments on rewrites are also useful in helping us answer these questions. Moraru writes that

The re-storied story is no longer solely an index for mutations brewing elsewhere in the cultural field but becomes itself a tool the rewriter uses actively to determine cultural change according to his or her

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid, p. 123.

<sup>231</sup> Grahame (1898), p. 124.

<sup>232</sup> Hunt, p. 11.

“social agenda”. Rewriting continues to have “indicial” value and, as such, speaks to the increasingly multicultural positioning of our time’s rewriters. From these very locations they “wage” rewriting to polemically “update” a “familiar story”. To do so, they usually take on the representation of race, gender, or class in the “model” story and alter it, or [...] *other* it from “marginal” standpoints. It is in this sense that rewriting carries out a complex critical rereading of the rewritten narrative, fulfilling interpretive, aesthetic, as well as ideological and political functions.<sup>233</sup>

It will be shown from the discussion of the three rewrites that *The Wind in the Willows* is indeed a text ripe for interpretation. Jan Needle and Gareth Lovett Jones in particular each adapt Grahame’s animal hierarchy in interesting ways, and while Needle depicts an alternative perspective of the original narrative, Lovett Jones casts the narrative in an alternate timeframe, setting his tale in the England of the 1990s. William Horwood, on the other hand, attempts an imitation of Grahame’s style. Meanwhile, what all of these rewrites choose to exclude from the narrative is equally as important as elements of the original which they develop further, emphasizing the importance of reader-response theory and concretization in understanding the diverse interpretations of Grahame’s text.

(i) Class Conflict and Jan Needle’s *Wild Wood*

Grahame’s technique of depicting a class hierarchy in the River Bank and the Wild Wood with only a few major characters proves effective. We recognise that Mole belongs to the lower-middle class, Ratty to the bourgeoisie, Otter to the aristocracy, and Toad to the nouveau riche. Weasels, stoats and the other Wild Wooders, as implied from Rat’s disdain in the first chapter, belong to the working classes. It is no accident that the very notion of labour, or working for a wage, falls outside the everyday concerns of Grahame’s heroes. All four are animals of leisure, and money only becomes an issue in the text once Toad escapes from prison, and has to barter his way to freedom. Concerns of money also occur during human-animal interactions, notably Toad’s exchanges with the engine-driver and the gypsy. Jan Needle gives weight to economic concerns in *Wild Wood* (1981), a narration of *The Wind in the Willows* told from the perspective of Baxter Ferret, a working-class Wild Wooder. Many episodes in Grahame’s text which have little to no effect on the everyday lives of the River Bankers have a profound and often negative impact on the lives of the labouring Wild Wooders. Hunt outlines the conflict and limitations of the class perspectives conveyed in Grahame’s original and Needle’s adaptation: ‘Just as in *The Wind in the Willows* we rarely

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<sup>233</sup> Christian Moraru, *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 9.

hear the working classes speak for themselves, so in *Wild Wood* we rarely hear the “river bankers.”<sup>234</sup> Upon reading both texts, one is left, not with a sense of social injustice inflicted on the Wild Wooders, but rather a sense of frustration at the narrow perspective of both groups of protagonists.

However, while Needle’s treatment of the subject of class in this rewrite is intriguing in itself, *Wild Wood* never strays too far from the animal realm. There are no narrative threads which explore human-animal interactions in the Wide World, certainly nothing quite as complex as the Toad sequence in terms of exploring the ambiguity of the species divide. Perhaps the reason for this is that Needle wishes to draw the reader’s attention away from the human-animal divide and focus it more upon the hitherto untold class struggle of the Riverbank. Either way, many of the ambiguities that surface in Grahame’s text from a closer look at its anthropomorphic tropes are absent from Needle’s. The anthropomorphism in *Wild Wood* is overtly expressed in the emphasis on class struggle and issues of money and labour, which in turn explains the absence of humans from the text. Humans no longer serve the narrative function that Needle has instead attributed to her ferrets, weasels and stoats.

Despite the absence of human beings, it is important to discuss issues pertaining to the species hierarchy used in the texts. Needle’s protagonists are all mustelids, more or less. Mustelids include, however, not only the weasels, stoats and ferrets of the labouring animal class, but also badgers and otters, larger and more powerful specimens -- both in reality and within the fiction of Grahame’s class hierarchy. Physical superiority then, equates in Grahame’s world to socioeconomic superiority, which implies an interesting convergence of explicit anthropomorphism and a strong element of naturalism in Needle’s portrayal of species dominance through physical strength. The Wild Wooders display a particular resentment toward Badger, supposedly one of their own but a traitor to his class. Boddington Stoa, the militant revolutionary of Needle’s cast, thought Badger a ‘dour, grizzled old chap’ who ‘was letting us down by siding with Toad and his well-to-do cronies’.<sup>235</sup> Badger and Otter are, in a sense, the most threatening figures of both texts. In Grahame’s original, Otter is happy to beat a frightened rabbit for information about his friend’s whereabouts, enforcing discipline on a member of a species which Rat calls ‘a mixed lot’. ‘He was a pretty scared animal when I crept up behind him,’ says Otter, ‘and placed a heavy forepaw on his shoulder. I had to cuff his head once or twice to get any sense out of it at all’ (95).

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<sup>234</sup> Hunt (1988), p. 162.

<sup>235</sup> Jan Needle, *Wild Wood* (London: Scholastic, 1993), p. 63.

Even within the community of working-class Wild Wooders there exists a hierarchy. Again, size plays an important role in determining its structure. Describing Boddington Stoat, Baxter tells his listener, Willoughby, that

This one really was a most peculiar animal, even for a stoat. They tend to be the most serious-minded of the three of us, and to be quite honest, somewhat short on humour and a sense of fun. Some say it's because they're smaller than us ferrets, and resent it, and envious of the weasels because *they're* smaller still but always seem to come out on top.<sup>236</sup>

The way in which Needle portrays different attitudes toward social change suggests that the 'serious-minded' stoats of the text may represent the far-left of the working class, while the weasels and ferrets represent the more liberal centre-left, and are less desirous of radical change. These implied political alignments are more evident by the end of the text when Boddington travels to Manchester with Baxter's sister, Dolly, 'to help the animals there in the depressed industrial zones to fight for their liberty and suchlike'.<sup>237</sup> While Boddington's revolutionary fervour persists, the old class differences return and even grow larger, it seems: 'Some of the Wild Wooders got even more humble and kowtowish after Toad and Co recaptured the big house, while others, like the Chief Weasel say, became almost as posh as they were.'<sup>238</sup>

Another aspect of class difference in Needle's text is the names of the protagonists themselves. In Grahame's text, as Gaarden has explained, 'species names and personal names are the same'. Needle's characters, those of 'the mere ordinary multitudes', recognize this difference, but more from the perspective of the powerful few versus the impoverished many.<sup>239</sup> 'So we have a ferret, a weasel, and a stoat', says Wilson, the seafaring rat. 'But what do we call them? We call them Baxter, Radcliffe, Boddington. There.' Dolly Ferret perceives Wilson's meaning and clears the general confusion left in the wake of his observation: 'I think Mr Wilson means the names...I mean us poor people; there are so many of us, if you know what I mean. I mean, Mr Toad, now. *He* hasn't got a name, has he? Well, if he has I've never heard of it. Just plain Mr Toad.'<sup>240</sup> While Wilson and Dolly attempt to draw the attention of those listening to the fact that they are more powerful than the River Bankers in terms of numbers, they also convey an anxiety that they may indeed comprise an 'ordinary multitude' and not a community of individuals with individual personalities, needs and

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, pp. 243-4.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, p. 246.

<sup>239</sup> Gaarden, p. 43.

<sup>240</sup> Needle, p. 38.

desires. Wilson himself is a rat – the same seafaring rat from ‘Wayfarers All’, in fact – which disrupts the singular self of one of Grahame’s heroes, at least.

While Grahame and Needle present a clear hierarchy amongst the mustelids, there is a less marked hierarchy amongst the rodent group. Apart from Ratty, rodents are also generally depicted as socially inferior. In ‘Dolce Domum’, Mole, an insectivore, and Rat, a rodent (and technically a vole), take in a group of cold and hungry carol-singing field mice. As Gauger explains in her footnote, the field-mice ‘have less means than the Rat and even the Mole. They literally sing for their supper.’<sup>241</sup> While Grahame’s intention is to portray Rat and Mole’s actions as charitable, this episode evokes anger from Dolly Ferret, who believes the mice were being used and made to ‘perform like silly little monkeys’.<sup>242</sup> An expression used by Boddington Stoat as an exaggeration of their poverty is ‘poor as church mice.’ In both versions of the story, mice are the most impoverished species, and again, social inferiority is connected with meekness in size. While the field mice go hungry, however, Rat enjoys an extremely comfortable life by comparison. ‘That Rat bloke, for instance,’ says Wilson. ‘Never done a hand’s turn; always out and about in a blazer and a fancy cap; expensive little lightweight rowing boat – well how do you think that reflects on the rest of us rats?’<sup>243</sup> It is revealed in Needle’s text that Rat even ‘kept a couple of servants’.<sup>244</sup>

It is intriguing that an alliance is forged between Toad and the Chief Weasel following Toad’s recapture of Toad Hall. As I have discussed, toads have historically evoked repulsion and disgust. Weasels, meanwhile, have been associated with cowardice and treachery. The medieval bestiaries conveyed rather bleak portrayals of weasels and Grahame and Needle both seem at least generally aware of this centuries-old disdain. Those that are firmly established in positions in power by the end of the narrative, then, belong to species of animals which have long been perceived as morally wicked and corrupt. Gareth Lovett Jones explores this coalition of power between the toads and the weasels in *The Wind in the Pylons*, while also offering a raw satire of recent British politics. The class struggle, in Lovett Jones’s adaptation, is taken to its farcical but disturbingly familiar conclusion. Before I discuss Lovett-Jones’ work, however, I shall first examine the serial of sequels written by William Horwood.

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid, p. 128.

<sup>242</sup> Needle, p. 118.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

(ii) William Horwood's *Tales of the Willows*

While Needle's adaptation invites new perceptions of the class affiliations which emerge from a reading of Grahame's novel, William Horwood's arguably opportunistic sequels remain partially within Grahame's arcadian ideal while testing its limits at the same time. Horwood retains much of the tone and feeling of Grahame's work, although there are several ways in which his sequels depart from the familiar and comfortable River Bank. First, Horwood explores the subject of age. Grahame's characters age over the course of the *Tales of the Willows*, and the River Bank bears witness to a new generation of moles, rats, badgers and toads. Horwood, deliberately I would argue, is lacking in originality when it comes to naming the animals of the younger generation. Mole's nephew, simply called Nephew, is the first we encounter. In *Toad Triumphant* (1995), we are introduced to Badger's grandson, again simply addressed as Grandson by the River Bankers, and Toad's French cousin and later ward, the Count d'Albert Chapelle, later called Master Toad. In *The Willows and Beyond* (1996), even Rat adopts the son of the Sea Rat from the original story, who assumes the name of Young Rat. Note that none of these relations are direct offspring, which comfortably negates the subject of sex; a negation of which Grahame may have approved. It also appears that, contrary to Needle's tendency to name her characters, Horwood avoids naming them altogether. However, with the introduction of new characters of the same species as the original four, this task proves increasingly difficult, and exposes the limitations of the arcadia Grahame depicts. Naming is perceived as central to our individual human identity. While Grahame's original characters are well-established, and Toadness and Moleness are very clearly affiliated with single figures (Toad and Mole), Horwood's younger generation do not attain the same status as recognized individuals within the story, serving as accessories to the narratives of their elders. It is only when the original four embark on the final journey into Beyond that the younger generation assume the names of their elders, and history repeats itself.

More poignant in Horwood's series of sequels is the subject of death. While death is amongst those matters in Grahame's novel forbidden by 'animal-etiquette', Horwood's River Bankers consider and converse on the subject more openly. In *The Willows in Winter* (1993), Mole attempts to cross the frozen surface of the river to reach Rat's home, and falls through the ice. While Mole is lost for some time and presumed dead, he wakes later in the novel from a dream in which he has glimpsed Beyond, which increasingly throughout the tales assumes connotations of a Christian heaven. Beyond is so enticing that Mole almost resents

returning to the living world: ‘That world he had come out of felt gone forever, and he missed it already; and the real world into which he had come did not seem to want him at all.’<sup>245</sup>

More significantly, we are told that Pan once again makes his presence known to Mole. Although Mole awakens with lapses in memory similar to his first encounter with the deity, these lapses seem less permanent, and one is left with the impression that Mole has begun to retain memories, contradicting Simons’ assertion that Grahame’s characters are spared human vulnerability in their ability to forget:

If he saw that Being who had saved him beckon him once more, if he journeyed back to that place wherein he had almost melded and become part of something far greater than himself or anything he knew, and if now he was only able to observe it as if he was but a temporary visitor whose time had not yet come to be a resident – he *did not quite remember* it when he awoke the following dawn to the soft chucking of mallard ducks, and the rustle and chirp of coots down by the river, whose flow he could hear nearby as a sure and purposeful rippling, but further off as a torrential roar.<sup>246</sup>

The desired wholeness with nature that comes across in this passage is indicative of a pantheistic view of life amongst the Riverbankers. However, while this pervading pantheism communicates a deeper, more meaningful sense of nature and our relationship with it, it also lays bare the realities of life and death. The Riverbankers are no longer protected, no longer oblivious to the worldly forces which govern their existence, although the sequels end by transporting the Riverbankers to another arcadian space which essentially becomes the River Bank in its renewed, almost original form.

Another aspect of the original which Horwood explores is Rat’s connection with the river itself. At several points over the course of the sequels Rat ‘communes’ with the river, and this is described in some detail: ‘It was the Water Rat, sitting with his hind paws dangling in the icy water, though he did not seem to notice that at all. His head was high and his eyes were closed and he seemed to be scenting at the air. Then he bent his head sideways and a little lower as if he was listening to the river’s sounds; whilst his front paws were gesticulating gently, in little fits and starts.’<sup>247</sup> The way in which this act of communion is described likens it to a possession of sorts, much like the overwhelming urge that takes hold of the Water Rat following his encounter with the Sea Rat in ‘Wayfarers All’. It is as if nature commands an irrevocable hold over the animals of the River Bank, and they are ultimately subject to nature’s will rather than possessing their own. Although the Water Rat can master the language of the river to a certain extent, he admits that sometimes ‘she’ eludes him: ‘One

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<sup>245</sup> Horwood, p. 100.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, p. 101; my emphasis.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

thing she has never failed to do is to talk to me, though sometimes I found it hard to listen and understand what she said.'<sup>248</sup> This ambivalence in the Water Rat's ability to communicate with the river suggests that the general status of not only the Water Rat but the other characters as 'animal' is in turn complicated.

Horwood's sequels should not only be considered alongside Grahame's text and other rewrites, but also alongside contemporary animal tales, especially those novels following in the wake of *Watership Down*, a novel which conveys the active destruction of an animal habitat by humans, and the subsequent escape and struggle for survival which ensues, as we shall see in Chapter 5. After Adams' novel was published, animal tales were suddenly stripped of their arcadian quality. Animals are threatened by humans whether or not they remain within the confines of their community. Deborah Stevenson remarks that while Horwood emulates the stylistic elements of Grahame's text, 'Orthodoxy and cold reality have invaded the previously untouched River Bank'. She goes on:

While this shift does not necessarily turn Horwood's book into a work for adults, it does result in a different kind of children's book from Grahame's. No matter how hard it tries not to be, *The Willows in Winter* is a product of its time, a time that includes children's books such as Brian Jacques' Redwall series (1986-), whose world of animal characters, in its violence and political overtones, is closer to *Animal Farm* than *The Wind in the Willows*. Horwood cannot evade the children's literature that *is* in order to produce more of the children's literature that *was*.<sup>249</sup>

Stevenson draws attention here to a problematic element of fictional rewrites in general, namely that it is very difficult to emulate the style of a different time period and achieve the same effect on the reader. Horwood's task would have been especially hard as he was writing his sequels in the wake of *Wild Wood*, where many of the social constructs of the Riverbank had been challenged in the narrative.

(iii) From Arcadia to Dystopia: *The Wind in the Pylons*

Written nearly a century after the original tale, Gareth Lovett Jones sets his two-volume adaptation in the England of the 1990s, at which the Mole arrives through a time-tunnel. In the place of the arcadia envisioned in Grahame's tale, Mole finds himself in a future controlled by monopoly capitalism and wider social gulfs than Grahame's or Needle's texts convey. The first character Mole meets is a rat named Gordon R. Rette, a middle-class

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>249</sup> Deborah Stevenson, 'The River Bank Redux? Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* and William Horwood's *The Willows in Winter*', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 21.3 (1996), p. 129.

suburban animal who has become embroiled in this ruthlessly competitive society, who even understands its nature, but feels powerless to affect change. Lovett Jones twists the theriomorphic expression ‘rat race’ to describe this society: ‘It’s always been a roach-race, obviously,’ exclaims Rette. ‘But now – believe me – it’s a *roach-race*.’<sup>250</sup> Over the course of the first volume of Lovett Jones’ adaptation, Mole meets figures that parallel the Rat, Toad and Badger of the original. One of the villains of the piece is Mr. Wyvern-Toad, head of Toad Transoceanic. Wyvern-Toad embodies the ideals of late capitalism at their most extreme. When Mole remarks on the damage that industrialization and pollution inflicts on the environment, the Toad insists that the ideals of vast economic growth and globalisation are the results of a natural, evolutionary process: ‘Isn’t it the case *in nature* that territory must always be extended outward, outward, outward?’<sup>251</sup> This runs contrary to the ideals of the Badger that Mole encounters later in the text. Like Mole, the Badger, very likely a descendent of Badger from the original, is opposed to capitalism, and to the evils – poverty, pollution, cruelty to animals – which result. On addressing a fox his company have rescued from the hunt, the Badger exclaims: ‘Nature is never ‘fair’ exactly, is she, Fox? No, no. But so far as any of us here happen to know, does Nature *actively organise* unfairness? Does she set an organising, methodical intelligence to work in pursuit of single victims? [...] Not exactly Nature’s way, is it?’<sup>252</sup>

The Badger of the 1990s leads the ‘Animal Restoration Front’ of Weaselworld, which is ‘dedicated to direct action aimed at undermining the processes of Weaselmind at every possible point of contact’.<sup>253</sup> ‘Weaselmind’ is a term employed throughout the text which refers to one or all hegemonic power structures. ‘Weaselmind’ could translate as ‘capitalism’, ‘colonialism’ or ‘patriarchy’, just as much as it could imply ‘racism’ or – more likely in this case – ‘speciesism’. What we know of Weaselmind is that, as the Otter remarks, it ‘admits of no boundaries, is a force that *mimics* Nature, manipulating what it finds there, reproducing it in ever more grotesque and destructive shapes, moving ever onward towards a single end’.<sup>254</sup>

Lovett Jones develops the species hierarchies of the original and Needle’s adaptation even further. In the political sphere of Weaselworld, the toads and weasels have formed the ‘Grand Old Toad and Weasel Alliance’ (GOTWA), which is otherwise known as the ‘To-We Party’ (‘To’ and ‘We’ being abbreviations of ‘Toad’ and ‘Weasel’ respectively). The

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<sup>250</sup> Lovett Jones (2003), p. 75.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, p. 106.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, p. 209.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, p. 221.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, pp. 223-4.

abbreviated name for this coalition is a blatant satire of the Conservative (Tory) party in British politics. Terms like ‘Priestess’ and ‘Priestess-worship’ are bywords for ‘the Iron Lady’ and ‘Thatcherism’. Moreover, political beliefs in general seem to correlate with a particular species mindset, evident in political terms like ‘One-Nation Toadyism’ and ‘Ferre-Weselo-Stoatist’ elements. These animals are so far removed from Nature that they believe they are able to manipulate Nature for their own gain. It is not nature that determines an animal’s species – it is a mindset, a political orientation. During the conversation between Wyvern-Toad and the weasel politician, Gibbert Phangachs, notions of animal nature and the nature of an animal’s species are eclipsed by occupational and class identities: ‘I am a bizz’mal a very long way before I am a toad, Gibbert, and it surprises me a little that I should have to remind you of that.’<sup>255</sup>

Clothing is an element of the text which explicitly determines whether an animal is seen as ‘a fellow-animal’ or a creature of ‘the lower orders’. When the Badger perceives that the Mole can establish communication with the fox, which lacks articulate speech, he remarks: ‘Now that’s not what you normally expect of the Clothed and Worded, is it? Not even moles!’<sup>256</sup> Other notions of species difference explored in the text include language and consciousness. Lovett Jones uses the example of the fox hunt to demonstrate how these differences form the basis for speciesist prejudice. The badger interrogates a certain Major Tode about his reasons for fox-hunting:

‘Well then, tell me, Major – you’re not troubled by any personal doubts, I suppose, about hunting your fellow-animals?’

‘A fox is not a fellow-animal!’ replied the Toad, spitting out the words as if it disgusted him to speak of them.

‘Oh? I see. In what way is he different?’

‘That is a ludicrous question! *It* is a creature of the lower orders. *It* is a member of the great Unclothed. It lacks words. And amongst the furred, as we all know, it is a sub-animal, the lowest of the low. What is more, it is a cunning, vicious creature. It will kill simply for pleasure, and not because it needs to eat – ask anyone who keeps a hen-run. And if we did not control them, they would be everywhere. Only scruffnecks who live in holes beneath the ground could possibly fail to know this.’<sup>257</sup>

Here we encounter typically speciesist arguments (the fox lacks culture, the fox lacks language), as well as anthropomorphic projections of immorality (the fox is cunning). The discrimination demonstrated in such passages as these, however, might be seen as being more akin to racism. Because the inhabitants of Weaselworld are all nonhuman animals, acts which we would perceive as speciesist equate to acts of racism; animals are prejudiced against one

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid, p. 133.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, p. 205.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, p. 206.

another on the basis of species just as humans show prejudice on the basis of race and ethnicity.

One feature of the ‘true’ animal that Lovett Jones retains from Grahame’s own perceptions of animal nature is their inherent honesty. The animals of Weaselworld, however, have regressed from their true nature. They have become practised liars and forgotten the difference between truth and falsehood. Mole, the only character from the time of Grahame’s original, is ultimately the only character that remains true. Badger is another exception to the rule of the dishonest Weaselworld. He explains to Mole that ‘Weaselmind *infects* other animals. Any animal can lie. Any animal can (with an effort) hold opinions without thought, convince himself that what he does is “in truth” all for the good [...] It’s how they carry on – by believing that in some way all of this is good. It’s the first, the last, the most necessary lie’.<sup>258</sup>

Mole unknowingly infects other animals around him with the inability to lie, disarming their power as speaking agents. This occurs in several passages, including the A.R.Fs interrogation of Major Tode and Wordselwese. Wordselwese, physically unable to resist telling the truth, exclaims:

‘Yes, damn you – *damn* you, why shouldn’t I say it? – it is the chase, the chase, the *chase!* It is the glory of the kill, the kill, the *kill!* Oh, we spend far too much of our lives trapped inside clothes [...] in shirts, in ties, in suits, in Harris Tweeds, in perma-press Cavalry Twills! In the chase you become truly animal again – claw down the long, dark, windy tunnel to your never-satisfied inner being, your true, your ferocious weasel-heart! You can destroy for the sheer bloody joy of destroying, yes, and the longer it lasts the better! – Don’t you understand? We *need* to kill! We *need* the sight of blood, we need that ravening joy, that rag-doll death, those staring death-masks lying in the long green grass, that ritual, that sacrifice, and the wild, cruel laughter that always follows on! You don’t know, you don’t know – oh, it is so *good* to laugh like that!’<sup>259</sup>

This is one of the most revealing passages in the text about what it means to be an animal in Weaselworld. Lovett Jones suggests here that there is a viciousness at the heart of capitalism which is ‘animal’ in a pejorative sense. Animality is likened more to the indifferent animal violence of Lawrence than the harmless, childlike innocence that defines Grahame’s animal. Lovett Jones brilliantly undermines this outburst from Wordselwese with the cold reaction of the cold-blooded Major Tode: ‘“I have to say,” he observed with a curl of the lip, ‘we toads are quite above such emotions. Have been for centuries’.’<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid, p. 227.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, pp. 216-17.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, p. 217.

*The Wind in the Pylons* could be perceived as being, as Simons' claims of Grahame's text, 'subverted by a different kind of narrative'. The presence of the god Pan once again pervades the text, although the ongoing conflict between Pan/Nature and the forces of industrialization is intensified, even in the persistent use of the expletive "Pandammit", a common term of blasphemy in Weaselworld. When Mole challenges Wyvern-Toad, claiming that his endorsement of pollution 'injures Pan', he is met with ridicule. "'Pan?'" he snorted. "Now *there's* a quaint concept! I'm afraid, Mr Mole, that 'Pan's' well-being is not very high on the Mollusk Prioritization-Paramountix-Profiles. No, no, not on the current PPPs, I'm afraid! Even if one does sometimes fear...But what am I saying?"<sup>261</sup> Even for Wyvern-Toad, who grows uneasy at the mention of Pan, reveals that even in Weaselworld the god of Nature still holds sway over some animals. We can also see that by this time Pan is no longer the stuff of dreams and memory. He is very real in this dystopia, and Lovett Jones laces his tale with passages in which Pan appears or seems to appear.

Nor is Mole's original encounter with the god forgotten after he feels his presence a second time. 'Pan had been simply *there*', we are told. 'Not in person, of course: not as he had been on that one occasion. But he had been there even so, as a force informing all that Mole saw about him, in the living interconnectedness of growing things'.<sup>262</sup> Mole calls upon Pan in his despair on several occasions and invokes his name in wishing other animals well. He also invokes it in threats to Pan's enemies. To one such animal, a Mr. Pottage-Ferret, he says, ' "Pan will stop you", [...] and [he] meant it. Pan, the god of diversity, *would find* some way to break this tyranny of sameness. He would; he must'.<sup>263</sup> Mole's great realization at the end of the second volume is that he must bring Rette and Wyvern-Toad to the island on which he first encountered Pan, in the hope that a similar encounter will reform the Toad and deter him from his destruction of Nature. However, they are met with a ferocious storm, and no sign at all of Pan.

Mole's plan ultimately fails, and he resolves to leave Weaselworld forever when he returns to the River Bank through the time-tunnel that brought him there at the start. As he emerges at Mole End once more, the entirety of his time in Weaselworld is erased from his memory, leaving only the faintest of traces, much like his first encounter with Pan. He is spared the terrible knowledge of future events and allowed to live according to his animal nature, oblivious to the outside world. What Pan's presence in this rewrite demonstrates is the

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid, p. 105.

<sup>262</sup> Lovett Jones, *The Wind in the Pylons, Volume II* (Aylesbury: Hilltop, 2004), p. 80.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, p. 104.

wrath of nature in the face of its own destruction, a far cry from the benevolent nature of the River Bank. While it is impartial, nature in *The Wind in the Pylons* is still retributive. This, however, mirrors the corrupted nature of many of the animals in Weaselworld. Mole's forgetting essentially ties off a narrative loop and restores Grahame's arcadia to its original state. Weaselworld, like Pan before it, is less than a recollection. Why does Lovett Jones opt for this ending? Although it seems like we are cheated a little by the lack of a resolution in Weaselworld, in actuality the message of this seems to be that we are still searching for one in our own world. Thus, the resolution cannot come to fruition, and so the narrative returns inevitably to the arcadia, to the time before.

## **Conclusion**

In a manner, this return to Grahame's arcadia pertains to Needle and Horwood's rewrites as well. Needle's is an alternative perspective but caught in the trappings of the same narrative, and resulting in the same outcome. Horwood's, meanwhile, perpetuates the River Bank through another generation of Mole, Rat, Badger and Toad. Why do these narratives choose not to disturb the status quo of the River Bank in their resolutions? Horwood's sequels conclude with a new generation of Mole, Rat, Badger and Toad assuming the same names, and while the old River Bank of Grahame's novel is destroyed, the characters find a new home, a new River Bank very like the old. Thus, there is a return to the status quo of the River Rank through renewal rather than regression through time as in Lovett Jones' work. Is this return to the status quo characteristic of rewrites of anthropomorphic fiction, or does it demonstrate something unique in Grahame's novel? This is a difficult question to answer, because there are few rewrites of anthropomorphic fiction, the most notable being the ones which have already been discussed. One significant reason for this is that most anthropomorphic fiction today, in terms of the quantity of publications, has been written within the last forty years. William Horwood, A.R. Lloyd, Brian Jacques, Robin Jarvis and Kathryn Lasky are among the many authors who have written such works, all of them series. I would argue that this surge may have prompted writers like Needle and Lovett Jones to return to *The Wind in the Willows* as the 'model' story. What may also have prompted the rewrites of this one text in particular is its pre-eminence within the category of anthropomorphic prose fiction. However we approach the novel, Grahame has set a precedent

which other anthropomorphic tales struggle to attain. They lack somewhat the ‘essential schizophrenia’ with which Hunt credits the novel.<sup>264</sup>

While the anthropomorphism of the novel reveals little about animality, except as Grahame conceives of it – which is very much in the light of how he conceives childhood – it is pointless to judge the book on this basis alone. In doing so we risk regurgitating one of the original criticisms of the text, offered shortly after its publication by an anonymous reviewer in *The Times*: ‘As a contribution to natural history the work is negligible.’<sup>265</sup> It is because of the very plurality which permeates its narrative elements that *The Wind in the Willows* is so widely recognised, even if it not recognised primarily as an anthropomorphic tale. The tales of Grahame’s contemporary, Beatrix Potter, meanwhile, depict a world in which overly anthropomorphic tropes exist alongside more naturalistic elements in a ‘dual’ anthropomorphism. The next chapter will explore this duality in Potter’s work and how it departs further from the either/or structure of Grahame’s “humanimals” and depicts a both/and structure of relation between the human and animal elements within each of her own “humanimal” characters.

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<sup>264</sup> Hunt, p. 18.

<sup>265</sup> Cited in Haining, p. 17.

## Chapter 4

### **Anthropomorphism and the Double Perspective: The Tales of Beatrix Potter**

Potter and Grahame's "humanimal" narratives share many obvious characteristics. Both feature animals living in human dwellings and wearing human clothes, both convey a dichotomy of rural and urban life, seemingly disfavoured the latter, and most importantly both explore the ambivalent boundary between the human and the animal, with the result that the anthropomorphism is of an inconsistent and often contradictory nature. However, while the previous chapter addressed notions of concretization and the implied reader, and the *plurality* of meanings in the anthropomorphism of Grahame's novel, this chapter will explore the *duality* of anthropomorphism in Potter's tales. While the term *plurality* implies multiple meanings and interpretations, it does not set a limit upon the extent of these interpretations. *Duality*, on the other hand, implies doubleness rather than multiplicity, and the result is that Potter's "humanimals" are depicted as their particular species as well as the child, adult, male or female human counterparts in a *both/and* structure of relation between the animal and human aspects of each character.

Potter's uses of each of the anthropomorphic techniques that are also evident in *The Wind in the Willows* are twofold. For example, one distinguishing element of Potter's work compared with Grahame's is its equal fusion of text and illustration, of verbal and visual anthropomorphism. In many ways her tales are also examples of *iconotexts*. The term *iconotext* denotes, in relation to the picturebook, 'an inseparable entity of word and image, which cooperate to convey a message'.<sup>266</sup> It is with this notion of the iconotext and the text-image relationship in the foreground that this chapter will explore the ways in which Potter's animal characters are anthropomorphised and how each anthropomorphic technique conveys a dual meaning. The discussion will therefore oscillate between examples from the text and the illustrations in each section.

Harking back to John Simons' categories of anthropomorphism, Simons groups Potter's work under the umbrella term of 'trivial anthropomorphism', which comprises 'texts which treat animals as if they were people but do not seek to use this strategy to point any moral or teach any example [...] it does not press against and force us to question the reality,

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<sup>266</sup> Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* (New York; London: Garland, 2001), p. 6.

or otherwise, of the boundary of the human and the non-human'.<sup>267</sup> The very term 'trivial' is dismissive in itself, and as we shall see, Potter's work is neither free of didactic meaning nor lacking in passages which force the reader to question species boundaries. Nor does Potter simply write about her animal characters as if they were human. Several critics have remarked that while Potter employs many overtly anthropomorphic techniques, this does not divert from a naturalistic portrayal of animals. However, in many cases these arguments are self-contradictory. Peter Hollindale writes that 'Accuracy may be suspended in the interests of anthropomorphic comedy, but it is not flouted'.<sup>268</sup> When Potter uses anthropomorphism, 'she goes with the grain of the animal, not against it'.<sup>269</sup> How do we distinguish between 'suspended' and 'flouted' accuracy in the portrayal of animal characters? In a similar vein, Rebecca Luce-Kapler claims that 'Never is the anthropomorphism exaggerated or grotesque'.<sup>270</sup> What an 'exaggerated or grotesque' form of anthropomorphism would look like is unclear, but the main reason that Potter's anthropomorphism seems so distinct is her interest in, and attention to, natural history. This interest, writes Hollindale,

expressed itself in two equally important ways. On the one hand there is the fondness for real, individualised animals as a kind of people – the childhood pets, and those of adult life, with names and characters immortalised [...] And, simultaneous with that, the scientific, detached observation, the dissections, the forensic skill, the ruthlessly practical farming. There is here a consistent double perspective which can make the brown rat, Samuel Whiskers, both a person and a pest.<sup>271</sup>

The notion of 'consistent double perspective' is significant, and I shall return to this notion throughout the chapter. It is this double perspective which inspires such contradictory statements as those offered by Hollindale and Luce-Kapler in criticism of Potter's work.

A significant factor in determining these contradictions is Potter's very accurate and naturalistic watercolour drawings, not just of animals but of flowers, fungi, fossils and all manner of subjects in the natural world. Her artwork, praised for its meticulous attention to detail, sets a precedent for accuracy. Anthropomorphic techniques, such as the use of clothing to dress her animals, might be seen to disrupt the attention to accuracy and detail that Potter's illustrative style demonstrates, and critics might feel bound to excuse or understate her use of anthropomorphism against the backdrop of her naturalistic illustration. Linda Lear remarks that 'Beatrix Potter had in fact created a new form of animal fable: one in which

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<sup>267</sup> Simons, p. 119.

<sup>268</sup> Peter Hollindale, 'Aesop in the Shadows', *Signal*, 89 (1999), p. 125.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid*, p. 126.

<sup>270</sup> Rebecca Luce-Kapler, 'The Seeing Eye of Beatrix Potter', *Children's Literature in Education*, 25.3 (1994), p. 144.

<sup>271</sup> Hollindale, pp. 116-17.

anthropomorphized animals behave always as real animals with true animal instincts and are accurately drawn by a scientific illustrator. The gap between animals and humans in Potter's work is so narrow that we scarcely notice the transition between the two'.<sup>272</sup> Taking an almost opposite stance to John Simons, Lear's statement ignores almost any anthropomorphic qualities pertaining to Potter's characters, who certainly do not behave as 'real' animals with 'true' animal instincts much of the time. While Potter's drawings do indeed reflect the accuracy characteristic of the scientific illustrator, Lear is misguided in assuming that we 'scarcely notice' the transition across the boundary between the human and the animal. The transition across species lines is at times very transparent in Potter's work, facilitated by such anthropomorphic techniques as illustrating her animals at times clothed and at other times unclothed, at times moving on all fours and at other times moving on their hind legs. These transitions are, admittedly, less jarring than the more explicit transitions in *The Wind in the Willows*, and this may support the argument that Potter's "humanimals" are determined by a *both/and* structure of relation. It is not a simple process of a character *becoming* animal or human, it is about always being both and manifesting alternating degrees of humanity and animality.

There are several elements of Potter's personal life which suggest a detached attitude towards animals, and this is reflected in her tales. Her younger years were often preoccupied with studying animals in a number of ways, from merely observing to stuffing dead animals or boiling them in order to examine their skeletons. Whalley cites as an example a letter Potter received from her brother Bertram:

'I suppose from what you say you will have to let lose [sic] the long-eared bats, as they will not eat meat. It is a great pity they are not easier to feed. As for the other, I think it would be almost wrong to let it go, as we might never catch another of that kind again. If he cannot be kept alive as I suppose he can't, you had better kill him, & stuff him as well as you can.' Nothing sentimental about either Bertram or Beatrix in their attitude to animals here! Moreover, Bertram reminds Beatrix to measure the animal carefully before she stuffs it, and he goes into considerable detail about the actual stuffing itself. No wonder they both fitted in to the life of breeders and farmers when they grew up.<sup>273</sup>

We should not contrive from Whalley's assessment that Potter was, as a rule, unsentimental in her treatment of animals, although she demonstrates more detachment than Grahame. Linda Lear writes that 'Grandmother Potter had an edition of Sarah Trimmer's *History of the Robins* [...] that Beatrix inherited. It was intended to instruct children in the humane

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<sup>272</sup> Linda Lear, *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007), p. 153.

<sup>273</sup> Whalley, p. 42.

treatment of animals and featured talking birds [...] Beatrix had it as an early primer and later remembered hating its moralism, but had no objection to its anthropomorphism'.<sup>274</sup>

We might argue, however, that Potter's predilection for observing animals actually results in a more realistic portrayal of their physiology, and occasionally their animal natures, in her tales. Gillian Avery remarks that Potter 'was not the usual type of animal lover. Her interest was scientific. She records their behaviour and habits without sentimentality and without anthropomorphising them'.<sup>275</sup> While this claim does not apply to the tales as such, Potter makes no grand claims about the true nature of animals; her remarks about them often emerge from close observation of individuals rather than a preconceived ideal. Her attitude towards animals is expressed occasionally in her coded journal, and while they reflect her observations, they also anthropomorphise her animal subjects. For example, on October 30, 1892, she writes:

Rabbits are creatures of warm volatile temperament but shallow and absurdly transparent. It is this naturalness, one touch of nature, that I find so delightful in Mr. Benjamin Bunny, though I frankly admit his vulgarity. At one moment amiably sentimental to the verge of silliness, at the next, the upsetting of a jug or tea-cup which he immediately takes upon himself, will convert him into a demon, throwing himself on his back, scratching and spluttering. If I can lay hold of him without being bitten, within half a minute he is licking my hands as though nothing has happened.

He is an abject coward, but believes in bluster, could stare our old dog out of countenance, chase a cat that has turned tail.

Benjamin once fell into an Aquarium head first, and sat in the water which he could not get out of, pretending to eat a piece of string. Nothing like putting a face upon circumstances.<sup>276</sup>

This passage in Potter's journal demonstrates a dual perspective of rabbit nature informed both by observation and anthropomorphic imaginings. Her description of Benjamin as 'volatile' suggests he is unpredictable, but his description as 'transparent' suggests the complete opposite. It is therefore unclear as to which of the two personality traits she is describing as 'this naturalness, one touch of nature'. One would be tempted to hazard a guess that Potter is referring to Benjamin's volatility. Potter's remark that Benjamin is 'pretending' to eat the string is also nothing more than attribution of deception that lends weight to her assertion that he is 'putting a face upon circumstances', which reminds us of Grahame's claim that animals are 'determined to make the best of everything'. Of course, the essential difference between the two writers is that Potter alters her descriptions according to the particular species of animal in question, while Grahame applies his concept to all nonhuman

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<sup>274</sup> Lear, p. 34.

<sup>275</sup> Gillian Avery, 'Beatrix Potter and Social Comedy', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 76.3 (1994), p. 189.

<sup>276</sup> Beatrix Potter, *The Journal of Beatrix Potter from 1881 to 1897* (London: Frederick Warne, 1966), p. 300.

animals in an idealistic fashion. Perhaps, then, a certain level of detachment lends more realism to the portrayal of animals, at least in Potter's case, and does not necessarily reflect a lack of sentimentality, only a recognition of difference. Continuing on from Potter's observations of real animals and her recognition of the individuality of the animal, I now turn to discuss the relationship between narrative and natural history, a genre of writing in which anthropomorphic and naturalistic representations of animals often converged, especially in Potter's time.

### **Narrative and Natural History**

One genre of non-fictional writing which sometimes applies the conventions of narrative to descriptions of animal life is natural history. Its relationship with fictional representations of animal lives and animal minds, as we shall see, is complex, particularly in the nineteenth century. Elements of the natural history genre also permeate Potter's fiction. So how does natural history figure in questions of narrative, and how does it resist or adhere to the 'anthropomorphic bias' that Fludernik argues is central to all narratives? In *The Heyday of Natural History, 1820-1870*, Lynn Barber writes that

Writers were admired for their skill in deploying the existing stockpile of anecdotes and for their 'power of bringing out the human side of science, and giving to seemingly dry disquisitions and animals of the lowest type, by little touches of pathos and humour, that living and personal interest, to bestow which is generally the function of the poet'. In practice, this meant their skill in anthropomorphizing everything they described.<sup>277</sup>

Barber suggests that in retrospect this anthropomorphic trend in mid-nineteenth-century natural history was in vogue to such an extent that it was indulgent. There were those who objected to the use of anthropomorphism in natural history writing, such as George Henry Lewes, who expressed that '[w]e are incessantly at fault in our tendency to anthropomorphise; a tendency which causes us to interpret the actions of animals according to the analogies of human nature'.<sup>278</sup> On the whole, however, it seemed impossible to escape anthropomorphic descriptions of animals in natural history texts.

Crist notes some examples of particularly anthropomorphic language in the work of turn-of-the-century naturalists (more specifically, entomologists), George and Elizabeth

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<sup>277</sup> Lynn Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History, 1820-1870* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980), pp. 18-19.

<sup>278</sup> George Henry Lewes, *Sea-side Studies at Ilfracombe, Tenby, the Scilly Isles & Jersey* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1858), pp. 365-66; cited in Barber, p. 81.

Peckham and Jean Henri Fabre. In order to describe animal behaviour, Crist claims, these writers adopted a subjective language of *lifeworld*, to use Crist's term, 'an everyday world where things, activities, relations, and events have experiential significance'.<sup>279</sup> Crist writes further that

In documenting animal life, they choose to narrate concrete behavioural events, episodes actually witnessed. This method of depicting animal behaviour [...] may be called "episodic description." [...] With their consistent reliance on episodic description, naturalists give prominent position to the activities in the here and now of specific animal(s). Episodic description preserves both the uniqueness and the holistic character of action. Focus on concrete episodes reveals the unique character of even thoroughly mundane behaviours, and the narration of events in their specific sequential integrity assembles a set of actions as a complete, self-contained "act".<sup>280</sup>

While she admits that the studies of such naturalists as Fabre and the Peckhams 'remained outside, or marginal to, the world of academic science', Crist's observations about the subjectivity of the language adopted in such cases is revealing.<sup>281</sup> Anthropomorphism was not enjoying the same vogue in the natural sciences that it had up to the 1890s, but it still existed on the margins, and the language of anthropomorphic description continued to evolve in interesting ways. Such studies and narratives of lifeworld are also contemporaneous with the golden age of children's literature and, more to the point, the animal narratives of Grahame and Potter. We shall return to the notions of lifeworld and episodic description throughout the course of this chapter, as instances of such description are evident, to some extent, in Potter's coded journal.

Natural history has informed the language of both eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fictional animal narratives. Children's animal stories in the eighteenth century, writes Jane Spencer, 'took part in the incomplete but significant shift in animal representation from the fabular, the allegorical, and the satirical to the naturalistic, the empathetic and the inwardly focused. In particular, they pioneered narrative attempts to imagine the subjective experience of non-human animals'.<sup>282</sup> Spencer adds significantly that 'Figurative and literal meanings were mixed together in the animal stories, and their authors were sometimes explicit about their dual purpose'.<sup>283</sup> Julie A. Smith writes: 'As a mixed-mode for representing animal minds, natural history was filled with complicated, competing, and contradictory attitudes. Furthermore, it was written by many different kinds of people for diverse audiences'. Smith

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<sup>279</sup> Crist, p. 54.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, p. 88.

<sup>282</sup> Jane Spencer, 'Creating Animal Experience in Late Eighteenth-Century Narrative', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 33.4 (2010), p. 470.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, p. 472.

discusses the influence of works of natural history on nineteenth-century animal autobiography such as Sewell's *Black Beauty*: 'When animal autobiographers expressly borrowed from natural history or were directly influenced by it, they imported this heterogeneity and often unsettled ideas about animals even further by converting third-person point of view into a fictive first-person one'.<sup>284</sup>

Providing a wider historical context for the relationship between the narratives of natural history and the narratives of animal stories, Smith explains that

Natural history had early associations with literature, and it shared with literature a holistic approach to animal lives. Natural history books since the early modern period had represented the natural world through a complex matrix of perspectives, and meaning was thought to be accessible only when approached from different angles. This complexity made possible the transformation of natural history animals into animals who were characters in extended narratives.<sup>285</sup>

Natural history writing provides indeed a 'complex matrix of perspectives', and once we start to explore such perspectives in fiction, the complexities multiply. The eighteenth-century narrative shift from 'the fabular, the allegorical, and the satirical' to 'the naturalistic, the empathetic and the inwardly focused' is what informs Herman's continuum of narrative strategies (see Chapter 2), and it is also important to remember that while this shift may be considered in diachronic terms, instances of the fabular and the naturalistic occur in fictional animal narratives taken from any time period, and even, as Herman argues, within a single text.

The influence of natural history on the fiction of Beatrix Potter is discussed by Peter Hollindale, who provides three general observations, 'all of them germane [...] to our understanding of [Potter] as a natural scientist':

First, that she is always alert to both fact and fantasy about the creatures she observes, and never mixes the two except with conscious intent. Second, that she makes no distinction of interest between wild and domestic animals, though she is sharply alert to the differences, as between wild and domestic rabbits. She enjoys the boundary line between wild and tame [...] Third, that in the animals she studies she is always aware of both the individual and the species – noticing for instance that even snails are not identical in their behaviour. Her concern for both individual and species applies just as much to the human animal as to any other. These are the building blocks from which Potter's natural history is made, and they account for the wonderful elasticity and variousness of outlook which made her both scientific observer and imaginative artist, and sometimes both at once.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Julie A. Smith, 'Representing Animal Minds in Early Animal Autobiography: Charlotte Tucker's *The Rambles of a Rat* and Nineteenth-Century Natural History', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 43.4 (2015), p. 726.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 733.

<sup>286</sup> Peter Hollindale, 'Beatrix Potter and Natural History', *Working on the Beatrix Potter Jigsaw: Twenty Years of Research and Discovery (Beatrix Potter Studies IX)* (The Beatrix Potter Society, 2001), p. 58.

Hollindale's third observation is significant if we regard Potter's work in the context of the lifeworld narratives of natural history discussed by Crist. Potter considers the individuality of animals as well as the characteristics of their particular species.

Finally, regarding the specific influence of such works as Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and Thomas Huxley's *Man's Place in Nature* (1863) on Potter's natural history, Hollindale observes that while 'it is impossible that Potter as a young adult was uninformed about these major, controversial works', of the two references to Darwin in her journal there is 'only one of consequence'.<sup>287</sup> Potter's cousin, Caroline Hutton, was a staunch Darwinian. In 1894 Potter writes that Caroline's sister, Mary, 'seems to be curious to discover whether I should be shocked with so much Huxley and Darwin', and we read that Potter remonstrates with Caroline about imposing her views on others, especially those who held religious views at odds with Darwinism. In her journal she simply concludes that 'truth is truth'.<sup>288</sup> Hollindale offers an opinion as to what Potter means by 'truth is truth':

My own feeling is that Potter was not much concerned with large theories, even of natural history. I think she was above all an empirical observer, a taxonomist and an analyst, fascinated by the What? How? And Why? of immediate natural phenomena. Her vocation was to investigate a crowded universe of small things. I suspect that she gave to Caroline, and through her to Darwin and Huxley, a half-committed agreement, while not believing that evolution or any other theory accounted for everything.<sup>289</sup>

If we give assent to Hollindale's claim, then what we encounter in the work of Beatrix Potter, both in her tales and in her journal entries, is a strategy of representing animals that is symptomatic of the anthropomorphic trend in mid to late-Victorian natural history writing but at the same time unbridled by the metanarrative of evolutionary theory which informs the most recognized works in the genre.

Potter's attention to animals as individuals and as members of a species, including humans, opens the way for theriomorphic, as well as anthropomorphic, interpretations of the characters in her tales. I now turn to discuss what I perceive to be a 'theriomorphic subtext' in Potter's work, and how this subtext informs the *both/and* structure of relation between human and animal, and explains how Potter's characters are perceived by many critics as occupying the categories of human and animal simultaneously.

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>288</sup> Beatrix Potter, *The Journal of Beatrix Potter from 1881 to 1897* (London: Frederick Warne, 1966), p. 315.

<sup>289</sup> Hollindale (2001), p. 65.

## The Theriomorphic Subtext

Margaret Lane claims that Potter's 'rabbits and hedgehogs and foxes, though they may walk on their hind legs, drink camomile tea and wear aprons or mufflers, are true to the last syllable to their animal natures'.<sup>290</sup> This is rather a grand claim, and Lane simplifies Potter's representation of animals when she writes that her characters are 'to some extent interpreted in human terms: Ribby wears an apron and shawl and goes shopping with a net purse and basket: but this method can be as veracious as translating a subject from one language into another. The technique is more than simply amusing to children, since it lays emphasis not only on the difference between man and animals but on the similarities between us'.<sup>291</sup> Simple this interpretation may be, but the comparison of Potter's anthropomorphism with translation is an interesting one. Lane is suggesting that Potter is merely reinterpreting the experiences of animals so her human readers can understand them.

The notion of translating between human and animal worlds is also explored by Kalevi Kull and Peeter Torop in 'Biotranslation: Translation Between *Umwelten*' (2003). Drawing on Jacob von Uexkull's concept of *Umwelt*, the main source for Crist's concept of *lifeworld*, they assert that 'for translation to occur, there must be a certain connection, or overlapping, between the *Umwelten*. This is usually called a message, or text, that is transmitted and should be made understandable'.<sup>292</sup> They identify syntax as the key component which differentiates human from nonhuman systems of communication. However, they argue that 'the correct identification of meaning may also be based on the recognition of context, or deep structure, since [...] equivalence in translating must be obtained not between words or grammatical constructions, but, rather, between the functions of texts in communicative situations'.<sup>293</sup> The notion of 'overlapping' *Umwelten* is crucial here, for within the space in which *Umwelten* overlap, the human and the animal coexist, they recognise and understand one another. The duality of the anthropomorphism in Potter's tales relies on a similar process of overlapping and a spontaneous depiction of human and animal nature.

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<sup>290</sup> Margaret Lane, *The Magic Years of Beatrix Potter* (London: Fontana, 1980), p. 8.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>292</sup> Kalevi Kull and Peeter Torop, 'Biotranslation: Translation Between *Umwelten*', *Readings in Zoosemiotics*, eds. Timo Maran, Dario Martinelli and Aleksei Turovski (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2011), p. 414.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 422.

Of equal significance is ‘the recognition of context, or deep structure’. Crist discusses George and Elizabeth Peckham’s work on wasps and the notion of *indexicality*, and naturalists’ use of ‘indexically distinct’ terms. “‘Indexically distinct’”, she writes,

means that the senses of the shared concepts of wasp and human worlds resound within one another, rather than collapse into each other. The common terms refer to objects and actions that are similar in certain ways, but at the same time nonidentical. For example, while in appearance the openings of wasp burrows have little in common with the doorways of human houses, the common grounds of construction through work and functional usage to enter an abode admit reference to a wasp “doorway.”<sup>294</sup>

In her footnote, Crist explains that “‘Indexicality’” means that the precise sense of a word becomes clarified or determinate only through consideration of its context of application or reference’.<sup>295</sup> Essentially, the use of indexically distinct language preserves both sameness and difference between species.

Besides the anthropomorphic techniques that Potter employs in her tales, there is also a sense that she not only projects *what are presumed to be* human characteristics onto animal characters, but also projects *what are presumed to be* animal qualities onto certain human types. Anthropomorphism and theriomorphism can thus be seen to coexist in the tales, and to demonstrate Potter’s double perspective, through which the animal and the human imply each other. Roberto Marchesini writes that

The animal has left to the realm of fantasy its reshuffled shadow through a catalogue of theriomorphic signs that can be assembled in various ways according to specific pressures [...] These theriomorphic presences are not necessarily traceable to a particular species of animal but are used through modular combinations according to a specific necessity: 1 – if we want to build a horrifying theriomorphic model we select particular characteristics: hirsutism, pronounced fangs and claws, menacing roar, ritualized behaviour of aggression; 2 – if we want to build a reassuring theriomorphic model we refine it through juvenile characteristics [...] When we choose to place an accent on a particular disposition – for example aggression – we make use of a model of theriomorphic characteristics that exemplify that tendency [...] In the same way we can render an animal icon even more reassuring if it is made awkward, bungling, soft, anthropomorphic.<sup>296</sup>

Marchesini suggests that humans project human characteristics onto animals to ‘render’ them more ‘reassuring’, and attribute animal characteristics to humans to exemplify animalistic tendencies, to make the human seem more ‘horrifying’. However, the differences between anthropomorphism and theriomorphism, especially in Potter’s fantasy animal world, are not so obvious, and often these two processes rely on similar narrative techniques.

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<sup>294</sup> Crist, p. 58.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid, p. 225n3.

<sup>296</sup> Roberto Marchesini, ‘The Theriosphere’, *Angelaki*, 21.1 (2016), p. 125.

Mrs. Tiggy-winkle is an interesting example of a character in whom both anthropomorphic and theriomorphic projections converge. The character of Mrs. Tiggy-winkle was inspired by Kitty McDonald, an old Scottish washerwoman, as well as Potter's pet hedgehog, the real Mrs. Tiggy-winkle. Potter anthropomorphises the hedgehog using Kitty McDonald as her human model, while also theriomorphising the washerwoman with hedgehog qualities. Unlike Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny, Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca, characters inspired entirely by Potter's pets of the same names, Mrs. Tiggy-winkle is also based on a human acquaintance of Potter's. In her journal Potter describes Kitty McDonald as 'eighty-three but waken, and delightfully merry [...] She is a comical, round little old woman, as brown as a berry and wears a multitude of petticoats and a white mutch'.<sup>297</sup> Hedgehogs might easily fit the description of 'round' and 'brown as a berry', and so the hybrid figure of Mrs. Tiggy-winkle, simultaneously a theriomorphised washerwoman and anthropomorphised hedgehog, began to form in Potter's imagination. A year before her death Potter would recall memories of McDonald as 'a tiny body, brown as a berry, beady black eyes and much wrinkled', while she remarks on Kitty's personality as 'outspoken and very independent, proud and proper'.<sup>298</sup> Here again is that phrase, 'brown as a berry', which in Potter's day referred to a person with suntanned skin, but originated in Chaucer's *The Monk's Tale*, in which a 'palfrey' (horse) is described as 'broune as is a bery'. So the phrase was initially used to describe the natural coloration of an animal, but five centuries later, in Potter's journal, is used to describe the coloration of a familiar human acquaintance. This is not to say that Potter's choice of phrase was chosen with its original context in mind, but rather that theriomorphism permeates human culture so deeply that even the most common idioms will contain theriomorphic elements if one traces their linguistic roots.

*Mrs. Tiggy-winkle* is also a rare example of where the proportion in size of animal to human is, relative to Potter's other tales, unrealistically depicted in the illustrations. The tale opens with Lucie, a little girl who has lost her pocket-handkerchiefs. She asks several animals if they have seen her handkerchiefs, and in the accompanying illustrations, these animals are drawn according to their real size next to Lucie. Lucie's search leads her from her home of Little-town to Mrs Tiggy-winkle's home. Hedgehog though she is, Mrs Tiggy-winkle at first appears to Lucie as 'a very stout, short person', and though Lucie notices many features that seem odd about the hedgehog, whom she takes for a washerwoman, the realization of her

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<sup>297</sup> Potter (1966), p. 243.

<sup>298</sup> Leslie Linder, *A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter, Including Unpublished Work* (London: Frederick Warne, 1971), p. 159.

actual species occurs only right at the end of the tale. On her return home, Lucie turns to thank Mrs Tiggy-winkle, and she is quite surprised at what she sees:

[Mrs. Tiggy-winkle] was running running running up the hill – and where was her white frilled cap? and her shawl? and her gown – and her petticoat? And *how* small she had grown – and *how* brown – and covered with PRICKLES!

Why! Mrs. Tiggy-winkle was nothing but a HEDGEHOG.<sup>299</sup>

In all of the illustrations in the tale depicting Lucie and Mrs. Tiggy-winkle together, they appear similar in size. Our question as to whether Mrs. Tiggy-winkle is human sized or whether Lucie has shrunk upon entering the hedgehog's home is answered when we see Mrs. Tiggy-winkle returning bundles of clean clothes to their animal owners. These animals are considerably smaller next to the hedgehog. However, this confuses our overall sense of proportion in the tale even further. If Mrs. Tiggy-winkle shrinks to normal hedgehog size when Lucie passes over the stile, why do the other animals remain their normal size?

The ambivalences in Mrs. Tiggy-winkle that distinguish it somewhat from many of the other tales may be explained by the suggestion that Lucie may have been dreaming: 'Now some people say that little Lucie had been asleep upon the stile – but then how could she have found three clean pocket-handkins and a pinny, pinned with a silver safety-pin? And besides – *I* have seen that door into the back of the hill called Cat Bells – and besides *I* am very well acquainted with dear Mrs. Tiggy-winkle!<sup>300</sup> Although Potter vindicates the doubts of 'some people', we are left wondering whether the story was not Lucie's dream after all. Of course, when Potter says she is acquainted with Mrs. Tiggy-winkle we can presume she is talking about not only the real life hedgehog that she owned as a pet but also Kitty McDonald. Potter also uses clothes as material evidence to confirm that Lucie was not in fact dreaming: 'Now some people say that little Lucie had been asleep upon the stile – but then how could she have found three clean pocket-handkins and a pinny, pinned with a silver safety-pin?' (100)

An illustration depicting a faint outline of Potter herself appears in *Samuel Whiskers*. The accompanying text reads: 'And when I was going to the post late in the afternoon – I looked up the lane from the corner, and I saw Mr. Samuel Whiskers and his wife on the run, with big bundles on a little wheelbarrow, which looked very like mine' (193). This is a peculiar example indeed. Not only can we see Potter in the illustration, with Samuel and Anna Maria clearly in the foreground, but the fact that the rats are making off with what is possibly Potter's own wheelbarrow raises more questions about proportion. Have the rats

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid, pp. 99-100.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, p. 100.

grown to accommodate the size of the wheelbarrow, or has the wheelbarrow shrunk? Or are the rats themselves already human sized? Potter leaves this an ambiguous matter in the illustration. The distance at which the figure of Potter is stood from Samuel and Anna Maria means we cannot tell what the proportion in size of rat to human ought to be.

Worthy of note is Potter's use of 'person' and 'people' to occasionally describe her animal characters. Potter describes Mrs. Tiggy-winkle as a 'very stout short person' through Lucie's eyes at their first meeting. Another example can be found in the opening lines of *Mr. Tod*: 'I have made many books about well-behaved people. Now, for a change, I am going to make a story about two disagreeable people, called Tommy Brock and Mr. Tod.' (253) We are told Mr. Tod 'was of a wandering habit and he had foxy whiskers', while Tommy Brock 'was a short bristly fat waddling person with a grin [...] He was not nice in his habits. He ate wasp nests and frogs and worms; and he waddled about by moonlight, digging things up'. Neither character is named explicitly here as a fox or a badger, although the illustrations depict them as such. Nevertheless, Potter attributes 'foxy' features to Mr. Tod without calling him a fox, and only Tommy Brock's dietary habits give him away as a badger, at least in the written text. In *Jemima Puddle-Duck*, Mr. Tod makes his debut as 'an elegantly dressed gentleman reading a newspaper. He had black prick ears and sandy-coloured whiskers' (165). Again, Potter remarks on his features without specifically naming him as a fox. The relationship between text and illustration is significant here. While the text describes Mr. Tod as a gentleman with fox-like features, the illustration shows him as a fox with gentleman-like features. The text applies theriomorphic characteristics, while the illustrations are anthropomorphic. This is not to say that both techniques do not converge in each medium, although the differences are more conspicuous once we examine the text or the illustrations by themselves.

Besides these examples in the tales, Potter is generally more explicit in naming her characters as rabbits, mice, squirrels, and so on. Potter also refrains from naming her characters, as Grahame does, according to their species, as in almost every tale there are more than one of each character's kind. Human characters, when they appear, are given proper names rather than being consigned to their occupation; Mr. McGregor or Peter Thomas Piperson, for example. By her very name choices, Potter's tales are less suggestive of the categories of animal or human because she wants us to perceive *either* animal *or* human as *both*. So what singles out Mr. Tod and Tommy Brock as 'people'? These two characters are – not coincidentally, I would argue – the only protagonists that are also the villains of the tale, apart from *Samuel Whiskers* (in which the protagonist is actually Tom Kitten). They are

predatory animals, more wild in many respects than other characters in the tales, but perhaps it is their predatory status that makes them outcasts, so much so that they are seen as ‘disagreeable people’ rather than animals, equated with humans as enemies. There are certainly common tropes which liken Tommy Brock and Mr. Tod to figures like Mr. McGregor, the human antagonist of the rabbit tales. Tommy Brock carries away the somnolent Benjamin Bouncer’s grandchildren in a sack, intending to kill them and cook them in a pie. This scenario is what threatens Peter, Benjamin and their kin in the previous rabbit stories, and it almost comes to fruition in *Mr. Tod*. Inviting the reader to regard badger and fox as ‘people’ may equate them with the previous human threats encountered by the rabbits.

(We should remember, however, that Potter’s opening line in *Mr. Tod* acknowledges that her previous tales have been about ‘well-behaved people’, and the personhood we presume she attributes to only handful of characters, including Tommy Brock and Mr. Tod, she in fact attributes to all her characters in this one line. If we trace the Latin roots of the words ‘person’ and ‘people’ we also find that ‘person’ originates from the Latin *persona*, meaning ‘human being, person, personage’, but also ‘a part in a drama, assumed character’, and its original meaning, according to the OED, is ‘mask’ or ‘false face’. ‘People’, meanwhile, is derived from the Latin *populus*, meaning ‘a people, nation; body of citizens’ but also simply ‘a multitude, crowd, throng’. Potter’s attribution of personhood to her characters, therefore, is perhaps a piece of meta-fictional irony as it comments on her own anthropomorphism by attributing a ‘mask’ or ‘false face’ to her animals which is implied by their status as a person, or *persona*. This ‘false face’ is ascribed most of all to the disagreeable badger and fox of *Mr. Tod*.)

Writing about Mr. Tod’s arrival at Bull Banks, where he becomes a more central character, Kutzer argues that

Even now that we are close to Mr. Tod and can see him dressed as a country gentleman, he still acts like a real fox and not an anthropomorphized one. He is annoyed by a screaming jay as he walks, so he “snapped at it, and barked”. When he arrives at his house, although he approaches the door with a rusty key, he also “sniffed and his whiskers bristled”. He can smell badger in the house, and Potter is careful to note that this smell “fortunately overpowered all smell of rabbit”.<sup>301</sup>

Kutzer lists several other natural fox characteristics, all of which Mr. Tod demonstrates. However, Mr. Tod is not entirely depicted from observation of foxes in nature. He also demonstrates characteristics humans have attributed to foxes:

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<sup>301</sup> M. Daphne Kutzer, *Beatrix Potter: Writing in Code* (New York; London: Routledge, 2003), p. 138.

Even when Mr. Tod begins to plot and plan how to safely dislodge Tommy Brock, the human traits he exhibits are linked to traditional fox traits that humans have personified for centuries [...] Potter is playing with the traditional image of the fox as a schemer and a “sly one,” a creature clever enough to think of a trick like this and a creature wise enough to make sure that first and foremost his own skin is kept safe.<sup>302</sup>

The character of Mr. Tod epitomizes the duality of Potter’s anthropomorphic depiction. She deliberately evokes both natural and traditionally anthropomorphic characteristics of the fox in her portrayal, although evokes this dual set of characteristics in a manner that renders Mr. Tod’s personality consistent. While she anthropomorphizes Mr. Tod by attributing to his depiction traits of the country gentleman, she simultaneously theriomorphizes the country gentleman by evoking Mr. Tod’s ‘foxy’ characteristics. The fox and the country gentleman are mutually implicated, not only in *Mr. Tod* but in *Jemima Puddle-duck*, the earlier tale in which the fox appears. Potter ‘translates’ between the human and animal worlds and we understand both the fox in country gentleman terms and the country gentleman in fox terms.

If we take one of Grahame’s characters, Mr. Toad for example, and attempt to apply a mutually implicating anthropomorphic and theriomorphic process in the same way, we are faced with the problem that Mr. Toad cannot simply be understood in terms of one anthropomorphic model, unlike Mr. Tod, whose anthropomorphic model is the country gentleman. Mr. Toad is also a country gentleman of sorts, but can also be understood as a rebellious child at the same time. In Potter’s tales, each animal character can be understood in terms of one particular human model. In some cases these are adult models and derive from a social class or occupation – Mrs. Tiggy-winkle as humble washerwoman, Tabitha Twitchit as house-proud mother – while in others the human models are children, as we shall now discover.

### **Potter’s ‘Animal-Children’**

One of the many possible readings offered by an exploration of the duality of Potter’s anthropomorphism is that her animals are representations of children, at least in the case of some of the main protagonists. Susan Scheftel credits Potter with an understanding of the “child’s child”, rather than a purely adult conception of the child. This is demonstrated in her animal characters: ‘Potter’s gift for embodying this essence of childhood expresses itself not only in the literal size of her books and their emotional tone but also in her choice of

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid, pp. 138-9.

protagonists – always diminutive animals, such as mice, squirrels, kittens, piglets, ducks and frogs’.<sup>303</sup> It is true – Potter’s protagonists are never large or formidable animals of the British countryside (or in the case of Timmy Tiptoes, the American wilderness), although several of her predators – Old Brown the owl and Tommy Brock the badger, for example – are much larger creatures. Lisa Hermine Makman remarks that ‘her characters generally stand in for children in particular, rather than humanity in general’.<sup>304</sup> Makman also uses the phrase ‘animal-children’ to describe Potter’s protagonists. She goes on to explain that this apparent representation of animals as children (and vice versa) is not a consistent trope throughout the tales. Potter’s animals seem ‘inherently child-like, according to dominant conceptions of childhood at the time. Usually Potter marks some animal characters as children and others as adults. However, in her late tales, individual animal figures become elastic with regard to age’.<sup>305</sup> Scott argues that ‘[Potter’s] animals merge their own natures so aptly with the behaviour and personalities of children that we wonder whether her animals have become children or vice versa’.<sup>306</sup> This is an interesting remark because to perceive Potter’s characters as child-like animals is to ascribe anthropomorphic tropes, while perceiving them as animal-like children is to ascribe theriomorphic tropes.

Characters such as Peter Rabbit, Squirrel Nutkin and Tom Kitten demonstrate behaviour which oscillates between innocence and wildness. This juxtaposition might serve well in depicting a character that resembles a child. Very many young children are still perceived as seemingly innocent and wild at the same time, either little angels or little beasts. How better to theriomorphise the child than depicting them as small, vulnerable animals, animals that are by humans both loved as pets and shunned as pests? At one end of the spectrum children are loved for their innocence, their affectionate and peaceful natures, and at the other end are loathed for their rudeness and disobedience.

Take rabbits, for example. Rabbits have often been perceived as symbols of innocence as well as rebirth and fertility, while in ancient folklore they have been perceived as tricksters.<sup>307</sup> This juxtaposition of qualities attributed to rabbits by different cultures at

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<sup>303</sup> Susan Scheffel, ‘The Child’s Child: Theory of Mind in the Work of Beatrix Potter’, *American Imago*, 71.2 (2014), p. 163.

<sup>304</sup> Lisa Hermine Makman, ‘Childhood Lost and Found: Locating Children in British Culture 1870-1930’ (Columbia University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2000), p. 150.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>306</sup> Carole Scott, ‘Clothed in Nature or Nature Clothed: Dress as Metaphor in the Illustrations of Beatrix Potter and C.M. Barker’, *Children’s Literature*, 22 (1994), p. 83.

<sup>307</sup> Regarding the rabbit as a regenerative symbol, Victoria Dickenson notes that rabbits are often associated with the moon, itself a symbol of regeneration. The rabbit was ‘linked among the Aztecs [...] with the moon’,

different times has permeated through the anthropomorphic tradition to Potter's own rabbit characters. The juxtaposition of innocent and trickster could quite easily be attributed to children. As we shall see in the next chapter, the rabbit as trickster motif strongly influences the convergence of anthropomorphic and theriomorphic tropes in Richard Adams' *Watership Down*. As Margaret P. Baker writes: 'The relationship between the bestial and the civilized in human nature is also demonstrated by tricksters, and especially well by the rabbits. Each has at the same time vital characteristics of both rabbits and humans, though in different proportions. Through them, people can see the dual nature of their own personalities and perceive ways of altering those proportions in themselves.'<sup>308</sup> Again this notion of duality emerges from a closer analysis of Potter's oscillation between anthropomorphism and theriomorphism. Kittens are another example of where the culturally constructed characteristics of cats and children converge. Tom Kitten is certainly one of Potter's more curious characters, and one should recall the phrase, 'Curiosity killed the cat'. This phrase has been used by parents to remonstrate their children about the dangers of excessive curiosity, and Potter uses a kitten character to convey this remonstrance in *Samuel Whiskers*. Tom demonstrates his curiosity, which is detrimental to his safety, by climbing up the chimney, unaware he is drawing closer to the rats' abode; curiosity does, indeed, prove almost fatal for Tom. *Samuel Whiskers* conveys an old moral message by anthropomorphising the animal which is used in the particular phrasing of the moral. Potter is thus theriomorphising children by exemplifying their characteristics with recourse to a plethora of animal symbols; rabbits signify trickery, kittens signify curiosity, and so on.

Potter's tales also touch upon a subject that Grahame claims to avoid in his work: the presence of sex. While female animal characters are absent from *The Wind in the Willows* – even in cases where there is a parent-child relationship, such as that of Otter and Portly – there is an abundance of them in these tales. In Potter's oeuvre, mothers, sisters, aunties and wives are present in the lives of male animal characters. Moreover, while in Grahame's River Bank characters do not seem to age (only in Horwood's sequels do they grow older), in Potter's tales they do, demonstrated most clearly in the sequence of rabbit tales, in which Benjamin Bunny and his cousin Flopsy grow up, marry and make a family of bunnies together. Marriage itself is also something touched upon frequently. We have married couples like Samuel and Anna Maria Whiskers, Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca, and Timmy and

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for example. 'At dawn, however, the rabbit was torn to pieces by the great sun eagle, only to reappear at moonrise' (p. 100).

<sup>308</sup> Margaret P. Baker, 'The Rabbit as Trickster', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 28.2 (1994), p. 158.

Goody Tiptoes, reminding us that Potter's tales are certainly not all about children. Many are about characters that have formed relationships with members of the opposite sex, and those relationships are not always harmonious. There is also an abundance of instances where Potter's characters reproduce. Farmer Potatoes discovers rats in his barn, 'all descended from Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Whiskers – children and grand-children and great great grand-children. There is no end to them!' (194) Sometimes in illustrations we see evidence of offspring not mentioned in the text. The last illustration in Timmy Tiptoes depicts Goody tending to their young outside their newly-padded nut-store. We must also assume that Jemima Puddle-duck did not conceive her young by herself, even if she wishes to hatch them alone. Perhaps Potter, rather than avoiding the subject of sex altogether in order to preserve some misplaced concept of childhood innocence, is attempting to educate the child reader about reproduction in nature while avoiding touching upon that subject in relation to humans, therefore maintaining a safe distance and appropriate address for both child and adult readers.

### **The Costume of Potter's Animals**

Inevitably Potter's use of clothing in her tales and its treatment in criticism requires that a whole section to be devoted to this classic anthropomorphic technique, not just for its function as such a technique but for the appeal of clothing itself, particularly of the Georgian era, to Potter's imagination. 'Although not the only children's author to exploit the convention of putting animals in clothing, Potter was indisputably the master of the technique', writes Scheftel.<sup>309</sup> This section will explore the reasons underlying this praise. How does Potter's use of this anthropomorphic technique which has been in use since the Reynard cycle surpass the efforts of other writers of anthropomorphic fiction, and how does clothing reinforce the dual depiction of her animal characters as both animal and human? Carole Scott is the foremost critic on the subject of the use of clothing in Potter's tales. According to Scott, Potter's clothes are 'usually the slightly old-fashioned kind of attire she saw people wearing in the vicinity of Near Sawrey.'<sup>310</sup> This observation suggests already that Potter's costume is influenced by the rural part of England in which she lived and produced much of her best work. Like many other critics, Scott insists there is also a certain degree of

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<sup>309</sup> Scheftel, p. 163.

<sup>310</sup> Carole Scott, 'Between Me and the World: Clothes as Mediator Between Self and Society in the Work of Beatrix Potter', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 16.2 (1992), p. 192.

accuracy in Potter's representation of animals. 'Clothing the animals', she writes, 'preserves the integrity of her naturalistic observation while clearly revealing the humanness the stories depict'.<sup>311</sup> For Scott, clothing is the most important anthropomorphic technique at work in tales like *Jemima Puddle-duck*, for instance:

[T]he fox's wily nature, which in real life enables him to raid henhouses and elude hunting dogs, is metamorphosed into the suave urbanity of "the ginger whiskered gentleman" whose clever talk and seductive persuasiveness lead to Jemima's initial trust and ultimate betrayal. His rather caddish sophistication is expressed not only in his first presentation – he is reading a newspaper – but in his dress, the plus-fours suit of a country gentleman, complete with scarlet waistcoat; he is, as Jemima perceives, "elegantly dressed," his costume contrasting with Jemima's country shawl and date poke bonnet.<sup>312</sup>

According to Scott, clothing is thus used to depict *both* the human *and* animal natures of the fox-gentleman (Mr. Tod) and Jemima.

Clothing is significant in its role in shaping human cultural identity as well as marking the transition from childhood to adulthood in many respects. Several critics have concurred Scott's claim that 'For Potter clothes are usually a matter of anxiety and are often downright constricting or hostile to life'.<sup>313</sup> This is accentuated when we think once more of Potter's characters as children. Scheftel describes the ways in which clothes play a crucial role in a child's development:

Being dressed, diapered, and swaddled are among the first ways children are acted upon by their parents [...] Perhaps given the connection between clothing and caretakers, dress-up becomes one of the central play modules of the early years [...] Through dress-up, children imitate and identify with adults without being mistaken for them. When they are old enough to turn the tables, in their dress-up games they try on occupations and gender roles, experiment with the border between humans and animals, and channel the cultural ideals of beauty and power.<sup>314</sup>

How do humans use clothing to experiment with the border between humans and animals, other than in the obvious sense of distinguishing themselves from the rest of the animal kingdom by wearing clothes?

Clothes are also associated in Potter's tales with the subject of money and making a living. The most obvious example is Potter's favourite among her tales, *The Tailor of Gloucester*. We are soon told that in this story, set in the Regency period, 'stuffs had strange names, and were very expensive in the days of the Tailor of Gloucester', and 'although he sewed fine silk for his neighbours, he himself was very, very poor – a little old man in

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid, p. 193.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Scott (1994), p. 77.

<sup>314</sup> Scheftel, p. 164.

spectacles, with a pinched face, old crooked fingers, and a suit of thread-bare clothes' (39). The tailor's poor, humble appearance contrasts with the expensive, elaborate garments he makes to earn his living. Clothes are used to elevate the status of not only the tailor but also the mice that make miniature garments from the scraps of cloth the tailor leaves behind. Kutzer remarks that 'The tailor helped the mice raise their status, and they in turn help him. Potter is validating hard work and cooperation as a way to improve oneself. Simpkin, who fails at both, cannot rise above his feline servant status. By the end of the tale he, of all the characters, is without clothing, without a symbol of social status'.<sup>315</sup> The tailor helps to elevate the mice to human status by providing the materials to make clothes, and the mice help elevate the tailor's social status by completing the mayor's coat. But animals in Potter's tales make a living from clothes as well as humans. In *Benjamin Bunny*, we learn that Mrs. Rabbit 'earned her living by knitting rabbit-wool mittens and muffetees (I once bought a pair at a bazaar)' (56). The irony is that her son Peter, whom Benjamin finds wrapped in nothing but a pocket-handkerchief, is without his clothes. In *Little Pig Robinson* there is also Fleecy Flock's wool shop: 'Such a shop! Such a jumble! Wool all sorts of colours, thick wool, thin wool, fingering wool, and rug wool, bundles and bundles all jumbled up; and she could not put her hoof on anything' (364). There is no indication in *Mrs. Tiggy-winkle*, however, that the hedgehog washes and irons the clothes of other animals for money. All we know is that 'the little animals and birds were so very much obliged to dear Mrs. Tiggy-winkle' (98).

We could argue that 'human clothes' are worn by humans, but in many cases, particularly in Potter's time, they are made from animals, and so are not 'human' clothes in every sense. Potter, the keen observer, is well aware of this, and there are instances in her tales which play with the mimicry across species lines that clothing facilitates. Mrs. Rabbit and Fleecy both make and sell clothes made from the skins of their own kind, and in *Mrs. Tiggy-winkle*, it is not always clear as to whether the clothes Potter's animals wear are human clothes or their own natural fur coats. In this tale, we are told that 'she hung up all sorts and sizes of clothes – small brown coats of mice; and one velvety black moleskin waist-coat; and a red tail-coat with no tail belonging to Squirrel Nutkin; and a very much shrunk blue jacket belonging to Peter Rabbit' (96). While we recognise Peter's blue jacket as simply a jacket, it is curious that Squirrel Nutkin suddenly possesses items of clothing, considering he is not depicted wearing any in his own tale. We can only presume that Mrs. Tiggy-winkle is hanging his fur out to dry. This ambivalence surrounding clothes and whether they are human

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<sup>315</sup> Kutzer, p. 22.

attire or natural fur coats recalls the opening chapter of Grahame's novel, where Rat wrings Mole dry after his tumble in the river. The anthropomorphic notion of the mole as a gentleman in black velvet recurs in one of Potter's rhymes in *Appley Dapply's Nursery Rhymes* (1917) – 'Diggory Diggory Delvet! A little old man in black velvet' (315) – which again raises doubts as to whether Diggory Delvet's black velvet is his own fur coat or an item of clothing. In return for helping Benjamin and Flopsy save their children from Mr. McGregor, Mrs. Tittlemouse is rewarded at the end of *The Flopsy Bunnies* with 'a present of enough rabbit-wool to make herself a cloak and a hood, and a handsome muff and a pair of warm mittens' (208). This seems to question whether clothing is the marker of humanness we might presume it to be. Is Mrs. Tittlemouse dressed like a human in her rabbit-wool, or dressed like a rabbit?

All of these examples are interesting in their subtle challenges to the humanness we attach to clothing, but for the most part, the clothes worn by Potter's animals are made from materials not taken from the skins of furry animals. Of course, any materials not taken from animals are still taken from nature. In *The Tailor of Gloucester*, 'fabrics and thread from which the wedding coat and waistcoat are made – silk, satin, and worsted (from silkworms and from sheep) – come from natural sources, and their relation to nature is enhanced by the pansies and roses embroidered on the silken coat and the poppies and cornflowers on the waistcoat, so that the bridegroom reflects both the animal and the plant worlds in his garb'.<sup>316</sup> This attention given to the materials used to make clothing can be found in both the text and illustrations of the tale. Potter was as meticulous in her illustration of clothes as she was in her illustration of animals, although 'she laboured over human figures and faces, and never drew them as well as Bertram'.<sup>317</sup> It is interesting that her accuracy in drawing from nature did not extend to human beings. Until *Mrs. Tiggy-winkle*, remarks Kutzer, Potter's humans 'had largely been off-stage characters, and Potter generally drew them only from a distance, or in partial view'.<sup>318</sup> Her interest in costume, especially of the Regency period, inspired many of her illustrations of clothes. She illustrated costumes from displays in the South Kensington Museum while she was writing *The Tailor of Gloucester* and, 'recalling her love of Randolph Caldecott's style, made Jeremy [Fisher] a Regency-period dandy with fine

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<sup>316</sup> Scott (1994), p. 87.

<sup>317</sup> Lear, p. 44.

<sup>318</sup> Kutzer, p. 77.

jacket, galoshes and pumps, who sailed elegantly on a water-lily leaf'.<sup>319</sup> We might also consider her possible influence on another dandyish amphibian: Grahame's Mr. Toad.

Randolph Caldecott was of significant influence in Potter's development as an artist. Along with Walter Crane and Kate Greenaway, Caldecott was one of the pioneers of children's picture book illustration in the late nineteenth century. Anne Lundin writes that the work of 'these stellar figures of the picture book pantheon evokes images of decorative floral borders and sinewy lines; of children dressed in romantic notions of eighteenth-century garb; of medieval manuscripts, blue-and-white china, and William Morris chairs; of Pre-Raphaelite young maidens and Maypoles; of jovial horsemen, Shropshire countryside, and Queen Anne architecture'.<sup>320</sup> Caldecott's work has been regarded as '[s]omewhat apart from current artistic trends, though by no means entirely divorced from them'.<sup>321</sup> The artistic trends of Caldecott's time were influenced by a blend of Aestheticism – 'art for art's sake' – and the Arts and Crafts Movement, which was 'dedicated to recapturing the spirit and quality of medieval craftsmanship' in metalwork, jewellery, wallpaper, textiles, furniture and books.<sup>322</sup> Whalley and Chester note Caldecott's direct influence on Potter's work in *A Frog he Would A-Wooing Go*, 'where we can see clearly depicted the ancestors of Jeremy Fisher and Samuel Whiskers. In this book we have once more the subtle blend of simple watercolour scenes and economically drawn ones, in which the interiors reflect an awareness of contemporary taste'.<sup>323</sup> Moreover, Caldecott's characters 'frequently wear 18<sup>th</sup>- or early-19<sup>th</sup>-century dress, and he placed many of them in a fashionable "Queen Anne" setting'.<sup>324</sup>

However, the tradition of clothing animal characters in eighteenth- or early-nineteenth-century garb reaches further back in the nineteenth century than the work of Crane, Caldecott, or Greenaway. Tess Cosslett discusses the role of clothing in poems such as William Roscoe's *The Butterfly's Ball* (1807) and Catherine Dorset's *The Peacock at Home* (1809), which have been collectively called 'papillonades'. 'The topsy-turvy world of the "papillonades",' she writes, 'bears an obvious relation not only to the general idea of carnival, but to the specific eighteenth-century masquerade, an allusion which is made very explicit in some of them'.<sup>325</sup> The illustrations themselves demonstrate more ambiguity in

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<sup>319</sup> Lear, p. 212.

<sup>320</sup> Anne Lundin, *Victorian Horizons: The Reception of the Picture Books of Walter Crane, Randolph Caldecott, and Kate Greenaway* (Lanham: The Children's Literature Association and Scarecrow Press, 2001), p. 2.

<sup>321</sup> Joyce Irene Whalley and Tessa Rose Chester, *A History of Children's Book Illustration* (London: John Murray, 1988), p. 109.

<sup>322</sup> <<http://academic.eb.com.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/levels/collegiate/article/Arts-and-Crafts-movement/9722>>.

<sup>323</sup> Whalley and Chester, p. 112.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid, pp. 109-10.

<sup>325</sup> Cosslett, p. 51.

their anthropomorphism, it seems, than their twentieth-century counterparts: ‘The insects appear as creatures riding on people, or people using animals as costume – for instance, a lady with a snail on her head like a hat; but the snail is also depicted as a man with a shell on his back, or is it a snail with the upper body of a man?’<sup>326</sup> However, ‘By the nineteenth century, the masquerade had been reduced to a quaint object of nostalgia, and, significantly, took on “juvenile associations” [...] But the masquerades in the “papillonades” instead allow children to participate in comic versions of adult revelry’.<sup>327</sup>

In *Masquerade and Civilization* (1986), Terry Castle writes that ‘Animal disguise [...] had its place too at the English masquerades, and suggested another sort of magical exchange. Eighteenth-century masqueraders metamorphosed into dancing bears, birds, donkeys, and apes [...] Occasionally masqueraders took the shape of mysterious beast/human hybrids’, but that ‘the masquerade, and that organized infatuation with otherness it represented, had essentially run its course by the beginning of the nineteenth century’, the same period at which Roscoe and Dorset’s ‘papillonades’ were published.<sup>328 329</sup> Derek Jarrett asserts that ‘England...was growing up: in the solemn atmosphere of the 1790s the rumbustious knockabout violence of the eighteenth century seemed like *an impossible childhood that was being left behind*’.<sup>330</sup> Castle, evoking the notion of duality in both the human and the animal which has informed our discussion of Potter’s work so far, concludes that

The masquerade [...] predicated the hallucinatory merging of self and other; it set up magical continuities between disparate bodies. Miraculous transmogrifications were symbolically enacted; the metamorphoses of dream and folklore became a temporary reality. As in Freud’s logic of the unconscious, the “either/or” had no place: only the “both/and”. Biological, social, and metaphysical taxonomies were overturned; the masquerade posited a return to primal unity.<sup>331</sup>

Following on from this distinction between the *either/or* and the *both/and*, Milne’s remark about Grahame’s text, that ‘it is necessary to think of Mole [...] *sometimes* as an actual mole, *sometimes* as a mole in human clothes, *sometimes* as a mole grown to human size, *sometimes* walking on two legs, *sometimes* on four’, suggests that in interpreting Grahame’s characters it is necessary to shift between perspectives, considering them as *either* animal *or* human.

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid, pp. 53-4.

<sup>328</sup> Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), p. 67.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

<sup>330</sup> Derek Jarrett, *England in the Age of Hogarth* (London: 1976), p. 32; cited in Castle, p. 101 (my emphasis).

<sup>331</sup> Castle, pp. 101-2.

Potter's characters embody *both* animal *and* human elements at the same time, never *sometimes* animal and *sometimes* human.

Besides emulating a Regency style or achieving comic inversion, Potter also depicts clothing as a means of suppression and control, particularly of adults over children. Two tales which explore this idea in particular are *Peter Rabbit* and *Tom Kitten*. In both of these tales, the child-animal characters, Peter and Tom, are dressed and undressed at various points in the stories, and the clothes their mothers force them to wear suppress their animal natures. Peter's blue jacket is the famous example: 'It is the very domestic jacket, insisted upon by a well-meaning but constrictive mother, that is nearly the end of Peter Rabbit. The danger to his life lies in his domesticated nature, not in his wild nature.'<sup>332</sup> Hence Peter gradually loses each item of clothing during his struggle to escape Mr. McGregor's garden. His shoes he loses amongst the cabbages and potatoes and his blue jacket he loses as he comes free of the gooseberry net. Peter's loss of his clothes, while it ultimately saves his life, is unintentional on Peter's part, and he of course returns to Mr. McGregor's garden with his cousin Benjamin to retrieve them, even though they are now a poor fit. In *Benjamin Bunny*, argues Kutzer, 'When Peter attempts to wear his discarded clothing, Potter is suggesting that he would like to go back to the innocence he has before his first adventure in the garden, before he lost his clothes through experience'.<sup>333</sup>

This notion of transgressing the boundary between childhood innocence and adult experience through the discarding of clothes is also explored in *Tom Kitten*. But while Peter loses his clothes accidentally, trying to escape the clutches of Mr. McGregor, Tom's clothes seem to slip off of their own accord because Tom, Potter remarks, 'was very fat, and he had grown; several buttons burst off. His mother sewed them on again' (151). In *Tom Kitten* the constrictive function of clothes is accentuated, not only because the clothes Tom is sewn into are uncomfortable but because his appearance while clothed makes him appear less masculine. Kutzer writes:

There is a frill around his collar and he wears a very feminine straw garden hat [...] Tabitha Twitchit, not unlike many turn-of-the-century mothers, is making an attempt to feminize her son, to make him both look more feminine through his clothing and to force him into more restricted behaviour by putting him into restrictive clothing – the way girls were expected to wear restrictive clothing that limited their movements. Tabitha Twitchit not only wants her kittens to behave in ridiculously inappropriate human ways, but she wants them to behave like adult humans, and more specifically adult female humans.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Kutzer, p. 44.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>334</sup> Kutzer, p. 93.

Of course all three of Tabitha's children rebel against her insistence that they conform to the conventions of adult humans, allowing the Puddle-ducks to walk off with their clothes which, once they get into a pond, 'all came off directly, because there were no buttons'. We can safely assume that the clothes are lost in the pond forever, as the Puddle-ducks 'have been looking for them ever since' (158). It is interesting that Potter tells us that the clothes worn by Tabitha Twitchit's children look more ridiculous worn by the Puddle-ducks. The clothes do seem a poor fit in the illustrations, in which Potter has comically painted the clothes onto the bodies of the ducks. We see Tom in a few illustrations in *Samuel Whiskers* wearing another blue jacket, this one unbuttoned. We must assume that this is a similar jacket and not the same that Tom was wearing in the earlier tale. While this jacket may not be tightly sewn to fit him, this proves a hindrance in this instance because Anna Maria is easily able to pull the jacket off, removing any unwanted garments which might spoil the taste of the roly-poly pudding Samuel wants to make out of Tom. It appears that clothes play an ambivalent role regarding the child-animal characters of Potter's tales, at times constrictive and at others protective.

A tale in which the loss of items of clothing protects animals from certain death is *Jeremy Fisher*. When the trout seizes Jeremy it is 'so displeased with the taste of the machintosh, that in less than half a minute it spat him out again; and the only thing it swallowed was Mr. Jeremy's galoshes' (127). Meanwhile, in *Timmy Tiptoes*, Timmy's red jacket singles him out from the other squirrels, who pursue him and stuff him inside a hole in a tree. While Tom's loss of his clothes in his first tale brings him comfort and freedom, this is lost when he returns to the house, where he and his sisters are cuffed by their mother and sent upstairs. Had he kept his clothes on, Tom would have been very restricted in the outside world, but would have been accepted and gone unpunished in the home.

Clothes are not always worn by Potter's animals, but in some of these instances there are episodes which are suggestive of the removal of clothing instead of natural covering. The first episode that springs to mind is Old Brown's attempt to skin Squirrel Nutkin. While we are well aware that this would seriously harm Nutkin if the owl were successful, the mention of his fur coat hanging out to dry in Mrs. Tiggy-winkle's home actually softens this violent episode in *Squirrel Nutkin*. The possibility suddenly arises that Nutkin's coat is an item of removable clothing rather than his own skin. While this is the only tale in which none of the animal characters are clothed, there are tales in which clothing is acquired by animals over the course of the story. The *Tailor of Gloucester* is of course the most obvious example, the

mice using the snippets of cloth left by the tailor to make their own clothes. In *Two Bad Mice*, Tom Thumb and Hunca Munca are unclothed throughout most of the tale, but Hunca Munca has acquired some of Lucinda's clothes by the end. This serves to domesticate her wild nature: 'And very early every morning – before anybody is awake – Hunca Munca comes with her dust-pan and her broom to sweep the Dollies' house!' (84) It appears then that clothes represent the values of domesticity in these tales, but clothes are also used to demonstrate the conflict that arises again and again between these values and the wild, animal natures of Potter's characters.

While Mrs. Rabbit and Tabitha Twitchit might dress their sons like humans and conform to domestic ideals, this outward appearance of human domesticity by wearing clothes does not, ironically, protect them from humans. Mr. McGregor's restless pursuit of Peter through the garden while he is still clothed makes this point very clear in Potter's first tale. Humans perceive the animal characters as animals, regardless of their attempts to humanize themselves. However, while Mr. McGregor hangs up Peter's clothes for use as a scarecrow in *Peter Rabbit*, in *Benjamin Bunny* there is no mention of Mr. McGregor noticing that these clothes are missing from the scarecrow, nor can he fathom whom the footprints in his garden belong to: 'It looked as though some person had been walking all over the garden in a pair of clogs – only the foot-marks were too ridiculously little!' (67) Like Lucie in *Mrs. Tiggy-winkle*, another human character, Mr. McGregor is observant but not particularly deductive. The animals' clothing eludes humans in both instances. Another example of where humans show indifference toward the clothed animals they encounter is *Pigling Bland* (1913). Despite the fact that Pigling is dressed like a gentleman, Mr. Piperson still looks upon him as meat for the chop: 'After supper Mr. Piperson consulted an almanac, and felt Pigling's ribs; it was too late in the season for curing bacon, and he grudged his meal.' (296)

In some tales, clothed and unclothed animals are even depicted together. One example is *The Pie and the Patty-Pan*, in which Duchess, a Pomeranian, is invited to tea by Ribby, a tabby cat. While Ribby is depicted clothed, Duchess is unclothed throughout the tale. While Ribby and Duchess are otherwise generally presented as social equals, there are moments in the text in which Duchess is depicted with less civility. This may of course boil down to the general consensus that cats are more elegant and reserved creatures than dogs. Another example is *The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse* (1918), in which Timmy Willie, the unclothed country mouse, travels to the town, where he meets Johnny Town-Mouse and his family, all clothed. Although the theme of the tale is taken from one of Aesop's fables, the deliberate

choice to draw Timmy without clothes offsets the rural mouse against the tamed and civilized urban mouse in a manner which parallels, and inverts, the domestic/wild binary.

In almost all cases in Potter's tales where an animal is clothed, they walk with an upright posture, while unclothed they walk on all fours, except, of course, in the case of Jemima Puddle-duck. Clothing, therefore, also transforms Potter's animals from quadrupeds into bipeds. The necessity of walking on one's hind legs while clothed is asserted by both Tabitha Twitchit in *Tom Kitten* – “Now keep your frocks clean, children! You must walk on your hind legs.” ’ (151) – and Aunt Pettitoes in *Pigling Bland* – “Mind your Sunday clothes [...] always walk upon your hind legs” ’ (287). *Peter Rabbit* is a perfect example of where the co-dependency of clothing and an upright posture is emphasized. When Peter breaks free of the gooseberry net, losing his blue jacket in the process, he resumes his natural quadruped posture. The only exception is in the illustration where Peter begins to cry after asking a mouse, to no avail, how to find Mr. McGregor's garden gate. This illustration shows Peter unclothed, yet standing with an upright posture, and both Margaret Lane and Judy Taylor have drawn attention to its close resemblance to Anna Lea Merritt's *Love Locked Out* (1890). This painting shows a young, nude human boy in a similar posture to Peter, also weeping and leaning against a locked door. This one illustration from Potter's tale is not only exempt from the general rule that animals walking on their hind legs wear clothing, but also epitomizes, with its resemblance to a painting showing a human boy in the same posture, the dual portrayal of a character as both animal and human, rabbit and child. We should also note that the image of a nude rabbit is much less controversial than the image of a nude boy in such a painting. Other exceptions to this rule of either clothed/bipedal or unclothed/quadrupedal include the unclothed Pomeranian, Duchess, in *The Pie and the Patty-Pan*, and Timmy Tiptoes, who moves on all fours despite wearing his red jacket (which serves in this tale merely to differentiate him from the other grey squirrels in the illustrations).

This seeming ability of almost all of Potter's characters to dress and undress, while altering their natural posture accordingly, implies that *both* human *and* animal behaviours and practices come naturally to them. Each character assumes either the human or animal characteristics which comprise their dual natures according to the situation of each tale and each episode within the tale, through the act of dressing and undressing, and by walking on two legs or four. There are other means, however, by which Potter's animals articulate their dual natures, as we shall see. These include acts of eating, acts of speech, and acts of violence.

## Food and Consumption

While food in Grahame's novel is almost exclusively food we might find in our own kitchens and often appears at points of resolution and reward, in Potter's tales food functions on many more levels. In almost every tale the theme of eating and being eaten recurs. However, while in some tales the food in question is food that exists in the natural world, other tales feature food that only humans would be capable of preparing or eating. In many cases naturally occurring food and food prepared using human methods appear in the same tale. Two tales in which the consumption of food is central to the plot is *The Pie and the Patty-Pan* and *Samuel Whiskers*. Of particular interest in the first tale is not only Duchess's comic attempt to replace Ribby's mouse and bacon pie in the oven with her own ham and veal pie, but the fillings of the pies themselves. From the beginning Duchess harbours a dislike of the taste of mouse, which of course she hides from Ribby but of which we are made aware as the reader. While bacon, ham and veal are all examples of meat products that humans would eat, mouse is not, and thus in the human reader's mind, Duchess's pie seems more appetising. However, besides the mouse in Ribby's pie, this tale is possibly the most anthropomorphic in terms of the food that is consumed and the methods by which it is prepared. Ribby partakes of muffins instead of pie and before Duchess arrives for tea she ventures out to the village shop to procure such items as 'a packet of tea, a pound of lump sugar, and a pot of marmalade' (107), although we are also told her 'hearth-rug was of rabbit-skin' (106), implying Ribby's more natural, feline appetites.

In *Samuel Whiskers*, besides the disturbing and violent behaviour of the rats towards poor Tom Kitten, the enticing mention of a roly-poly pudding, of pastry and desserts, which would appeal to the sweet tooth of most child readers, is offset by the fact that the rats are attempting to roll a live kitten inside the pudding, fur and all. Human cooking practices coincide in this tale with savage animal appetites. Heather Evans claims this doubling of savage and civilized consumption pertains to Potter's tales as a whole: '[T]he correspondences between the savagery of the animal world and the truculence of human behaviour are evident in the frequent occasions when characters are not only in danger of being consumed by animals that in nature would be their predators, but also risk being transformed into a tasty baked good or savoury dish fit for consumption by the most

discerning human gastronomes.’<sup>335</sup> What accentuates the unnaturalness about the episode in *Samuel Whiskers* is that Tom falls prey to rats, creatures that normally would be far smaller in size if Tom were a full-grown cat. The most and the least anthropomorphic manifestations of consumption are interwoven to make this tale one of Potter’s most chilling, and certainly one to stay the appetite.

In some tales the promise of food places the main protagonist in danger of being eaten themselves. This is especially true of *Peter Rabbit* and *Jeremy Fisher*, in which the hunt for food results in near death and a rather meagre reward at the end. Peter is given doses of camomile tea and his sisters eat bread, milk and blackberries for supper, while Jeremy is forced to abandon fishing for minnows and serve roasted grasshopper and ladybird sauce to his guests. *Jeremy Fisher* is another tale, like *Samuel Whiskers*, in which the animal’s natural prey is prepared using human culinary methods. While Jeremy would probably eat grasshoppers and ladybirds raw and alive in nature, instead he roasts the grasshopper and makes a sauce out of the ladybirds. Earlier in the tale he eats a butterfly sandwich for lunch, which he draws from his picnic basket.

There is also a more primitive and sacrificial aspect to the theme of consumption in Potter’s tales. In *Squirrel Nutkin*, the squirrels present offerings of dead animals to Old Brown so that they may safely gather nuts on his island. On the first of the six days they spend gathering nuts, the squirrels bring the owl ‘three fat mice’ (25), followed by a ‘fine fat mole’ (27) on the second day, and ‘seven fat minnows’ (29) on the third. Potter never shows us how these offerings are caught and killed, but we can surmise that the squirrels must be responsible. This detracts somewhat from the cute image of the English red squirrel that Potter’s tale has been credited with popularising. Besides this, squirrels are not naturally in the habit of killing mice, moles or minnows. In this tale, however, the squirrels engage in carnivorous violence (if not consumption) as much as their potential predator, Old Brown. Potter’s emphasis on the size of these offerings to Old Brown as ‘fat’ also gives the reader the impression that these presents of food are wholesome and sumptuous, at least to the owl’s taste. ‘On the fourth day’, she writes, ‘the squirrels brought a present of six fat beetles, which were as good as plums in *plum-pudding* for Old Brown. Each beetle was wrapped up carefully in a dock-leaf, fastened with a pine-needle pin’ (30). Again, Potter’s description deliberately appeals to the sweet tooth of the child reader with her comparison of the beetles to plums, translating the sensory experiences of owls into human terms. The beetles are also

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<sup>335</sup> Heather A. Evans, ‘Kittens and Kitchens: Food, Gender, and The Tale of Samuel Whiskers’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 36 (2008), p. 605.

prepared using human methods of presentation, as in *Samuel Whiskers* and *Jeremy Fisher*, although in this instance the squirrels use plants as utensils. The illustrations are also telling of Owl Brown's dual nature by depicting his eating habits. In one illustration Old Brown has two of the fat mice he receives on the first day clutched in his talons, and the tail of the third is dangling from his beak, even as Nutkin taunts him with riddles. In another, however, he is shown sitting down at a table to eat honey off a plate using a spoon, with Nutkin peeping through the window. In the latter image, Old Brown is also sitting on the same oak chair that appears just at the edge of the illustration depicting the owl pinning Nutkin to the floor by his throat, evoking both the civilized and the primitive, domestic and wild natures, simultaneously.

Potter is also ironic with the items of food she features in several of her tales. In *Benjamin Bunny*, Peter and Benjamin are collecting onions from Mr. McGregor's garden as a present for Mrs. Rabbit, onions being vegetables traditionally served with rabbit. Grahame uses the same irony when Mole yells 'Onion-sauce!' at the rabbits in the opening chapter of *The Wind in the Willows*. In *Jemima Puddle-duck*, the 'gentleman with sandy whiskers' asks Jemima to "bring up some herbs from the farm-garden to make a savoury omelette? Sage and thyme, and mint and two onions, and some parsley. I will provide lard for the stuff – lard for the omelette." (167) The culinary irony is lost in this tale, although what is particularly amusing about this scene is that the sandy-whiskered gentleman (Mr. Tod) thinks that Jemima will realise his devious plan to cook her if he mentions stuffing, but will not realise that he plans to eat her eggs if he mentions an omelette. Potter even mentions explicitly that Jemima is 'nibbling off snippets of all the different sorts of herbs that are used for stuffing roast duck' (167), emphasising Jemima's obliviousness to the gruesome fate that may await her.

### **Animal Speech and Communication**

Verbal interactions between the animal and human characters of Potter's tales are infrequent, but the examples to be found oscillate between spoken exchanges between the human and the animal and exchanges between human speech and animal noises. One of the most revealing examples from the tales is *The Tailor of Gloucester*, one of two tales to feature a human protagonist, the other being *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-winkle*. The human tailor, his cat Simpkin, and the mice living in the tailor's shop all demonstrate shifting degrees of

articulation. The tailor talks often to Simpkin, and even entrusts him to make purchases of bread, milk, sausages and some cherry-coloured silk with their last fourpence. Simpkin, of course, never responds in human language, and the only time Simpkin speaks is during the magical time when ‘all the beasts can talk, in the night between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day in the morning (though there are very few folk that can ever hear them, or know what it is they say).’ Even then, Simpkin is in the streets, out of the tailor’s earshot. His first human words are also nonsense: ‘First and loudest the cocks cried out – “Dame, get up, and bake your pies!” “Oh, dilly, dilly, dilly!” sighed Simpkin.’ He speaks again soon after: ““Hey, diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle! All the cats in Gloucester – except me.”” (47)

Simpkin reverts back to mewling when he encounters the mice busy at work and singing rhymes. The mice tease Simpkin with their songs when they find him mewling and scratching at the door:

The little mice only laughed, and tried another tune –

“Three little mice sat down to spin,  
Pussy passed by and she peeped in.  
What are you at, my fine little men?  
Making coats for gentlemen.  
Shall I come in and cut off your threads?  
Oh, no, Miss Pussy, you’d bite off our heads!” (49)

Simpkin’s inability to articulate his thoughts in the eloquent language the mice use in their rhymes does not necessarily mean that the mice can use human language at this point. With the tailor absent from this passage, the mice could simply be speaking a mouse language of some sort. Even so, the decision to grant the mice human language and Simpkin his natural, animal sounds could suggest that the mice have come to learn human language from the tailor, much like Simpkin, except that the mice have learnt how to speak it as well. When the tailor overturns the teacups and frees the mice Simpkin had trapped there, the mice do not speak to the tailor but they show their gratitude with curtsies and bows, maintaining the periodical mood that Potter’s neo-Georgian tale evokes. So the mice at least know human body language and etiquette; why not spoken language as well?

Of course Potter’s narrative licence is her evocation of Christmas Eve as a magical night on which all beasts can talk. This explains away any discrepancies between the animals’ use of human language. The mice must still be under the Christmas spell when Simpkin arrives, while the spell has already worn off for Simpkin. There could be a moral dimension to this as well. Simpkin’s magic could wear off faster because he had made the wrong choice in hiding the silk from the tailor as punishment for releasing the mice. The

mice, on the other hand, made the considerably better choice in resolving to finish the tailor's coat for him. There is a very interesting passage where Simpkin and the tailor actually communicate in their sleep: 'Whenever the tailor muttered and talked in his sleep, Simpkin said "Miaw-ger-r-w-s-s-ch!" and made strange horrid noises, as cats do at night.' (45) Potter's choice of words suggests that Simpkin makes these noises as a response to the tailor's mutterings. It is a strange instance in the tales of a subconscious exchange between human and animal. Communication across species lines in *The Tailor of Gloucester*, then, can be situated on a complex spectrum which incorporates elements of both the moral and the fantastic. We should also remember that not only are Potter and the reader anthropomorphising the animal characters in the tale, but so is the tailor. He talks to his cat, he imagines mice in waistcoats made from snippets of cloth, and is relatively unphased when he in fact discovers the mice under the teacups wearing clothes, and who curtsy and bow to him. While the illustrations depict the mice in smart Georgian dress, the text does not mention any such attire, even though the tailor as well as the reader can see them clothed. These illustrations depict the mice as the tailor sees them in that moment. Instead of reacting with surprise, however, the tailor merely remarks it is 'very peculiar' or 'passing extraordinary' before returning to muse over his unfinished coat (43). He does not seem to react as a human would be expected to react to the sight of a mouse in miniature human clothes. Another tale in which the human and the nonhuman communicate, and possibly the most glaring example from the tales, is *Mrs. Tiggy-winkle*. Lucie and Mrs. Tiggy-winkle have a full conversation in human language, although the whole time Lucie is under the impression that Mrs. Tiggy-winkle is human, and so she addresses the hedgehog as a human from the start of their dialogue, her first question being "*Who* are you?" (91; my emphasis). Mrs. Tiggy-winkle's speech is humble and polite, filled with many an "if you please'm". As Lucie mistakes Mrs. Tiggy-winkle for a human washerwoman, so their conversation in human language flows without difficulty, suggesting that perhaps a belief in the animal as human (Lucie does not realise until the end that Mrs. Tiggy-winkle is a hedgehog) can foster communication across species lines.

While examples such as this demonstrate that characters can communicate in the same language across the human-animal divide, examples of nonhuman animals of different species speaking to each other demonstrate barriers in communication. *The Pie and the Patty-Pan* is a particularly interesting example of language working on different levels between different species of different social standing. While Duchess is complaining that to Ribby that she has swallowed a patty-pan, all the while she is careful not to let on that she swapped the

pies in the oven (which of course, she hasn't). Duchess is careful with her language so as not to give herself away and seem extremely rude in front of her graceful hostess, although she is convinced that she has swallowed the patty-pan that was in her own ham-and-veal pie and not Ribby's mouse-and-bacon pie, the pie that Duchess has actually eaten. When Ribby resolves to fetch Dr. Maggotty the magpie, she is met with nonsensical utterances, comprising primarily of the words 'gammon' and 'spinach'. The phrase 'gammon and spinach' was actually a colloquial expression synonymous with 'nonsense' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and perhaps Dr. Maggotty's words are not nonsense in themselves but actually a sly commentary on the ridiculous and awkward situation in which Duchess and Ribby have found themselves. For example, after Duchess finds her own pie still in the oven and puts it in Ribby's backyard, she 'sat down again by the fire, and shut her eyes; when Ribby arrived with the doctor, she seemed fast asleep. "Gammon, ha, HA?" said the doctor' (116). This suggests that Dr. Maggotty knows Duchess is pretending to be asleep but lacks the capacity to articulate his thoughts in proper speech. He can only remark on something which is 'gammon and spinach'.

The birds that sing riddles to the grey squirrels in *Timmy Tiptoes* and end up inciting the other squirrels to turn against Timmy do not seem to convey any meaning to Timmy himself, but the other squirrels react to the birds' song:

The squirrels followed and listened. The first little bird flew into the bush where Timmy and Goody Tiptoes were quietly tying their bags, and it sang – "Who's-bin digging-up *my* nuts? Who's been diggin-up *my* nuts?"

Timmy Tiptoes went on with his work without replying; indeed, the little bird did not expect an answer. It was only singing its natural song, and it meant nothing at all.

But when the other squirrels heard that song, they rushed upon Timmy Tiptoes and cuffed and scratched him, and upset his bag of nuts. The innocent little bird which had caused all the mischief, flew away in a fright! (240-41)

Why is it that Timmy is the only squirrel that pays the bird no attention? Whatever the reason, it certainly gets him into trouble when the other squirrels single him out. Timmy and Goody are also illustrated as the only squirrels in human attire, suggesting that perhaps they are less attuned to their animal (squirrel) natures, and therefore less attuned to the language of other species.

Squirrel Nutkin explores language as a marker of difference between the human and the nonhuman. Nutkin spends much of his time in the tale agitating the seemingly composed owl, Old Brown, with riddles, rather than collecting nuts on Old Brown's island with the other squirrels. However, when Old Brown finally snaps and catches Nutkin with the

intention of eating him, he succeeds only in tearing off Nutkin's tail. Losing his tail, however, also results in Nutkin losing his voice: 'And to this day, if you meet Nutkin up a tree and ask him a riddle, he will throw sticks at you, and stamp his feet and scold, and shout – "Cuck-cuck-cuck-cur-r-r-cuck-k-k!"' (36) Kutzer remarks that

In the end Nutkin is not completely vanquished by authority, but he does lose his tail and his voice. His tail is the very essence of who he is. Squirrels in nature express much of themselves and their mood through their tails, which twitch and switch and express (to the human eye) their emotions. Nutkin has lost the essence of squirrelhood in losing his tail. But more significantly he has also lost his voice, lost his "tale" or the ability to tell it, through his disobedience. He is no longer verbally quick and clever but is reduced to squirrel chatter, rendered admirably by Potter in her onomatopoeic last line. He has challenged authority and escaped with his life, but he is somehow diminished.<sup>336</sup>

Nutkin has lost his 'squirrelhood' while also 'reduced to squirrel chatter'. This is no place for him in either the human or animal realms.

This particular example illustrates the interdependency of human and animal traits in Potter's characters. In losing one of the features that makes him a natural squirrel, Nutkin also loses speech, the one feature that makes him an anthropomorphized squirrel. This interdependency suggests continuity, in this case, between human and squirrel nature. The dual nature of Nutkin and other characters is such that the human and animal halves of this duality cannot be separated without both being lost. We could also view Potter's attribution of articulate speech to her animals as another process of translation from animal into human terms, and in the case of language the notion of translation applies most. It is also not entirely clear as to whether Nutkin has lost the ability to speak or chooses not to speak. Perhaps Nutkin does not utter riddles upon request, another way in which he resists authority.

### **Potter's Use of Violence**

Something else that pervades Potter's tales is violence, which is manifest at a variety of degrees, from Tabitha Twitchit cuffing her unruly kittens to Old Brown the owl attempting to skin Squirrel Nutkin. There are episodes in the tales which demonstrate a level of violence not seen in Grahame's work, and which, perhaps, reflect a mixture of the harsh discipline typically experienced in the domestic human spaces of Potter's era, the violence symptomatic of the natural world which Potter learned from her observations, and the violence inherent in

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<sup>336</sup> Kutzer, p. 30.

the human mistreatment of animals. While some tales also depict violence implicitly, many others feature only the threat of violence, which in many ways is far worse, particularly for the child reader. However, Gillian Avery remarks that ‘Ruthlessness and violence have always been popular with children. They don’t worry in the least about the fate of Jack and Jill, the three blind mice, or the old man in ‘Goosey Gander’ who wouldn’t say his prayers [...] But though children have now taken them over, nursery rhymes and folk stories were not composed with them in mind, and adults who write for children are in general more fastidious’.<sup>337</sup> Potter seems less fastidious than the general case, perhaps because, as Avery suggests, she is able to ‘give her sardonic humour full play because ostensibly it was not being directed at human characters; writers for children find it very difficult, if not impossible, to avoid hinting at some sort of moral judgment where human behaviour is involved’.<sup>338</sup> William Wynn Yarbrough remarks in a similar vein that ‘Potter’s punishments can be scarring, physically and psychologically, and the violence is depicted as if it were always justified and, more importantly, natural’.<sup>339</sup> Moreover, her merging of human and animal forms of violence, or threats of violence, provokes some interesting notions about what types of violence, indeed, can be considered ‘animal’.

One thing to note about the violence that occurs in the tales is that it is not absent from the domestic space, although there is a distinct feeling in several of the tales that threats of violence are greater when characters venture away from home. It is sometimes unclear as to whether home is in fact the safe place Potter’s child readers are led to believe by their parents. Yarbrough writes that ‘Home produces its own dysfunction despite what socialised and acculturated parents do and confinement and cruelty are relative to the child: different punishments are meted out to different characters depending on the transgression’.<sup>340</sup> A classic example is *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers*, in which Samuel and his wife Anna Maria, living behind the skirting board of Tabitha Twitchit’s home, attempt to make Tom Kitten into a roly-poly pudding. Tom does not have to wander away from the domestic space to run into this grisly situation.

There is also something more disturbing in the sort of violence that occurs in this tale in that Samuel and Anna Maria use human implements for a human recipe. Had they simply tried to catch and eat him as they found him, we might regard the episode as an example of a

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<sup>337</sup> Avery, pp. 190-91.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid, p. 195.

<sup>339</sup> William Wynn Yarbrough, *Boys to Men: Performative Masculinity in English Anthropomorphic Children’s Tales* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2007), p. 95.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

more natural form of violence, but Tom is very methodically bound and rolled up, still alive, inside the dough. Samuel and Anna Maria also take their time to decide how best to make the roly-poly pudding, drawing out the suspense of the tale. An example of the text demonstrates the sadistic undertones of the episode: '[Tom's] coat was pulled off, and he was rolled up in a bundle, and tied with string in very hard knots. Anna Maria did the tying. The old rat watched her and took snuff. When she had finished, they both sat staring at him with their mouths open' (187). The reader is well aware that Tom's fur is untouched, evident from Samuel's objection later that the pudding smells 'sooty'. However, while Tom's coat being pulled off refers to his human clothes being removed, it is also suggestive of his being stripped of his fur. The use of 'coat' here, as opposed to 'jacket' or something more suggestive of human attire, is deliberate. Relating the episode to the rats' language, Kutzer also remarks on the disturbing disparity between the violence of the rats and their seemingly polite social airs: 'The rats, when they return, are comic in a horrifying kind of way. The horror lies in the disconnection between their barbaric desire to wrap up a live kitten in dough and bake it and their very formal and polite speech. Their language has an archaic and polite tone to it, even while they are discussing the edibility of kittens.'<sup>341</sup>

A similarly disturbing tale is *Mr. Tod*. Having stolen Benjamin and Flopsy's new litter, Tommy Brock, meaning to cook and eat them in a pie, keeps them locked up in the oven while he sleeps. Even upon Peter and Benjamin's discovery of the babies, looking through the window from outside the house, the helplessness of the situation soon becomes evident: 'They could not open the window; and although the young family was alive – the little rabbits were quite incapable of letting themselves out; they were not old enough to crawl' (264). Potter's use of suspense in this tale really emphasizes the horror of the situation the rabbits face. Peter and Benjamin must race against the build up of the conflict between Tommy Brock and Mr. Tod above ground by frantically digging a tunnel underneath the house. This presents an interesting opposition between the wild and domestic space. In the case of *Mr. Tod*, the domestic space, especially the more human-like dwelling of Bull Banks, is the site of danger. The wild space is by contrast one of safety for the rabbits.

*Mr. Tod* could be seen to embody all three forms of violence: violence in the domestic sphere, violence in nature, and the violence of humans towards animals. The anthropomorphism of Mr. Tod and Tommy Brock differentiates them enough from the rabbits for them to seem almost like human predators at various points in the tale. For

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<sup>341</sup> Kutzer, pp. 102-3.

example, Tommy Brock carries off the rabbit babies in a sack to cook in the oven at Bull Banks, rather than killing and eating them outright while Benjamin Bouncer is asleep. Furthermore, Tommy Brock does not sneak into the rabbit burrow to steal the babies, but stumbles across the opportunity when Benjamin Bouncer invites the badger into his home. This would be unheard of in reality – badgers are potentially extremely dangerous for even the stoutest rabbit. Meanwhile, there are episodes where fox and badger seem very animalistic indeed. This fluctuation between naturalistic and anthropomorphic fox and badger also converges with the fluctuation between the domestic and wild space, creating a threefold manifestation of violence in both animal and human forms: animal violence in the wild space, animal violence in the domestic space, and human violence in the domestic space. While the battle between fox and badger at the climax of the tale results in the almost total destruction of the interior of Bull Banks, wrecking the domestic space, the manner in which the antagonists brawl is more animalistic. Tommy Brock rolls Mr. Tod out of the house, and ‘Then the snarling and worrying went on outside; and they rolled over the bank, and down hill, bumping over rocks’ (277). Potter’s language gives us the impression the two characters are biting and growling at each other, tearing at each other’s fur rather than throwing a few punches.

In terms of human mistreatment of animals in Potter’s tales, there are two major instances: the rabbit tales, which feature the vigilant but ultimately thwarted Mr. McGregor, and the pig tales. There are two tales in the collection which feature pigs as the protagonists – *Pigling Bland* (1913) and *Little Pig Robinson* (1930). In both narratives, the protagonists are sent away from home by their aunts to market, end up in the company of humans who mean to eat them or sell them for their meat, and finally both escape into the wild. In *Pigling Bland*, the narrator plays an active role in the tale, assisting Aunt Pettitoes with the care of her family of eight. After deliberating over what to do with the piglets, Aunt Pettitoes resolves to keep one piglet at home to help with the housework and sends five away, two in a wheelbarrow and three in a cart. While it is not expressly stated we can only assume they are taken away to be slaughtered. The remaining piglets, Pigling Bland and Alexander, are prepared for their journey to market. They are issued pig licences, which Aunt Pettitoes ‘had no end of trouble in getting [...] from the policeman’, and they are dressed and made to look like proper, civil little pigs indeed: ‘“Mind your Sunday clothes, and remember to blow your nose [...] beware of traps, hen roosts, bacon and eggs; always walk upon your hind legs.”’ (286-7)

Of course, the whole purpose of their taking themselves to market is so they can be sold for their meat. The fate of slaughter is normalised for these pigs, almost like a final rite

of passage; they do not understand that it is possible to live a free life and die naturally. It is only after Pigling Bland and Alexander are separated on their journey, the latter having to return home with the policeman because he lost his licence, that Pigling Bland begins to question the business of going to market: 'He had never wanted to go; and the idea of standing all by himself in a crowded market, to be stared at, pushed, and hired by some big strange farmer was very disagreeable – "I wish I could have a little garden and grow potatoes", said Pigling Bland' (291). In spite of these aspirations, Pigling Bland is still rather clueless about the intentions of Peter Thomas Piperson, who catches him in a hen roost.

Avery writes that in the mid-Victorian period,

...the fate of pigs was much dwelt on, with no apparent thought that this might be found distressing. Curiously, the whole of *Little Pig Robinson* [...] turns on pork and bacon jokes. This sort of humour would have looked decidedly out of place in the 1930s – an epoch when there was a conspiracy on the part of middle-class adults to conceal harsh realities from children.<sup>342</sup>

## Conclusion

Within a single tale, Potter depicts a multitude of themes which reflect the instability of the categories of 'human' and 'animal'. Through the fluctuating representations of clothing, speech, food, and violence, themes which all intersect, Potter disrupts the boundary between domestic and wild. Such concepts as clothing or speech are revealed to apply to *both* the human *and* animal worlds. While the distinction between human clothes and animal coats is blurred throughout, the ambiguous line between language and communication is also blurred in several episodes of dialogue from the tales. Animals speak as well as bark, growl, croak, quack, and so on. Plum-like beetles are wrapped in dock-leaves, butterflies are eaten in sandwiches, and mice are cooked in pastry. There is no distinguishing where the boundaries between supposedly human and animal tropes lie in the dual anthropomorphism which permeates Potter's narratives.

The more subtle interplay between the human and animal aspects of characters in Potter's tales enables a reading of her anthropomorphic characters as not only animals as humans, but also humans as animals. Her oeuvre exemplifies the mutually implicative processes of anthropomorphism and theriomorphism throughout each tale. Potter differs from Grahame in representing animals according to the nuances of each species in question, as

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<sup>342</sup> Avery, pp. 192-3.

opposed to representing animals according to some homogenizing concept of animality, which is also crucial in helping us to understand the interrelations between species.

Marchesini asserts that

The multiformity of the species – and thus of anatomies, of performativities, of behaviours, of electivities of habitat, of sensory abilities, of communicative abilities – perfectly incarnates the concept of diversity, thus permitting a subjective identification or, better, an identity alliance. The animal becomes a real double and as such is exemplary of characteristics or properties of an individual, a genealogical line, a tribe, a population, or humans in the most complex sense of the term. In other words, to observe animals means to absorb their performativity; in turn, this permits the construction of an identity link with this particular species, that is to say to make a projection on the animal or, if you wish, to use (never in a passive, instrumental, reified way) the animal represented in the form of a stereotype.<sup>343</sup>

While Potter is attentive to the details – anatomies, performativities, behaviours – of certain species such as rabbits, mice, squirrels and ducks, each tale offers but a glimpse into the interrelations between humans and rabbits, humans and mice, and so on. Literature of a later period, which includes, and is perhaps indebted to, Richard Adams' *Watership Down*, explores this 'identity alliance' between two species – rabbits and humans, in Adams' case – in a much more complex way.

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<sup>343</sup> Marchesini, 'The Theriosphere', p. 122.

## Chapter 5

### **Anthropomorphism Reconsidered: The Rabbit “Humanimals” of Richard Adams’ *Watership Down***

#### **Introduction: What Sort of a Novel is *Watership Down*?**

On the surface, Richard Adams’ debut novel, *Watership Down* (1972), seems a far cry from the animal fantasies of Kenneth Grahame and Beatrix Potter. Adams’ novel differs in its use of anthropomorphic techniques in many respects; he does not clothe his animal characters, house them in human dwellings, or have them engage in dialogue with humans. However, Adams depicts rabbits (more specifically the European rabbit) as social animals, often in ways which resemble human social practices, without resorting to the strongly anthropomorphic techniques employed by Grahame and Potter. While Adams’ text differs to some extent from the anthropomorphism of Grahame, Potter, Lewis Carroll, Joel Chandler Harris, and other such authors whose animal characters seem like humans in disguise (at least some of the time), it nonetheless differs in equal measure from another category, the “realistic” animal story, in which none of the animal characters speak, dress or behave in any *explicitly* anthropomorphic way; examples include Jack London’s *Call of the Wild* (1903) and Henry Williamson’s *Tarka the Otter* (1927). While any of these texts would provide an interesting departure from the Edwardian “golden age” tales, *Watership Down* perpetuates certain elements of these animal arcadias while delving further into the genre of natural history and testing anthropocentric assumptions about language, subjectivity and species difference.

The result of the liminal status of *Watership Down* in terms of its anthropomorphic tropes is that Adams’ rabbits are depicted as *neither* rabbit *nor* human, yet *both* rabbit *and* human, at the same time; they are *neither/both*. The “humanimals” of Adams’ novel exemplify Haraway’s assertion that the interrelations between species depend on “partial connections”, ‘patterns within which the players are neither wholes nor parts’.<sup>344</sup> I argue that, like Grahame’s novel, *Watership Down* is ‘more than one kind of book,’ but extends beyond *The Wind in the Willows* in its amalgamation of different genres.<sup>345</sup> *Watership Down* is, we might say, more than one kind of *animal narrative*; the novel is simultaneously a children’s

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<sup>344</sup> Haraway (2003), p. 8.

<sup>345</sup> See Chapter 3.

animal story, a natural history text, and an animal epic. Robert Miltner argues that the novel is ‘not one fine story, but simultaneously so many fine stories, so many types of stories. To a greater or lesser degree, *Watership Down* is a beast fable, a fantasy, a mythological tale, an epic, a political/Utopian novel, and an allegory’.<sup>346</sup>

Graham Hammond stresses the novel’s affinity with an older style of literature, and claims it to be ‘unique among children’s books. And yet it has been shown to be a book in many ways so old-fashioned in style and outlook and so derivative in some of its elements as to test one’s credulity that it could have been written and published in the 1970s’.<sup>347</sup> *Watership Down* certainly possesses tropes of earlier children’s animal stories, although Hammond’s presumptuous argument that the novel is unique among ‘children’s books’ is limiting. Adams’ novel is not *only* a children’s book, and there are many ‘adult’ themes explored in the text – violence, death, sexuality – which are conventionally excluded from or only alluded to in children’s literature (Potter’s tales, for example) but which are nonetheless explicitly portrayed in *Watership Down*, often unsentimentally. Despite Adams’ depiction of the rabbits’ world as an ultimately dangerous one, there is an arcadian quality to the novel in the rabbits’ search for a safe haven on Watership Down. Much of the dialogue in the novel is also greatly influenced by Adams’ own experiences during the Second World War, evoking a sense of old-fashioned masculinity and camaraderie between the characters in the all-male company that embark on the great journey, which bears similarities to the dynamic between the heroes of *The Wind in the Willows*. In light of recent posthuman readings of animal narratives and the growing popularity of literary criticism within the wider field of critical animal studies, however, Hammond’s verdict is wide open to debate. While *Watership Down* does indeed retain stylistic elements of older literature, as I will argue, it also demonstrates ways in which animal subjects can be portrayed anthropomorphically, but non-anthropocentrically, in a plurality of genres and modes which blur provocatively into each other. This non-anthropocentric anthropomorphism characterizes the shift in literary representations of nonhuman animals towards which Adams’ novel tends.

Another reason for the ambivalence regarding the periodic register of the text is the epigraphs which precede each chapter. These epigraphs, over fifty in total, include excerpts from Greek tragedy (Aeschylus), medieval romance (Mallory), allegory (Bunyan), poetry (Blake, Browning, Tennyson, Yeats, Auden), drama (Shakespeare), Bible verses, letters,

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<sup>346</sup> Robert Miltner, ‘“Watership Down”: A Genre Study’, *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 6.1 (21) (1993), p. 63.

<sup>347</sup> Graham Hammond, ‘Trouble With Rabbits’, *Children’s Literature in Education*, 4.3 (1973), p. 62.

memoirs, and even a libretto. They also include snippets from the works of Lewis Carroll, Joel Chandler Harris, Kenneth Grahame and Walter de la Mare, whose own animal story, *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* (1910), or *The Three Royal Monkeys*, was to have an influence on Adams' narrative (although this particular text is not quoted in an epigraph). Some epigraphs are also written, often untranslated, in French and Italian. It is little surprise that *Watership Down*, a patchwork quilt of intertextual references and allusions spanning millennia, should confuse the critic who does not immediately recognise in this narrative a modern, children's tale.

A question that we must answer in this chapter is, why rabbits? The animal story from which Adams draws most influence, De la Mare's *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, features very humanized monkey protagonists, animals closely related to humans phylogenetically, although less so than apes. It is interesting, therefore, that Adams should choose a species of mammal comparatively so distant from humans on the same scale. While it could be argued that De la Mare's choice of animal allows him to depict the behaviour of his monkey characters as, to an extent, *homologous* to human behaviour, Adams' choice allows him to depict more *analogous* behaviours, and that it is this crucial difference which allows Adams to probe questions of species difference so provocatively in his novel. One answer to the question of why he chooses rabbits is that Adams is perpetuating the literary tradition of the rabbit trickster figure. Rabbits are central characters in the works of Lewis Carroll, Joel Chandler Harris, Beatrix Potter, and others (though not all of them are strictly tricksters). In fact, rabbits are probably the most anthropomorphised animals in English literature. Another answer is that rabbits are cute, furry, herbivorous animals that child readers will find relatable protagonists. Lockley even writes about how the physiognomy of rabbits makes them more relatable to children:

The rabbit has a baby face, of rounded outlines, snub nose, enormous ears and eyes, and an appearance of helplessness. Konrad Lorenz has suggested that it is because of these attributes of infancy, this facial resemblance to the young human, that we – women and children especially – are pleased when we gaze at a rabbit. The fox, with its pointed nose, the badger with its pig-like profile, are less charming, even disliked and feared; we also remember the carnivorous habit of these and other long-nosed animals, and hold this, perhaps also subconsciously, against them. Yet the podgy faces of cub fox and baby badger delight us – again perhaps because of the childish appearance: rounded, helpless, without guile.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> R.M. Lockley, *The Private Life of the Rabbit: An Account of the Life History and Social Behaviour of the Wild Rabbit* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964), p. 11.

There is probably not one definitive answer as to why rabbits have been chosen by Adams as the main protagonists. The following sections will, in part, explore other possible answers to the question, and the central difference between homologous and analogous representations of rabbits in the novel will also be of vital importance to the discussion.

Examples of anthropomorphism in Adams' other novels demonstrate that his approach to representing animals in fiction is highly experimental. Following *Watership Down* is his second novel, *Shardik* (1974), and his third, *The Plague Dogs* (1977). *Shardik* is more fantastical than its predecessor as it is set in a secondary world characteristic of much 'high' fantasy fiction, but less fantastical is its animal protagonist, the bear Shardik, who remains silent throughout the novel, and true in every sense to his ursine nature. Godlike status is anthropomorphically attributed to Shardik by the primitive human cultures in the novel. *The Plague Dogs*, on the other hand, is set in the real world of the Lake District but features dialogue between Adams' two canine protagonists, Snitter the terrier and Rowf the retriever, both of whom have escaped from an animal experimentation facility. The novel also continually shifts between a third-person narration of the experiences of both Snitter and Rowf and the human characters they encounter. *Tales from Watership Down* (1996) is problematically regarded as a sequel to the 1972 novel while it is actually a more extensive collection of tales about El-ahrairah and some stories which offer glimpses into the lives of certain characters after the events of the novel.

*Watership Down* is similar to Grahame's novel in many respects, not least in its dual narrative structure and incorporation of pagan myth. It has been generally regarded as an epic, Dieter Petzold calling it a 'lapine Aeneid'.<sup>349</sup> However, the question of audience in the novel is more ambivalent than the question of its form. Gillian Adams writes:

[I]s *Watership Down* an epic, and if it is, for what audience? Is it an epic for children? Or are there rather two readers implied by the text, the college-educated adult and the child, each of whom will respond to a different journey: the adult to the Virgilian epic journey which operates on a socio-political level, the child to the personal journey of a group of brave rabbits who form a composite hero with whom he can identify.<sup>350</sup>

As with *The Wind in the Willows* we are once again drawn to notions of the implied reader, particularly as it relates to child and adult audiences. Furthermore, I would argue that the child/adult distinction, as it applies to the question of the intended audience, is more blurred.

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<sup>349</sup> Dieter Petzold, 'Fantasy Out of Myth and Fable: Animal Stories in Rudyard Kipling and Richard Adams', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 12.1 (1987), p. 18.

<sup>350</sup> Gillian Adams, 'Watership Down as a Double Journey', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 1986 Proceedings (1986), p. 106.

Not only is it more oriented towards adults with its intertextual references but its treatment of subjects such as death, pain and torture signifies a violent turn in the children's animal story.

What sort of animal story is *Watership Down*? The plurality of forms listed above by Miltner transports the text beyond simply the plurality of meaning. Adams' own remarks about the novel in a radio interview throw its alleged status as allegory into ambiguity: 'It's only a made-up story, it's in no sense an allegory or parable or any kind of political myth.'<sup>351</sup> For an animal story to be purely allegorical it must, by extension, be purely anthropomorphic; in other words, the nonhuman is not represented on its own terms but is depicted as entirely analogous to the human. It is Miltner's claim that the work is a beast fable which sparks particular interest: 'Because the story is a beast fable, we do not identify ourselves too strongly with any of the animal characters.'<sup>352</sup> I would argue strongly against this statement; in fact, drawing upon texts like Lockley's *The Private Life of the Rabbit* (1964), Adams allows the reader to imagine the experiences of rabbits by emphasising the shared characteristics of rabbits and humans, as we shall see later. Rabbits are not simply analogues of humans in *Watership Down*. However, the figure of the rabbit in the novel is nonetheless ambivalent as Adams' depictions shift between the actual and the symbolic, and this, furthermore, perpetuates the ambiguity surrounding our categorisation of the novel's genre. While Adams includes several factual elements in his tale, the motif of the rabbit as trickster is the essential anthropomorphic trope of the novel. Moreover, this anthropomorphic attribute is what defines the code of survival by which Adams' rabbits live, as well as what shapes their mythology.

Although Adams asserts that his novel was not meant to be a 'political myth', mythology is central to the culture of his rabbit characters. One narrative thread of *Watership Down* follows the journey of the Sandleford rabbits in their search for a new home, while the other is comprised of tales about El-ahrairah, the semi-divine rabbit trickster figure that pervades their mythology. The second narrative thread is embedded within the first. In all instances these tales are told by the skilful orator, Dandelion, at points at which the rabbits' journey becomes difficult or dangerous. Joan Bridgman writes that 'From the first page, the reader is trained to view the events in the narrative on the real and transcendental [spiritual] levels'.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/berkshire/content/articles/2007/03/16/richard\\_adams\\_interview\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/berkshire/content/articles/2007/03/16/richard_adams_interview_feature.shtml)>.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>353</sup> Joan Bridgman, 'The Significance of Myth in "Watership Down"', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 6.1(21) (1993), p. 7.

John Pennington claims Beatrix Potter's influence on Adams' novel is deeper than most readers realize: 'The spectre of Potter is indeed present in Adams, a spectre that is a shadowy, but integral influence [...] In fact, it may be that Potter, not Lockley, is the lapinological center of *Watership Down*.'<sup>354</sup> The works of both authors, argues Pennington, 'attempt to escape the industrial world and recapture Arcadia. The Peter Rabbit stories and *Watership Down* are, in effect, quests for the Golden Age and highlight the unending there-and-back again search for this Arcadia'.<sup>355</sup> Pennington identifies some important similarities between Potter and Adams' work, but Potter's tales do not, arguably, comprise the 'lapinological center' of the novel. There is too much of Lockley's influence at work in *Watership Down*, and Potter's rabbits are undoubtedly more analogous of humans. While Adams and Lockley recognise *analogies* between the human and rabbit species, they do not generally seek to draw *homologies* between them. Pennington's assertion that Adams' narrative is a search for Arcadia is also misleading, as if to suggest that Hazel and company reach some sort of Warren of Eden, in which they are safe from enemies. The whole mythology of Adams' rabbits is constructed around the figure of El-ahrairah, the "Prince with a Thousand Enemies", and their prey status necessitates their survival ethic and the very foundations of their mythology, counter-narrating any arcadian reading of the text.

*Watership Down* deals *explicitly* with ideas that are only *implicitly* treated in Grahame and Potter's work. The most striking example is Adams treatment of what may once have been perceived to be adult themes – sex, death, violence, and so on. While Grahame and Potter still allude to these themes, and while certainly an adult if not a child reader can surmise the meaning of these allusions, Adams lays bare the truth of such themes as death in several descriptive, often harrowing, episodes. Another obvious example of this difference between the explicit in Adams and the implicit in Grahame and Potter is Adams' consistent observations, as the omniscient narrator, and as an author drawing in part upon Lockley's *Private Life*, of the affinities between the behaviour of rabbits and humans. In some instances, Adams seems almost to tone down the anthropomorphic language of Lockley's text, as we will see later. While sometimes converging notions of humanity and animality is implied in certain episodes within Grahame's novel and Potter's tales (for example, in the fluctuation of size and posture, or the presence and absence of clothing), Adams also

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<sup>354</sup> John Pennington, 'From Peter Rabbit to "Watership Down": There and Back Again to the Arcadian Ideal', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 3.2 (1991), p. 67.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 68-9.

converges these notions, but by perpetually shifting between the perspective of characters (namely Hazel) and the perspective of the omniscient narrator.

What happens if we deconstruct the narrative of *Watership Down* in order to draw out its different shades of anthropomorphism? Is it possible to apply a gradient of most to least anthropomorphic tropes and modes of writing as a thought experiment through which to explore Adams' novel? The rest of this chapter will discuss themes of the novel along such a gradient, while discovering that the process of applying a gradient model is problematic at many levels, not least because Adams' rabbits embody the contradictory tropes of the "humanimal", neither/both rabbit and human. This structure of relation means that any trope considered strongly anthropomorphic will also contain naturalistic elements, and vice versa. Firstly, it will address the novel as an epic quest narrative and explore its more allegorical and fantastic (and sometimes escapist) tropes. Secondly, the chapter will explore the primitivist tropes of the novel and the mythological and supernatural elements as exemplified in the characters of El-ahrairah and Fiver. As we shall see, the character of Fiver exemplifies the inconsistent and contradictory anthropomorphism which permeates Adams' novel. The discussion will then address the subject of language, perhaps the most ambivalent trope in the novel in terms of its anthropomorphic implications, before finally exploring Adams' natural history mode of writing and his representation of the rabbits' lifeworld. Ultimately the aim of this chapter is to use an already deconstructed and critical concept of anthropomorphism to deconstruct Adams' novel and to distinguish the various narrative tropes he employs throughout this complex and unique work of animal fantasy. It will be seen that often, though not always, the seemingly most anthropomorphic tropes in *Watership Down* are revealed to be the least anthropocentric.

The distinction between homology and analogy, between sameness and difference, will prove to be a crucial one as we explore the complexities of Adams' use of anthropomorphic tropes in depicting his rabbit "humanimals". Ontological categories are destabilized in the novel through Adams' ability to describe rabbit behaviour and social structures as seemingly different from those of humans while exposing interesting affinities between them at the same time. Human-constructed characteristics of rabbits are often deployed in representing them in the guise of natural attributes. This contradictory mode of representation is in large part due to the complex history of migration and domestication we share with rabbits, more specifically the European rabbit, and this history confuses and blends notions about what it means to be rabbit and what it means to be human. In Donna Haraway's terms, humans have "become with" the rabbit, and perhaps this explains their

unrelenting appeal for humans in their construction of myths, folktales, children's stories and, of course, animal epics.

Let us remind ourselves of Herbrechter and Callus' claim that 'a posthumanist reading may identify oppositions between the human and the non-human at work in a text or practice and demonstrate how the vital difference between the two has to be strategically breached in order to trouble protection of the "essential purity" of the categories'.<sup>356</sup> *Watership Down* demonstrates this strategical breaching of species categories in the case of rabbits and humans throughout his complex narrative. Perhaps even reading Adams' "humanimal" rabbits in a posthuman way is inadequate given that it is 'patterns of relationality', to use Donna Haraway's terms, 'that need rethinking, not getting beyond one troubled category for a worse one even more likely to go postal'.<sup>357</sup> If we are to read "humanimal" figures as posthuman, we also need to read them as *post-canine* or *post-panine* (thinking specifically of Kafka's humanimals), affixing the "post" to the most relevant species- or order-specific adjective.<sup>358</sup> In the case of Adams' rabbits, the relevant term would be *post-lapine*, although given Adams' invention of Lapine as a rabbit language in the novel, it might be more useful to differentiate by using the term *post-lagomorph* (even though this order of mammals includes hares and pikas). By reading the animal tropes of the humanimal in this way, we are able to explore the constant interplay of tropes which are neither/both human and animal, human and rabbit, human and dog, human and chimpanzee, and so on. Of course, this interplay is determined in narratives by differing degrees and modes of anthropomorphism and as well as the attributes we culturally and biologically we share, or are perceived to share, with other species of animals. I shall return to the concept of the *post-lagomorph* as it relates to Adams' rabbits later in this chapter.

### ***Watership Down* as an Animal Epic**

Cathi Dunn MacRae claims that *Watership Down* is 'the prototype of the modern epic animal fantasy'.<sup>359</sup> According to MacRae, the conventions of animal fantasy established in Adams' novel are the following: language and communication with other species; a

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<sup>356</sup> See p. 41.

<sup>357</sup> Haraway (2008), p. 17.

<sup>358</sup> While *post-canine* refers to dogs, *post-panine* refers to the "great apes", i.e. chimpanzees, gorillas and bonobos; it is thus the most relevant adjective to use in relation to Kafka's character of Red Peter.

<sup>359</sup> Walter Hogan, *Animals in Young Adult Fiction* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), p. 177.

nonanthropomorphic culture; legends and lore explaining their origins; a visionary leader who predicts danger and urges the group towards change; a conviction that animals are more highly evolved than brutal humans; and a struggle for survival with some force, often human, which threatens their way of life.<sup>360</sup> By a ‘nonanthropomorphic culture’, writes Walter Hogan, ‘MacRae means that the featured animal species has a unique, specialized history and culture especially suited to that animal, quite different from any known human culture. However, in a larger sense, such literature is “anthropomorphic” in that it attributes to animals communication and cultural skills that are generally considered to be possessed only by our own species’.<sup>361</sup> Moreover, two things are evident from glancing at the above list of animal fantasy conventions: one is that one or a combination of these conventions has already appeared in animal narratives from earlier periods, the other is that the claim of a nonanthropomorphic culture seems to contradict almost all of the other conventions in the list.

The immediate predecessor in the epic quest narrative tradition, for Adams at least, is Walter de la Mare’s *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*. De la Mare’s text is the story of three monkey brothers – Thumb, Thimble and Nod – princes of a distant land named Tishnar. With the aid of the wonderstone they set out on a quest to find the land of their royal ancestors. Adams himself writes of the novel that it ‘seemed more real to me than my surroundings [...] Beyond the boring outward world this other, valid world of the imagination really existed; a remote, dangerous place, with its own animals, trees and plants, where all the inhabitants were animals’.<sup>362</sup> This description of De la Mare’s fictional world as ‘remote’ and yet ‘dangerous’ suggests that the novel does not follow in the tradition of the animal arcadia, which has been attributed to Grahame’s novel and, to an extent, Potter’s tales. By extension of the profound influence of the text on Adams’ own work, we can surmise that it is not Adams’ intention to portray an arcadia in *Watership Down* either. Margaret Blount summarises De la Mare’s story as ‘the old, never failing quest story of a journey towards a far off paradise transposed into animal terms. It has likenesses with the prototype quest stories, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *The Odyssey*, *King Solomon’s Mines*, *Through the Looking Glass*, *The Water Babies*, *Treasure Island*’.<sup>363</sup> However, while the story conforms to many traditional tropes of these quest narratives, as does Adams’ novel, the human-nonhuman

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<sup>360</sup> The most obvious, contemporaneous example of an animal narrative which explicitly draws on these conventions is William Horwood’s Duncton trilogy (1980-89), often perceived as the *Watership Down* of moles.

<sup>361</sup> Hogan, pp. 177-8.

<sup>362</sup> Richard Adams, *The Day Gone By: An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1990), p. 155.

<sup>363</sup> Blount, p. 275.

relationship is one of ambiguity. De la Mare ‘sees the monkeys as a kind of man: a special, poetic, rare race like men and yet unlike, gentle, delicate, full of courage, near to natural things and finer than men and more sensitive. The monkeys have hopes and fears, poetry and memory; they meditate on their forbears, childhood, nameless terrors and wonders, the beauty and strangeness of other animals, the industry of insects’.<sup>364</sup> Perhaps Adams attempts to challenge the human-nonhuman distinction even further by casting rabbits in his own quest narrative instead of monkeys, with whom more obvious parallels with humans can be drawn.

However, it is not immediately clear that *Watership Down* adopts many of De la Mare’s own anthropomorphic tropes. *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* follows in the more overtly anthropomorphic tradition of Carroll, Grahame and Potter by featuring the monkey protagonists in human clothes, and wielding man-made trinkets on their quest. Early in the story, their father, Seelem, ‘taught them to walk upright, never to taste blood, and never, unless in danger or despair, to climb trees or to grow a tail’.<sup>365</sup> In other words, he cautions them against fully embracing their animality, much in the same way that Tabitha Twitchit cautions her kittens or Aunt Pettitoes her young piglet nephews. While it is central mostly to Adams’ construction of an epic quest narrative in *Watership Down*, we shall return to De la Mare’s profound influence on Adams’ fiction later in the chapter.

I have begun my analysis of the anthropomorphic gradient of *Watership Down* with its epic quest narrative because the characters of any such narrative will necessarily be humanized to a significant extent. W.A. Senior writes that as part of the conventional quest fantasy, ‘[t]he protagonist, generally an average person with hidden abilities, receives a call to action and reluctantly embarks on the first adventure. Choice is crucial in quest fantasy, so protagonists face several cruxes where their choices determine the fate of many’.<sup>366</sup> He goes on to claim that for some writers, including Ursula Le Guin and Neil Gaiman, ‘the quest fantasy is an ever-changing portal that leads us into the heart of the human condition’.<sup>367</sup> These supposed conventions of the genre are problematized when we encounter a text like *Watership Down*. The ‘person with hidden abilities’ is of course Fiver, whose visions provide the ‘call to action’ which spurs on Adams’ main protagonist, Hazel, to assemble, and eventually lead, the company that leaves the Sandleford warren. Hazel’s choices, indeed, ‘determine the fate of many’. However, straightforward notions such as choice and even

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid, p. 276.

<sup>365</sup> Walter de la Mare, *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1919), p. 12.

<sup>366</sup> W. A. Senior, ‘Quest fantasies’, *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 190.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid, p. 199.

personhood might be considered anthropomorphic if we attribute them to animal protagonists. Therefore, conventions of quest fantasy are revealed, through closer inspection, to be inherently tied to notions of the human. So, the quest narrative is either making a very strong, perhaps exaggerated claim, for the personhood of rabbits or, more plausibly, using a human quest structure as part of a strategy of non-anthropocentric anthropomorphism. Adams' rabbits are, after all, fleeing from humans.

Arguably the most anthropomorphic tropes of the novel emerge from its narrative structure. Adams more explicitly transposes the conventions of the Homeric epic quest onto the narrative of *Watership Down* than does Grahame in *The Wind in the Willows*, a much earlier and more playfully anthropomorphic text. Kenneth Kitchell best explains this transposition of epic quest conventions in terms of 'shrinking' the epic hero:

*Watership Down* is not set in a separate, greater world. Adams has instead looked deeper into the existing world by shrinking his hero and his "landscape of adventure". A cannibalistic giant is, after all, a matter of scale. For Odysseus it is a Cyclops; for Hazel, a fox. And one man's small stream is another creature's ocean. The size of the raft each needs for the crossing may differ, but the courage required does not.<sup>368</sup>

In fact, Kitchell argues that it is the very epic conventions of the novel which determine its fluctuation between *supposedly* natural and unnatural rabbit behaviour, although this distinction is already inherently flawed, as we shall see throughout this chapter. He argues that 'such actions as raiding a farm, riding in an automobile, luring on a dog, or swimming in a river at spate, are all things which no rabbit naturally does, and which these specific rabbits cease doing once they have attained their goals. This sort of temporary stepping beyond one's nature, then, is a large part of epic heroism as depicted in this book'.<sup>369</sup> Kitchell is suggesting here that Adams' desire to create an epic narrative is the determining force in any subsequent manifestations of anthropomorphism in the novel. Furthermore, Adams himself claimed that *Watership Down* was a novel primarily about leadership, not rabbits.

A more important question to address at this early stage is whether *Watership Down* is, indeed, a 'prototype' of modern epic animal fantasy. One might be hard pressed to find an earlier example of an animal narrative which actually unites all of the conventions listed by MacRae, even if they have surfaced individually in previous texts. For example, there is an abundance of literature which features animal characters communicating with other species, although many such examples do not include a culture and mythology which is particular to

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<sup>368</sup> Kenneth F. Kitchell, Jr., 'The Shrinking of the Epic Hero: From Homer to Richard Adams' *Watership Down*', *Classical and Modern Literature*, 7 (1986), p. 25.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 28-9.

each species. A major reason for this is that works by authors like Carroll, Kipling, Grahame and Potter all feature a cast of diverse animal species, as opposed to one species; rabbits, in this particular case. Character pairings such as Mole and Ratty or Ginger and Pickles do not obviously share the same species-specific concerns as Adams' rabbits. It is much more plausible in Adams' case that his characters share an understanding of the customs and experiences particular to each member of the group. This, in turn, intensifies our reading of *Watership Down* as an epic narrative.

Adams also describes the thoughts of his characters in great detail, an element which is lacking in the "golden age" tales of Grahame and Potter, and which reinforces the reader's notion of the internalized journey which is an essential trope of the epic hero. Some passages in the novel are narrated using thought report, especially where Hazel, the main protagonist, is concerned. This is most prevalent in scenes where Hazel is considering his actions as appointed leader, a role he does not confidently assume straight away. Upon meeting Cowslip and his warren, Hazel 'wondered if he ought to be very formal. Whether or not he could call himself a Chief Rabbit, he had no experience of this sort of thing [...] He did not want to appear at a loss or to let his followers down' (71). However, for a small part of the story, Bigwig, posing as a loyal member of the Efrafan Owsla, is parted from his friends and thus often left to his own thoughts, which are sometimes narrated in direct thought: "I wonder how old Holly's getting on," he thought, "and whether I'll ever see him again: or Hazel either, for the matter of that. Well, I'll give these blighters something to think about before I've finished. I do feel lonely, though. How hard it is to carry a secret by yourself!" (313) Perhaps this narrative mode is used for Bigwig because he is the most direct character in the novel, thrown into a situation in which he must initially deceive rather than confront his enemies; in short, to act the part of the rabbit trickster. Showing Bigwig's thoughts to the reader but concealing them from other characters emphasises the secrecy necessary for his mission to succeed.

Returning to Adams' use of thought report, there is a clever passage during the rabbits' escape from the Efrafan patrol in which Hazel attempts to imagine the perspective of the seagull Kehaar, to imagine how he perceives situations within his very different lifeworld. On Kehaar's assurance that Hazel and his friends will cross the River Test safely, Adams writes:

Hazel felt at a loss. What exactly was he to understand from this? Kehaar was not a rabbit. Whatever the Big Water was like, it must be worse than this and Kehaar was used to it. He never said much in any case and what he did say was always restricted to the simplest, since he spoke no Lapine. He was

doing them a good turn because they had saved his life but, as Hazel knew, he could not help despising them for timid, helpless, stay-at-home creatures who could not fly. He was often impatient. Did he mean that he had looked at the river and considered it as if he were a rabbit? (373)

Hazel is simultaneously imagining himself looking upon the situation from Kehaar's perspective and imagining Kehaar considering how the situation might appear from the rabbits' perspective. However, since it is Hazel's thoughts that are being reported in the narrative we can only guess at what Kehaar might be thinking – the reader, like Hazel, must anthropomorphise, or to use a more appropriate term for rabbits, must *lagomorphise* (rabbits belong to the Lagomorpha order of mammals). Adams' detailed narration of his rabbits' internal thought processes and their speculation of the thoughts of other characters are both explicitly anthropomorphic tropes, as such narration attributes an advanced degree of conscious self-awareness to nonhuman animals. While this is necessitated by the epic quest conventions which shape the novel, it demonstrates the non-anthropocentric anthropomorphism inherent in many of the novel's anthropomorphic tropes. I now turn to discuss the role of more fantastic and, arguably, escapist tropes in *Watership Down*, and how the novel adheres to the more general conventions of the fantasy genre.

### **Fantastic Narrative Elements**

Despite the novel's realistic portrayal of the harsh, cruel and violent world in which rabbits live, Adams often adopts more a more fantastic mode of writing in his narrative. Not only are rabbits able to communicate with other species in the novel (except humans), but more significantly, Hazel and his company are able to survive and succeed in their endeavours by the intervention of external forces. In other words, Adams' rabbits are delivered from the bleak fate that awaits most of their kind by the help of humans and other nonhuman species, rather than depending entirely on their wits and trickery. Adams' use of some of the conventional tropes of fantasy narrative also emphasize the tension between the fantastic and the natural which permeates the novel

Their greatest helper for Adams' rabbits is the seagull, Kehaar. The injured Kehaar happens to fall from the sky around the same time that Hazel has started to consider the problem of mating and finding does to help populate the warren. Without the help of Kehaar, who essentially provides them with a map of the surrounding area, Hazel would not have learned about the hutch rabbits of Nuthanger Farm, nor would the company have been able to

escape from Efrafa without Kehaar to guide them. In the preceding chapter, Hazel resolves to seek alliances with other species which are not among the *elil*: “‘Now *elil* can’t do us good, obviously, but there are many creatures that aren’t *elil* – birds, mice, yonil and so on. Rabbits don’t usually have much to do with them, but their enemies are our enemies for the most part. I think we ought to do all we can to make these creatures friendly. It might turn out to be well worth the trouble.’” (161) Although there are doubts amongst the other rabbits, they agree to try out Hazel’s idea. No sooner have they resolved on this plan of making friends with other species than Kehaar, a creature totally alien to the rabbits, arrives on the scene.

The concept of rabbits or other nonhuman species living in symbiotic relationships with others is not such a fanciful idea as might be first imagined, especially if we consider interspecies relationships in the natural world. The most obvious example of mutual symbiosis would be the human-canine relationship, although examples of symbiotic relationships between nonhuman species are rare, and exist mainly between species of fish or invertebrates. It would certainly never exist between rabbits and seagulls, two species significantly distanced not only phylogenetically but also geographically, even if it might potentially be plausible to suggest it exists between rabbits and mice. Kehaar is thus employed in the novel more as a purely narrative device than as an extension of Adams’ natural history narration. Because of the more natural setting of the novel, it is easy to overlook these interspecies alliances as overtly anthropomorphic. How different is it, after all, from the mismatched company of Grahame’s novel? Toads, badgers, moles and water-rats working together is equally as implausible.

Kehaar’s function as a narrative device is not the only element that renders his presence in the novel one of the more anthropomorphic tropes. ‘The seagull comes out of my experience in World War II’, writes Adams himself. ‘Kehaar’s character, even his voice, is based on a Norwegian Resistance man I knew in the war, a splendid chap, Johansen’.<sup>370</sup> Kehaar is also, therefore, a directly anthropomorphic caricature of a familiar acquaintance of the author, which in turn suggests that the interspecies relationship in the novel between Kehaar and the rabbits is perhaps partially symbolic of the mutual cooperation between human societies and nations. However, the warren societies themselves and the ways in which they interact with one another symbolized, one might argue, human social structures. Whether Adams intended such symbolism, his explicit reference to Kehaar as a

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<sup>370</sup> Richard Adams, ‘To the Order of Two Little Girls: The Oral and Written Versions of *Watership Down*’, *The Voice of the Narrator in Children’s Literature: Insights from Writers and Critics*, ed. Charlotte F. Otten and Gary D. Schmidt (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), p. 121.

theriomorphic Johansen further emphasizes the ambiguous position of this character in relation to the more naturalized rabbits.

*Watership Down* plays to a much lesser extent than some narratives with the fantastical notion of interspecies harmony between animals which are either unfamiliar with or in conflict with one another in the natural world. A perfect example is Colin Dann's *The Animals of Farthing Wood* (1979). Dann's novel tells the story of a diverse group of wild animals who resolve to leave behind their home of Farthing Wood, soon to be destroyed and overrun by human developments, and embark on a journey to White Deer Park. Dann's cast of animals is, like Grahame's, made up almost exclusively of characters whose names indicate their species: Fox, Badger, Mole, Tawny Owl, Kestrel, Toad, Hare, Weasel, Adder, and so on. While this reductive trope of naming according to species negates notions of individuality and personhood, the differences between the animals are nonetheless emphasized throughout the novel. For example, it is consistently pointed out that smaller characters like Toad and Mole are naturally slower than their larger or airborne companions and therefore must ride atop Hare and Badger so that the entire company can move at a quicker pace on their journey. Strengths and weaknesses pertaining to each individual (and species) all demonstrate the theme exemplified in Adams' novel of cooperation and camaraderie. Each of the rabbits in Hazel's company also has their own unique strengths to contribute to the quest.

The quest in search of a new home safe from human intervention is what primarily shapes the narratives of both *Watership Down* and *Farthing Wood*, although in Dann's novel the animals are fully aware of human practices and their banding together in the face of the threat of human destruction emphasizes a much clearer animal-human dichotomy. At the same time, the interspecies relationships which ensue in the narrative are even less plausible than those in *Watership Down* between the rabbits and Kehaar or the field mouse, especially since Dann's animals can communicate with each other with perfect ease. Creatures like Adder, for example, must put aside their predatory instincts and their carnivorous diet for the sake of certain members of the company, namely rabbits, fieldmice and voles. Dann uses such anthropomorphic tropes to point out the more supposedly human virtues of compassion towards people less advantaged or privileged than themselves or members of their own social group. Such considerations, of course, do not apply to nonhuman animals in the natural world. A close reading of Dann's novel reveals, I would argue, an interesting blend of anthropomorphic tropes characteristic of both Grahame and Adams' novels. The more

naturalistic elements of *Farthing Wood* are also diluted by these overtly fantastic elements and the diversity of the species of Dann's protagonists.

We can easily forget, however, that the fantastical elements of a novel like *Watership Down* are often necessary in order to emphasize the differences between fantasy a more naturalistic mode of writing and representing the animal. Without the tension established between genres in Adams' novel, the reader might overlook or trivialize some of the most crucial naturalistic or anthropomorphic tropes in the narrative.

### **Mythology and the Supernatural**

'I felt that *Watership Down* would be richer if the rabbits had some kind of metaphysical dimension to their lives', writes Adams. 'Of course this would have to be kept very simple'.<sup>371</sup> Arguably one of the most anthropomorphic elements of *Watership Down*, the rabbit mythology of Frith the sun-god, and the rabbit trickster figure, El-ahrairah, nevertheless exposes the anthropocentrism of human creation myths and human ideals of exceptionalism in many religions around the world. As a sun-god, Frith is not explicitly cast in rabbit form in the novel, but the rabbits' creation myth tells of how Frith made the stars, amongst them the world, by 'scattering his droppings over the sky and this is why the grass and the trees grow so thick on the world' (25). Passing *hraka* (excreting) is a bodily function divorced from such (supposedly) human notions as shame and disgust. Rabbit droppings are also small and spherical in shape, resembling worlds in miniature. So we can surmise that Adams' rabbits believe somewhat that Frith created El-ahrairah and his people in his own image. This presents an obvious analogue to the anthropocentric and anthropomorphic Judeo-Christian and Islamic belief in deity that assumes human form; Frith is *lagomorphised* by Adams' rabbits.

Conversely, the mythological element of Adams' novel is also reflective of primitive religious beliefs. 'One of the most important figures in most bodies of cultural mythology is that of the trickster,' writes Margaret Baker. 'Whether it be the Polynesian Maui, the African spider Ananse, the Navajo Coyote, or the European Reynard the Fox, this is the character with whom the common people identify and who captures their hearts and imaginations as well as their minds'. The cultural mythology of Adams' rabbits is, relative to other modern

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

cultural representations of the rabbit trickster, an example of Adams non-anthropocentric anthropomorphism. Baker argues that while ‘Richard Adams has created for his rabbit civilization a formal mythology which included a powerful, idealized trickster figure [...] the cartoon character Bugs Bunny shows the popularization and trivialization of the form’.<sup>372</sup>

While the mythological, supernatural elements in the novel might seem the most anthropomorphic, they arguably stem from actual characteristics of rabbits. ‘Often rabbit symbols have to do with the real qualities that rabbits possess,’ claim Davis and DeMello. ‘Rabbits are quick; they zigzag from place to place, and they have to rely on their quick wits to survive’. They remark further that

Rabbits also often sleep with their eyes open, which makes them look as if they can see (and understand) more than other animals can [...] Rabbits’ open eyes also gave them such a reputation for intuition and prophecy that the ancient Egyptians, Romans and Britons would let a hare run loose on the fields to plan an attack on another tribe; the direction in which the hare ran indicate the best route to take. Similarly, the Algonquins (a Native American tribe) refused to hunt rabbits, as they were seen to be the keepers of life’s secrets and a key to the afterlife.<sup>373</sup>

Adams thus draws upon ancient cultural representations of rabbits, particularly in his depiction of the character of Fiver. The eye of the rabbit itself is not mentioned in the novel, although the film version opens with a close-up view of a rabbit’s eye, presumably the eye of Hazel, the first rabbit to appear on the scene in both the novel and the film versions.

There are five stories about El-ahrairah in the novel, all told by the master-orator of the company, Dandelion. The first, ‘The Story of the Blessing of El-ahrairah’, is the rabbit version of the creation story. While Frith is portrayed as a sun-god, we are told that he made the stars ‘by scattering his droppings’, which attributes to Frith some sort of animal manifestation. Of course, the idea of a god creating the world from their droppings would likely seem repulsive, even blasphemous, in some modern religious cultures. If Frith is indeed an animal the species of that animal is never revealed, perhaps because he represents all animals homogenized in a single being. Frith creates the animals, after all, without differentiating traits in the beginning. This dual portrayal of Frith as cosmic or elemental (the sun) and physical (animal) corresponds with many deities in ancient mythologies; the Egyptians or the Aztecs, for example. Of greater significance to the wider narrative is Frith’s promise to El-ahrairah that while they will always be hunted by the Thousand, his people will survive as long as they remain true to their natures as tricksters. The rabbit trickster figure is,

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<sup>372</sup> Baker, p. 149.

<sup>373</sup> Sarah Davis and Margo DeMello, *Stories Rabbits Tell: A Natural and Cultural History of a Misunderstood Creature* (New York: Lantern Books, 2003), p. 132.

as we have already seen, one of the essential anthropomorphic constructs of the novel, and El-ahrairah epitomises this anthropomorphic representation in the stories told about his adventures. By placing El-ahrairah at the centre of rabbit mythology, however, Adams' rabbits each internalize this anthropomorphic trope and the trickster archetype thus becomes normalized, a "natural" characteristic of each rabbit in the novel. All rabbit societies which divert from this norm are considered "unnatural" and thus doomed as a society. The rabbit mantra of following the ways of the trickster is akin, in Adams' rabbits' world, to observing religious doctrine. The cultural hegemony of the belief in El-ahrairah seems to determine characteristics that Hazel and his company consider "natural" or "unnatural". The most obvious example is Cowslip's warren, which holds no reverence for El-ahrairah and regards Dandelion's oration of 'The Story of the King's Lettuce' with the fascination of a fairy-tale. "El-ahrairah doesn't really mean much to us. Not that your friend's story wasn't very charming," says Cowslip (99).

The stories of El-ahrairah contain less of the natural history elements of the novel and El-ahrairah himself is depicted in Dandelion's tales with more overt anthropomorphic tropes. In 'The Story of the Trial of El-ahrairah', inter-species communication occurs without the difficulty of speaking across dialects. El-ahrairah converses quite easily with Yona the hedgehog while Rabscuttle speaks with Hawock the pheasant as both rabbits plan to deceive the rabbit Hufsa. The trope of animals in disguises also recurs in the stories of El-ahrairah. Rabscuttle disguises himself to give the appearance of a fearsome, otherworldly creature:

As [El-ahrairah] spoke, a most curious-looking creature came out of the grass. It looked something like a rabbit, but even in the moonlight they could see that it had a red tail and long green ears. In its mouth it was carrying the end of one of the white sticks that men burn. It was Rabscuttle, but not even Hufsa could recognize him. He had found some sheep-dip powder at the farm and sat in it to make his tail red. His ears were festooned with trails of bryony and the white stick was making him feel ill. (170-171)

What is also interesting about this disguise is that it incorporates props from symbols of human destruction (the cigarette-end, the sheep-dip) and props from the natural world (the bryony). Even in the mythology of El-ahrairah, human traces still play a part; it is not an Edenic world depicted in these stories, by any means. In 'The Story of Rowsby Woof and the Fairy Wogdog', El-ahrairah fashions a piece of a tire – 'an old, black wheel-covering' – into the shape of a dog's nose for his disguise (397).

The most symbolic use of disguise is in 'The Story of El-ahrairah and the Black Rabbit of Inle', in which El-ahrairah loses his tail, whiskers and ears to the Black Rabbit in a game of bob-stones. Rabscuttle patches him up with pieces of plant; a makeshift tail and

whiskers ‘made from the winter drift of clematis and ragwort’ (273) and ears replaced with dock-leaves. While sacrificing parts of his own body for the survival of his people, he becomes physically, rather than merely spiritually, closer to nature. Of course, Frith gifts El-ahrairah with a new tail, whiskers and ears at the end of the story. While El-ahrairah sacrifices different parts of his body for the survival of the species, Hazel’s spirit leaves his body in death, assured in the knowledge that he has left behind a legacy that will continue in the warren for generations.

Hazel dies relatively peacefully in the epilogue to the novel. The spirit of a buck rabbit, presumably El-ahrairah, comes for Hazel in his burrow. Adams describes the moment of transition between life and death here once again in quite a matter-of-fact way: ‘It seemed to Hazel that he would not be needing his body any more, so he left it lying on the edge of the ditch, but stopped for a moment to watch his rabbits and to try to get used to the extraordinary feeling that strength and speed were flowing inexhaustibly out of him into their sleek young bodies and healthy senses.’ (472) Hazel’s experience of dying is described as a discarding of the body, as if it were merely a corporeal house for Hazel’s spirit, or ‘like an outworn coat’.<sup>374</sup> ‘[Adams’] [r]abbits accept death as part of life, or as a necessary progression’, writes Bridgman. ‘If the transcendental world is accepted as a part of life, then sleep, trance and death are merely stations along the same continuum’.<sup>375</sup>

While we might perceive the mythology of Adams’ rabbits to at first demonstrate strongly anthropomorphic tropes, Adams manipulates the popular trickster motif in a way which renders it the most natural attribute of rabbits in the novel. One can speculate that it is not implausible, although not yet provable, that nonhuman animals, rabbits included, make sense of their world and their experiences through something akin to religion. Kenneth Oppel depicts a similar mythology for bats in his *Silverwing* series (1997-2007), in which bats worship the creation goddess Nocturna, who they have created in their own image as a bat. David Clement-Davies’ *Fire Bringer* (1999), a story about feuding herds of red deer (as well as roe, fallow, and reindeer), features a mythology in which deer follow the ways of Herne, a god which supposedly takes deer form. One of the legacies of *Watership Down* is that mythology has been used as a fantastical way of allowing nonhuman characters – whether they be rabbits, bats or deer – to perceive the meaning of the world around them and the lives of their species in a coherent way. Religion and mythology has, after all, explained unfamiliar

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<sup>374</sup> Bridgman, p. 12.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid, pp. 11-12.

or strange aspects of the world to humans for millennia. Adams' rabbit mythology is ultimately analogous to human mythologies, but remains non-anthropocentric.

### **Fiver as Rabbit Shaman**

While there appears to be a narrative thread – the stories of El-ahrairah – encompassed within the main narrative, elements of the supernatural mediate between the story of the rabbits' journey and their mythology. John Pennington attributes the sophistication of the novel to its mythic elements, and argues that Adams, like Fiver, acts as shaman for the reader:

Fantasy literature, we can argue, is a mode that allows for this transcendent escape, this crossing over from civilization to wilderness; thus, the writing of fantasy can be construed as a deliberate and social – and oftentimes subversive – act. Fantasy has shamanistic powers to lure readers across such boundaries. Adams in *Watership Down*, then, may be crossing such a boundary, returning the reader to the mythic while acknowledging that this mythic realm has been lost in our technological age. *Watership Down* may be construed as a novel in search of meaning; its mythic subtext – the interpolated rabbit myths and Fiver's shamanistic visions – looks forward to a mythic realm that has been lost to the modern world.<sup>376</sup>

However, Pennington's remark about the novel's portrayal of a 'mythic realm [...] lost in our technological age' and 'lost to the modern world' reflects a humanist primitivism which, as we shall see later, conflicts with more *neo*-primitivist, or posthumanist primitivist, tendencies in the narrative. Fiver's character might, therefore, also be seen as a way of bridging this tension between different manifestations of primitivism.

The prophesying Fiver serves a dual function in the novel anthropomorphically. His superlappine gift makes Fiver arguably the most anthropomorphic character in the novel, enabling him with the power to warn Hazel and the rest of the company about threats from the human world that the other rabbits would not otherwise perceive. However, Fiver's gift is also portrayed as an instinct as well as a supernatural ability, which perhaps makes Fiver the most attuned with his animal instincts as he acts without ratiocination and is thus the least anthropomorphised character. Fiver's response to the Threarah about the nature of the 'bad danger' that he has foreseen is articulated in simple language: "I don't know," said Fiver. "B-but it's bad. It's so b-bad that – it's very bad," he concluded miserably.' (11) The abstractions of language cannot express what Fiver instinctually senses. Anderson remarks that the 'repetition, conciseness, and fragmentation of Fiver's speech suggests its emotional

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<sup>376</sup> Pennington, p. 37.

immediacy and credibility as both an accurate representation of his inward state and of the outward conditions he predicts'.<sup>377</sup>

At the same time, Adams' uses Fiver's visions more didactically as a means to critique human destruction of the environment. The notice-board in the first chapter, and the first human disturbance, is the catalyst for Fiver's vision of blood. The ground where the notice-board has been erected, we are told, 'had been freshly disturbed'. The posts on which the board is placed are 'reeking of creosote and paint', both man-made chemicals, and 'a hammer and a few nails had been left behind,' emphasising the disregard for the safety of any animals in the immediate environment. It is upon 'wrinkling their noses at the smell of a dead cigarette-end somewhere in the grass' that Fiver 'shivered and cowered down' (6-7). This feeling of fear precipitates the vision that follows. The cigarette is a recurrent motif used throughout the novel to emphasise not only human pollution of the environment but also physical self-destruction. In destroying the ecology of the rabbits, and other nonhuman animals, humans are also further severing their connection with a lost, primitive animal essence.

The second chapter of the novel, immediately following Fiver's vision of blood, opens with Hazel woken by Fiver, who recalls a prophetic dream:

"Oh, Hazel! I was dreaming. It was dreadful. You were there. We were sitting on water, going down a great, deep stream, and then I realized we were on a board – like that board in the field – all white and covered with black lines. There were other rabbits there – bucks and does. But when I looked down, I saw the board was all made of bones and wire; and I screamed and you said, 'Swim – everybody swim'; and then I was looking for you everywhere and trying to drag you out of the hole in the bank. I found you, but you said, 'The Chief Rabbit must go alone,' and you floated away down a dark tunnel of water." (8-9)

Fiver's recollection of the dream prophesies many events in the novel: the crossing of the Enborne on a floating piece of wood, the escape along the River Test on a boat, the warren of the snares, Hazel wounded and found in a ditch, and Hazel becoming chief of the warren.

Adams uses Fiver as an authorial device, communicating and shaping the narrative through the disjointed channel of his visions and dreams. Fiver is certainly the most symbolic of the characters that inhabit the real world of the narrative. He acts as both the representation of the instinctive, primitive self – whether this primitive self is rabbit, human, or both – and a shamanic narrator; Fiver is at the same time the most rabbit *and* the most human of the company. At the warren of the snares, Fiver observes the rabbits foraging of carrots left by

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<sup>377</sup> Kathleen Anderson, 'Shaping Self Through Spontaneous Oral Narration in Richard Adams' "Watership Down"', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 6.1 (21) (1993), p. 27.

the men with disgust, comparing them with dogs – “Dogs – you’re like dogs carrying sticks.” – and squirrels – “Those are rabbits down there, trotting along like a lot of squirrels with nuts. How can that be right?” (86) Fiver’s theriomorphic projections are intended as pejorative, and simultaneously emphasise and critique the anthropocentric aspect of theriomorphic representation.

Adams’ depiction of Fiver consistently blurs the boundaries between the anthropomorphised and the naturalised rabbit. It should be noted, however, that the representation of Fiver, or any rabbits in the text for that matter, as “naturalistic”, is a projection of human conceptions of rabbit “nature” onto rabbits. Thus, while we are not attributing supposedly human characteristics, we are still attributing what can only be considered as *supposedly* rabbit traits. Fiver is presented at once the most instinctive or “natural” rabbit character in the novel and the most symbolic and “unnatural” rabbit, and thus the most interesting case of the convergence of anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic tropes.

No clearer is this shown that in the opening scene in which Fiver experiences his vision of blood. Fiver’s superlapine gift saves Hazel, Bigwig and the rest of their company from the gruesome fate of the other Sandleford rabbits. Fiver’s unnatural instinct, to use a seemingly paradoxical term, also later leads him to caution the other rabbits against staying in the warren of the snares, and when Hazel is shot trying to escape from Nuthanger Farm, Fiver experiences a precognitive dream in which he sees Hazel in the same ditch in which he later finds him injured, but alive.

Our first observation of Fiver is that he ‘was small, with wide, staring eyes and a way of raising and turning his head which suggested not so much caution as a kind of ceaseless, nervous tension’ (4). From the beginning we learn that Fiver’s behaviour is suggesting of traits not conventionally understood as common to his species. Most rabbits are naturally cautious, but a ‘ceaseless, nervous tension’ suggests something prolonged rather than instinctive. On experiencing his terrible vision, Hazel is confused by Fiver’s behaviour; it is not recognisable to him as “natural” for rabbits: ‘If he was terrified, why did he not run for safety, as any sensible rabbit would?’ Fiver even refuses to enter the burrows of the warren: ‘When at last Hazel had got him back to the ditch, he refused at first to go underground and Hazel had almost to push him down the hole.’ (7) Hazel himself is at first ambivalent about his own position regarding the truth of Fiver’s visions: ‘He did not want to believe Fiver, but he was afraid not to.’ (9) This suggests a tension between Hazel’s instinctive and reasoning

nature, if we think of instinct and reason in the context of the traditional binary. This tension is prompted in the first place by Fiver's convictions.

What connects all of Fiver's visions is that they come upon him when there is an approaching danger from humans. When Holly tells his horrific tale of escape from the Sandleford warren, Fiver remembers his visions:

'Great golden Frith, I hope I never have them like that again! I shall never forget it – that and the night I spent under the yew-tree. There's terrible evil in the world.'

'It comes from men (said Holly). All other elil do what they have to do and Frith moves them as he moves us. They live on the earth and they need food. Men will never rest till they've spoiled the earth and destroyed the animals.' (149)

Fiver is thus cast as the anti-anthropocentrically anthropomorphised rabbit. His symbolic role as the mediator of human danger renders him anthropomorphic, and yet situates him in opposition to the human. The rabbits of Adams' novel need rabbits like Fiver who can foresee danger that others cannot predict, because humans, or at least *civilized* humans, do not possess the same mentality as animals and *primitive* humans. The civilized human is presented as alien, as other. While Adams makes observations throughout *Watership Down* which attempt to draw parallels between human and rabbit nature and bridge the gap between our conceptions of the two species, he also stresses, particularly through Fiver, that humans are also responsible for much of the destruction of our nonhuman kin.

### **Primitivism and Orality**

When affinities are drawn between humans and rabbits in the novel, they tend to be drawn between rabbits and "primitive" humans. Arguably, Adams demonstrates what Philip Armstrong has termed *therio-primitivism*, which describes the alignment of animality with a primitive humanity. Therio-primitivism is, according to Armstrong, a manifestation of primitivism characteristic of the early twentieth century. One explicit instance of primitivism in *Watership Down* follows the reaction of the rabbits to Holly's horrific tale of escape from the Sandleford warren: '[A]s with primitive humans, the very strength and vividness of their sympathy brought with it a true release. Their feelings were not false or assumed. While the story was being told, they heard it without any of the reserve or detachment that the kindest of civilized humans retains as he reads his newspaper' (159).

There are elements of *Watership Down*, and of Adams' work more generally, that are arguably "primitivist", overtly or otherwise. Primitivism in the modern sense, according to Michael Bell, 'differs crucially from such earlier manifestations as the ancient myth of the golden age; the renaissance and eighteenth-century interest in the noble savage that lies behind Rousseau; and the traditional dichotomies between art and nature or town and country'.<sup>378</sup> While some of these earlier manifestations may still be seen in the animal stories of golden-age writers like Grahame, Adams' fiction explores notions of homogeneity between species; in particular, as we have seen, between humans and rabbits.

Firstly, this homogenous aspect is evident in the rabbits' mythology: 'Frith made all the animals and birds, but when he first made them they were all the same. The sparrow and the kestrel were friends and they both ate seeds and flies. And the fox and the rabbit were friends and they both ate grass.' (25-6) Of course, each species is granted their own distinct attributes only when Frith wishes to turn them all against El-ahrairah and his kin: 'He gave out that he would hold a great meeting and that at that meeting he would give a present to every animal and bird, to make each one different from the rest [...] And so in their turn came the fox and the stoat and the weasel. And to each of them Frith gave the cunning and the fierceness and the desire to hunt and slay and eat the children of El-ahrairah.' (26-7) To rabbits, however, Frith gifts a white tail and powerful legs to flee from enemies, and as long as they are 'cunning and full of tricks', they will 'never be destroyed' (28); at least not as a species, which is the most a rabbit can hope for. *Watership Down* also evokes a sense of homogeneity between the species and the individual. When Hazel tries to persuade Woundwort that their warrens should unite, he says: 'A rabbit has two ears; a rabbit has two eyes, two nostrils. Our two warrens ought to be like that. They ought to be together – not fighting.' (418)

Adams often evokes a sense of a common sensibility between all species, not just between humans and rabbits. One such example is at the beginning of the chapter called 'The Stranger in the Field':

To come to the end of a time of anxiety and fear! To feel the cloud that hung over us lift and disperse – the cloud that dulled the heart and made happiness no more than a memory! This at least is one joy that must have been known by almost every living creature.

Here is a boy who was waiting to be punished. But then, unexpectedly, he finds that his fault has been overlooked or forgiven and at once the world reappears in brilliant colours, full of delightful prospects. Here is a soldier who was waiting, with a heavy heart, to suffer and die in battle. But suddenly the luck has changed. There is news! The war is over and everyone bursts out singing! He will go home after all! The sparrows in the ploughland were crouching in terror of the kestrel. But she

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<sup>378</sup> Michael Bell, *Primitivism* (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 4.

has gone; and they fly pell-mell up the hedgerow, frisking, chattering and perching where they will.  
(56-7)

This is a particularly romantic evocation of a common strain of feeling which exists between all living things. Adams brings the image of childhood, often associated with the primitive, the soldier, close to death but resigned to his fate, and the sparrow. Bell argues that romanticism ‘provided the precedent for the literary recreation of psychological states whose qualities, putatively at least, were commonly lacking in the civilized personality. Later primitivism is the heir to this tradition except that where the romantics generally sought a unification of sensibility primitivist works have tended to dramatize the disintegration’.<sup>379</sup> While Bell is referring to the difference between romantic primitivism (Wordsworth) and twentieth-century primitivist works (Lawrence), I would argue there are elements of both the unification of sensibility and the dramatization of the disintegration in *Watership Down*. Animal protagonists, particularly prey animals like rabbits, are well situated to demonstrate this conflict, between the acknowledgement of our supposedly estranged but not lost primitive nature, and the acknowledgment of the widening rift between the primitive and the civilized within ourselves.

A particularly illuminating passage from the work of D. H. Lawrence which demonstrates the darker side of primitive humanness is the ‘Rabbit’ chapter from *Women in Love* (1920). Lawrence invokes the raw, reactive animality of the hutch-rabbit Bismarck to exacerbate the ongoing sexual tension between Gudrun Brangwen and Gerald Crich, although the diverse uses of imagery Lawrence employs in his description of the rabbit itself are revealing about his own primitivist mode of writing. At the moment of first contact between Gudrun and Bismarck there is an immediate and violent repulsion on both sides:

They unlocked the door of the hutch. Gudrun thrust in her arm and seized the great, lusty rabbit as it crouched still, she grasped its long ears. It set its four feet flat, and thrust back. There was a long scraping sound as it was hauled forward, and in another instant it was in mid-air, lunging wildly, its body flying like a spring coiled and released, as it lashed out, suspended from the ears. Gudrun held the black-and-white tempest at arms’ length, averting her face. But the rabbit was magically strong, it was all she could do to keep her grasp. She almost lost her presence of mind.<sup>380</sup>

In this brief passage alone, Lawrence describes Bismarck’s movements using both supernatural and mechanomorphic imagery. The whole episode is written as a struggle between primitive and machinic power; Gudrun is increasingly drawn to Gerald’s machinic sexual power while simultaneously repulsed by the struggling animal in her grasp. Lawrence

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<sup>379</sup> Bell, p. 61.

<sup>380</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (1920) (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 240.

draws on demonic imagery in his description of the rabbit as it continues to resist Gudrun: ‘The long, demon-like beast lashed out again, spread on the air as if it were flying, looking something like a dragon, then closing up again, inconceivably powerful and explosive.’ At this point, Gerald feels his own reactive physical power welling up inside him, and this is violently directed towards Bismarck: ‘The man’s body, strung to its efforts, vibrated strongly. Then a sudden sharp, white-edged wrath came up in him. Swift as lightning he drew back and brought his free hand down like a hawk on the neck of the rabbit. Simultaneously, there came the unearthly, abhorrent scream of the rabbit in the fear of death.’<sup>381</sup> Lawrence again employs mechanomorphic and even theriomorphic imagery, this time in his description of Gerald’s reaction to the rabbit.

The representation of wild animal instinct alongside machinic human power confuses the boundary between what is conceived as natural or unnatural for either human or rabbit. What is also evident is that Lawrence depicts Bismarck as a subject to his impulses rather than a conscious agent: ‘They all stood in amazement, smiling uncannily, as if the rabbit were obeying some unknown incantation. Round and round it flew, on the grass under the old red walls, like a storm.’<sup>382</sup> In the aftermath of the rabbit’s struggle and its return to a state of calm, Gudrun concludes:

“It’s mad,” said Gudrun. “It is most decidedly mad.”  
[Gerald] laughed.  
“The question is,” he said, “what is madness? I don’t suppose it is rabbit-mad.”  
“Don’t you think it is?” she asked.  
“No. That’s what it is to be a rabbit.”<sup>383</sup>

Gerald recognises in Bismarck the appearance of madness but concludes from this observation that it is Bismarck’s natural behaviour, nothing akin to what he perceives as human manifestations of madness. Of course, it is difficult to qualify Gerald’s assumption about Bismarck as a rabbit as he is a domesticated hutch-rabbit, specifically of the Angora breed. It is also unclear as to how far Bismarck’s role in the chapter is symbolic of the tensions in Gudrun and Gerald’s relationship.

Philip Armstrong coins the term *therio-primitivism*, which, he explains, is ‘shorthand for [the] specifically modern conjunction between animality and pre- or non-modern forms of humanity’.<sup>384</sup> Armstrong’s term might best encapsulate the primitivism which is manifest in

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid, p. 241.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid, p. 243.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Armstrong, p. 142.

Adams' fiction, although, as we have seen, Adams' conjunction of animality and pre-modern humanity is much more explicit than the primitivism inherent in Lawrence's work. Armstrong describes Lawrence's primitivism as 'the contrast between a repressive instrumentalism and a vibrant organicism', which is exemplified in the above passage.<sup>385</sup>

The differences between wild and domesticated rabbits – and, by extension, primitive and civilized nature – are explored in Adams' novel. When Hazel journeys to Nuthanger Farm to persuade the hutch rabbits to join their warren, his task is not without difficulty:

It became plain that they thought of their life in the hutch as dull but safe. They had learned a good deal about elil from some source or other and seemed sure that few wild rabbits survived for long. Hazel realized that although they were glad to talk to him and welcomed his visit because it brought a little excitement and change into their monotonous life, it was not within their capacity to take a decision and act on it. They did not know how to make up their minds. To him and his companions, sensing and acting were second nature; but these rabbits had never had to act to save their lives or even to find a meal. If he was going to get any of them as far as the down they would have to be urged. (201)

Hazel's impression of the hutch rabbits might be compared with the situation of Adams' readers, particularly if we consider, like Christopher Pawling, that initially the novel 'appealed almost exclusively to a middle-class readership'.<sup>386</sup> In accordance with Adams' primitivism, in the modern age humans have lost the sharpness of instinct that our species supposedly once possessed many thousands of years ago. Many of us opt for safety and security over fulfilment, and we also learn about potentially threatening forces in the world from outside sources of information (television, radio, newspapers, etc) and subsequently make our own assumptions based on these sources instead of our own first-hand experiences. In terms of our direct experience of nature, at least, many of us are still rabbits confined to our hutches.

Peter Sloterdijk explores such notions of human confinement in the modern world in his discussion of the *Menschenpark*, or "human zoo". He puts forward the idea that civilization, urban civilization in particular, is a form of human self-domestication:

[A]s soon as speaking men gather into larger groups and not only connect themselves to linguistic houses but also build physical houses, they enter the arena of domestication. They are now not only sheltered by their language, but also tamed by their accommodations [...] Historians of culture have made it clear that with domesticity the relationship between men and animals changed. With the taming of men by their houses the age of pets began as well.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Ibid, p. 144.

<sup>386</sup> Christopher Pawling, 'Watership Down: Rolling Back the 1960s', *Popular Fiction and Social Change*, ed. Christopher Pawling (London; Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 213.

<sup>387</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, 'Rules for the Human Zoo: a response to the Letter on Humanism', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 27 (2009), p. 21.

Humans, according to Sloterdijk, are ‘self-fencing, self-shepherding creatures. Wherever they live, they create parks around themselves’.<sup>388</sup> This perspective on the behaviour of modern humans suggests that we impose upon ourselves unnatural conditions in which to live, and, more to the point, most humans are unaware of the disparity between modern living conditions and our natural tendencies as human animals. Desmond Morris writes: ‘The modern human animal is no longer living in conditions natural for his species. Trapped, not by a zoo collector, but by his own brainy brilliance, he has set himself up in a huge, restless menagerie where he is in constant danger of cracking under the strain’.<sup>389</sup>

We might also view the differences between the wild and domestic in the context of the animal fable tradition vis-à-vis Aesop’s fable of *The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse*, and such adaptations as Potter’s *Johnny Town-Mouse*. In *Watership Down*, however, the domesticated rabbits who are set free from Nuthanger Farm integrate and adapt successfully in the new warren, even bearing litters before any of the Efrafan does. Our impression of the hutch rabbits at first is one of creatures born into a prison and unaccustomed to freedom, or unaware that they might possess the means to seek freedom for themselves. Moreover, they are deprived of knowledge of their natural environment necessary for survival. “‘What is the lane?’”, a hutch rabbit asks Blackberry, who ‘stopped as it came over him that these rabbits knew neither lane nor farmyard. They had not the least idea of their most immediate surroundings’ (213-14). The hutch rabbits are also compared, by their deprivation of experience, to children, despite their similarity of age with the Sandleford rabbits: ‘They remembered Hazel; they had been excited by the forcing of the door and curious to come through it once it was open. Otherwise, they had no purpose whatever and no means of forming one. They had no more idea of what was involved than a small child who says he will accompany the climbers up the fell.’ (214) This contrasts with Romantic notions of the child being corrupted by mediated rather than unmediated experiences of the world. In this instance, it is the transition from mediated to unmediated experience that signifies the passage into maturity and adulthood.

Crucial to traditional conceptions of primitive cultures is that they rely on oral rather than written forms of communication. David Abram writes: ‘In indigenous, oral cultures, nature itself is articulate; it *speaks*. The human voice in an oral culture is always to some extent participant with the voices of wolves, wind, and waves – participant, that is, with the encompassing discourse of an animate earth. There is no element of the landscape that is

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>389</sup> Desmond Morris, *The Human Zoo* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), pp. 8-9.

definitively void of expressive resonance and power: any movement may be a gesture, any sound may be a voice, a meaningful utterance.<sup>390</sup> Adams' primitivism would seem, therefore, to set up a dichotomy between orality and literacy in his novel.

The difference between the explicit and the implicit, the concrete and the abstract, is marked in Adams' invocation of signs and symbols throughout the text. While the message upon the notice board in the first chapter is clearly legible to our human eyes, to the rabbits it makes no concrete sense but merely implies danger. The "Shapes" in Cowslip's warren likewise convey an explicit meaning to those strange rabbits, but to the more "natural" rabbits (Hazel and company) they are a source of bewilderment, and if they imply anything at all, it does not seem to be anything good.

There is only one instance in which a rabbit communicates with a human orally, and even then only in the world of dreams. After Hazel is wounded while trying to escape from Nuthanger Farm and is presumed dead, Fiver dreams of a man putting up a board on which to hang Hazel's body. Their dialogue is worth quoting here in full:

'Ah! An' what am I doin', eh?' asked the man.  
'What *are* you doing?' answered Fiver, staring and twitching with fear.  
'I'm just putt'n up this 'ere ol' board,' said the man. 'And I s'pose you wants t'know what for, eh?'  
'Yes,' whispered Fiver.  
'It's fer that there old 'Azal,' said the man. 'On'y where 't'is, see, we got t'put up a bit of a notice, like, on 'is account. And what d'you reckon it says, eh?'  
'I don't know,' said Fiver. 'How – how can a board say anything?'  
'Ah, but it do, see?' replied the man. 'That's where we knows what you don't. That's why we kills when we 'as a mind to. Now you wants take a good look at that there board and then very likely you'll know more 'n what you knows now.'  
In the livid, foggy twilight, Fiver stared at the board. As he stared, the black sticks flickered on the white surface. They raised their sharp, wedge-shaped little heads and chattered together like a nestful of young weasels. The sound, mocking and cruel, came faintly to his ears, as though muffled by sand or sacking. 'In memory of Hazel-rah! In memory of Hazel-rah! In memory of Hazel-rah! Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!' (pp.224-5)

In rhetorically asking whether a board can 'say anything', Fiver does not comprehend that messages can be articulated in a written form of language, although somehow, staring at the words, the message acquires meaning for Fiver when the words make sounds in his dream, chattering together and acquiring a character of their own. The comparison of the appearance of the words first to sticks and then to a nest of weasels implies Fiver, while unable to discern meaning from merely looking at the symbols, is able to understand the meaning by subconsciously animating the symbols on the board.

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<sup>390</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage, 1996), pp. 116-17.

In his dream, Fiver is endowed with a form of synaesthesia, the ‘overlap and intertwining of the senses’.<sup>391</sup> Abram asserts that ‘reading, as soon as we attend to its sensorial texture, discloses itself as a profoundly synaesthetic encounter. Our eyes converge upon a visible mark, or a series of marks, yet what they find there is a sequence not of images but of sounds, something heard; the visible letters [...] trade our eyes for our ears’.<sup>392</sup> Of course, the fact that Fiver’s experience occurs in a dream negates it as a cognitive ability of his conscious mind. It is also inconceivable for us to speak with nonhuman animals, even in our dreams, for such an experience is unfamiliar to us. The dream passage recalls aspects of Fiver’s vision of blood. Kathleen Anderson remarks that ‘Hazel cannot sense what Fiver instinctively feels. But the narrator’s description of the sign confirms the accuracy of his instincts. The print, whose “sharp, hard letters cut straight as black knives across” the creaking board, represents a hidden, dark, destructive force’.<sup>393</sup> Again, the words are animated, personified. Without making sense as words, the symbols still somehow convey the intent which underlies the message.

Signs and symbols are often portrayed as negative forces in the novel. Another example is the mysterious shapes carved into the stone walls of Cowslip’s warren. Strawberry tells Hazel that the stones are supposed to depict El-ahrairah, and were placed there by a rabbit called Laburnum.

Hazel was more at a loss than ever. He had never seen a laburnum and was puzzled by the name, which in Lapine is ‘Poison-tree’. How could a rabbit be called Poison? And how could stones by El-ahrairah? What, exactly, was it that Strawberry was saying was El-ahrairah? In confusion he said, ‘I don’t understand.’

‘It’s what we call a Shape,’ explained Strawberry. ‘Haven’t you seen one before? The stones make the shape of El-ahrairah on the wall. Stealing the King’s lettuce. *You know?*’ (76)

While Hazel and his company preserve their mythology through oral narration of the tales of El-ahrairah, the rabbits of Cowslip’s warren, having long abandoned this oral tradition, have created abstract representations of El-ahrairah in stone. The meaning of the name Laburnum also puzzles Hazel as a laburnum is a species of tree which is deadly to rabbits as well as many other species. This suggests that the rabbits in this warren choose names for the pleasure of their utterance rather than the substance of their meaning. Anderson writes that their ‘loss of narrative roots and attempted renarration of themselves through the crafting of

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<sup>391</sup> Abram, p. 124; the Merriam-Webster definition of synaesthesia is ‘a subjective sensation or image of a sense (as of color) other than the one (as of sound) being stimulated’. In Fiver’s case, his synaesthetic experience is the sensation of sound in place of the image.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> Anderson, p. 26.

“Shapes” or stone art objects and abstract poetry cause them to lose their identity [...] they become spiritual as well as physical automatons who worship rhetoric for its own sake’.<sup>394</sup>

Lissa Paul writes: ‘In industrialized Western societies, we often feel torn between our lost, small-scale, oral culture and our inherited, technological, destructive, literary one. That is the story Adams tells in *Watership Down*.’<sup>395</sup> The tension between orality and literacy which Paul explores in her reading of the novel leads her to conclude that:

Our sympathies in the story are with the illiterate rabbits. Rabbits do not belong to what is known as a ‘primary’ oral culture (that is, culture that has no concept of writing). Theirs is a ‘secondary’ orality. Like human children, they know that print in books and signs on cereal boxes mean something, but they don’t know quite what. To make sense of the world, they (children and rabbits) rely on sensual awareness of the sight, sound, smell, taste and feel of the world around them, and they rely on memory.<sup>396</sup>

The orality/literacy opposition that Paul remarks upon accentuates our understanding of what might be considered “natural” or “unnatural” rabbit behaviour in the novel.

The homogeneity with which Adams writes about rabbits and “primitive” humans threatens to erode essential differences and also reconfigures the civilized/primitive binary expressed in modern Western thought; think back to Adams’ image of detached civilized man reading his newspaper. Although Adams’ representation of this binary reflects negatively on the civilized when contrasted against its other, the primitive, it still serves to widen the perceived gulf between “primitive” and “civilized” cultures. Victor Li writes:

In the earlier primitivism, the primitive is regarded as inferior and justifiably superceded by modern civilization, whereas in the later version the primitive is seen as a corrective to the malaise of Western modernity. But in both cases the primitive is known, given a value, and exists only as an antithesis to the modern West, which not only remains the central point of reference but also is the source from which the idea of the primitive emerged in the first place. In both forms of primitivism, the primitive does not exist in itself but only in relation to and for the West.<sup>397</sup>

The above passage would still make sense if we reinterpreted it according to the human-animal binary. It reads almost as coherently if we substituted ‘anthropocentrism’ for ‘primitivism’, ‘animal’ for ‘primitive’, ‘humanity’ for ‘modernity’ and ‘human’ for ‘West’.

However, Li advocates what he calls ‘neo-primitivism’, which, he explains, ‘challenges an ethnocentric, “domesticated” primitivism by insisting on the absolute rupture and transgression of the primitive rather than its affinity to or dialectical complicity with

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>395</sup> Lissa Paul, ‘Dumb Bunnies : A Re-visionist Re-reading of “Watership Down”’, *Signal*, 56 (1988), p. 114.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>397</sup> Victor Li, *The Neo-Primitivist Turn: Critical Reflections on Alterity, Culture, and Modernity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 15.

modern Western regimes of knowledge'.<sup>398</sup> Adams' primitivism oscillates between twentieth-century manifestations and Li's 'neo-primitivism', or, for the purposes of grounding this idea in the context of the human-animal ('humanimal') relation, we might rephrase this term as 'posthumanist primitivism'.

## Lapine and Other Languages

Language plays a central role in *Watership Down*, primarily because Adams' rabbits speak Lapine, a fictional rabbit language. I shall now turn to discuss the ways in which Lapine may be understood as a non-anthropocentric anthropomorphic trope in terms of how rabbits actually communicate. Dickenson explains that while rabbits do omit vocal signals, 'for most species this consists of squeals in extremis or during sex, or grunting either in warning or occasionally in pleasure. Perhaps because rabbits are such silent creatures, the scream of a rabbit in distress is startling'.<sup>399</sup> So rabbits, including, presumably, the European variety, rarely vocalize when compared with other signals they use to communicate:

If their speech is limited, their sense of smell is highly developed, and rabbits are particularly equipped not only with highly sensitive noses, but with a number of organs specifically focused on laying down scent markings. Whether free in the wild or kept in the house, rabbits 'chin' objects in their territory. 'Chinning' makes a place smell familiar, 'like home', and both male and female rabbits scent mark with their neck glands. Eastern cottontails and European rabbits also rub a corner of the eye along prominent objects, releasing secretions from the Harderian gland. Inguinal glands, which lie alongside the penis or vulva, are also used in scent marking, as are the anal glands.

Dickenson notes further that '[t]he chemical cocktail in rabbit urine identifies gender, age, identity, dominance and condition, one whiff replacing a thousand words of human conversation. The richness of their olfactory world is incomprehensible to the human nose, and even a house well chinned by a dominant house rabbit remains odourless to the homeowner'.<sup>400</sup>

Of course, the olfactory plethora of signals with which rabbits use to communicate cannot be represented in the abstract form of written human language. Adams thus navigates between depicting the rabbits' sensory communication with each other and their environment, and a more anthropomorphic depiction of how rabbits might communicate if it were possible

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>399</sup> Victoria Dickenson, *Rabbit* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), p. 27.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

to translate these experiences into abstract language. To demonstrate an example of the former, read the following exchange between the rabbits from Hazel's company and Cowslip's warren:

There were no more speeches. Rabbits have their own conventions and formalities, but these are few and short by human standards. If Hazel had been a human being he would have been expected to introduce his companions one by one and no doubt each would have been taken in charge as a guest by one of their hosts. In the great burrow, however, things happened differently. The rabbits mingled naturally. They did not talk for talking's sake, in the artificial manner that human beings – and sometimes even their dogs and cats – do. But this did not mean that they were not communicating; merely that they were not communicating by talking. All over the burrow, both the newcomers and those who were at home were accustoming themselves to each other in their own way and their own time; getting to know what the strangers smelt like, how they moved, how they breathed, how they scratched, the feel of their rhythms and pulses. These were their topics and subjects of discussion, carried on without the need of speech. (72)

It is significant that Adams differentiates here between 'communicating' and 'communicating by talking', although this differentiation is for the most part blurred by his very recourse to fictional language, despite his acknowledgement of the artificiality of language.

Few animal stories can claim to have invented a language for its characters. There are other examples, of course: Ursula Le Guin's 'The Author of the Acacia Seeds' (1974) is a short story in which animal *languages* are translated into English through studies in "therolinguistics", and Kathryn Lasky's *Guardians of Ga'Hooole* series (2003-13) features an owl language, a translated glossary of which is contained in *Guide to the Great Tree*. As a term, "Lapine", while derived from the French word for 'rabbit', is also an analogous borrowing from Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty*, the full title of which states that the novel is 'Translated from the Original Equine'. Significantly, humans are unable to understand Lapine, although the rabbits in the novel are able to converse with other nonhuman species in a form of patois. Interspecies communication is more of a given in Beatrix Potter's tales, although there is variation in the intelligibility of meaning in the communication between certain characters (Dr. Maggotty the magpie or the mutilated Squirrel Nutkin, for example). In Adams' novel, attention is given to the linguistic particularities of interspecies communication that takes place.

An earlier example of an animal narrative which explores the idea of rabbit language, while avoiding the explicit fabrication of a fictional language per se, is Ernest Thompson Seton's 'Raggylug' story, which features in *Wild Animals I Have Known* (1898). Seton precedes the story by explaining to the reader that 'Truly rabbits have no speech as we understand it, but they have a way of conveying ideas by a system of sounds, signs, scents,

whisker-touches, movements, and example that answers the purpose of speech; and it must be remembered that though in telling this story I freely translate from rabbit into English, *I repeat nothing that they did not say*.<sup>401</sup> Of course, we are meant to take Seton for his word that he is correctly ‘translating’ the various rabbit signals and gestures into English, although we should expect that the accuracy of this translation will be questionable. Natural history writing and overt anthropomorphism converge in the following passage about the thumping signals of his rabbits:

As soon as Rag was big enough to go out alone, his mother taught him the signal code. Rabbits telegraph each other by thumping the ground with their hind feet. Along the ground sound carries far; a thump that at six feet from the earth is not heard at twenty yards will, near the ground, be heard at least one hundred yards. Rabbits have very keen hearing, and so might hear this same thump at two hundred yards, and that would reach from end to end of Olifant’s Swamp. A single *thump* means ‘look out’ or ‘freeze’. A slow *thump thump* means ‘come’. A fast *thump thump* means ‘danger’; and a very fast *thump thump thump* means ‘run for dear life’.<sup>402</sup>

Reducing the rabbits’ ‘signal code’ to such a fixed translation of meaning offsets the more scientific observations Seton makes earlier in the passage about the distance these signals can travel. The telegraph analogy is also overtly anthropomorphic.

In De La Mare’s *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, the animal characters in the tale communicate and even bond with humans at certain points. Nod, the youngest of the brothers, is freed from a snare by an Oomgar [human] after he becomes separated from Thumb and Thimble. The human, a merry sailor named Andy Battle, brings Nod to his hut, and there they develop an understanding of each other’s languages:

Nod tried hard to understand, and looked as wise as ever he could. “Ulla Mulgar majubba; zinglee Oomgar,” he said.

Battle burst out laughing. “Ugga, nugga, jugga, jingles! That’s it – that’s the werry thing,” he said.

Nod looked up softly without fear, and grinned.

“He knows, by gum!” said Battle. “There be more wits in that leetle hairy cranny than in a shipload of commodores.”<sup>403</sup>

Despite their inability to translate the other’s utterances into their own language, there seems to develop an underlying understanding of what the other is trying to communicate, an understanding which almost transcends language.

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<sup>401</sup> Ernest Thompson Seton, *Wild Animals I Have Known* (New York: Scribner, 1898), pp. 93-4 (author’s emphasis).

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

As we shall see, Adams' own rabbit language, Lapine, features some fictional terms which describe objects and concepts encountered in the lifeworld of the rabbit, but not to the extent of De la Mare's monkey languages. However, De la Mare leaves much of his fictional languages untranslated and unexplained, instead making explicit at rare points in the story that his English is inadequate for translating such language, which absolves him of constructing any complex system of translation. He also briefly glosses over the various monkey languages and dialects the three brothers are taught by their father: 'He taught them, too, the common tongue of the Forest-monkeys – that is the language of nearly all the Mulgars that live in the forests of Munza – Jacquet-mulgars, Mullabruks, purple-faced and saffron-headed Mulgars, Skeetoes, tuft-waving Manquabees, Fly-catchers and Squirrel-tails, and many more that I can mention.'<sup>404</sup> Again, it is not always clear as to which species of monkey these various fictional terms are referring. Adams, meanwhile, features significantly less Lapine terms in his story, but explains the meaning of each term as they appear throughout the novel. The fictional language trope in *Watership Down* nevertheless draws much of its influence from De la Mare.

While Lockley is almost more anthropomorphic than Adams in his descriptions of rabbits in some respects, on the subject of language he attributes no sort of sign system that we would understand under the term 'language'. 'Rabbit language', he writes, 'is through the senses of sight, smell and hearing – the hearing of signals made by movement, of body rustling in the grass or in the burrow, or by the thudding stamp of hind feet on the ground in alarm'. He confines the vocal capacity of rabbits to 'two rare sounds: a low nasal grunt, hardly audible, and used in sexual contacts; and a high treble scream or vocal squeal resembling that of a little pig, or perhaps more like that of a young child in distress'.<sup>405</sup> Lockley makes this comparison between a rabbit squeal and a child's later in his work, describing the sound as 'that heartrending cry of anguish which it utters when caught in a steel-jawed trap and which is so painful to the human ear because of its high pitch and human quality, like that of a child in the extremity of terror'.<sup>406</sup> Given the influence of *Private Life* on Adams' text, might this element of affinity drawn between a rabbit and a scared child also have influenced Adams' choice of species for his characters in an attempt to engage his reader?

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid, pp. 16-17.

<sup>405</sup> Lockley, p. 23.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

Only a few words of Lapine are actually disclosed in the text, but each of these terms signifies something of vital significance in the environment of the rabbits. Anderson observes that ‘the rabbits employ words which are practical because they convey concrete and thus accessible meanings, and beautiful because they describe, not replace, what they represent’.<sup>407</sup> In other words, the Lapine language evolves out of the rabbits’ relationship with the natural environment and does not contain any abstract terms. The term *embleer*, for instance, is an expletive, and means ‘stinking’, or more specifically, ‘the smell of a fox’. This signifies that a fox’s scent is one of the things rabbits detest the most, primarily because of the fox’s status as a common hunter of rabbits. *Embleer* is also used more generally as an expletive. Some Lapine terms signify the names of other species of animals, such as *lendri* for badger and *yona* for hedgehog, while other species are named by the rabbits as humans would name them – cats, dogs, stoats, foxes (sometimes referred to in the Lapine term, *homba*), mice and rats, to name a few examples. Other Lapine terms refer to broader categories, such as *elil*, which means ‘enemies’, and *hrududu* (plural: *hrududil*), which refers to *any* motor vehicle. *Elil* comprises any natural predators of rabbits, most notably foxes, stoats, weasels, cats, owls and men. When the rabbits encounter a creature that is unfamiliar to them, their first question is whether that creature is one of the *elil*.

Some Lapine terms denote complex meanings for which human languages do not possess an equivalent term. For example, the word *tharn* means the ‘state of staring, glazed paralysis that comes over terrified or exhausted rabbits, so that they sit and watch their enemies – weasels or humans – approach to take their lives’ (24). Alternatively, Lapine is restricted by its use of oversimplified categories. Take, for example, the episode in the beanfield when Hazel first encounters a crow: ‘It so happened that Hazel had never seen a crow. It did not occur to him that it was following the track of a mole, in the hope of killing it with a blow of its beak and then pulling it out of its shallow run. If he had realized this, he might not have classed it light-heartedly as a “Not-Hawk” – that is, anything from a wren to a pheasant – and continued on his way up the slope.’ (39) The rabbit categories of *elil* and non-*elil*, which are applied to all other animal species, including humans, prove problematic when any of the rabbits encounter an unrecognised species.

In terms of the linguistic roots of Lapine, Anderson identifies in certain words features of Arabic, French, Spanish, Sanskrit and Native American languages, going so far as to suggest that ‘Adams has constructed an earthly conglomeration of international languages,

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<sup>407</sup> Anderson, p. 31.

a kind of linguistic universal'.<sup>408</sup> Perhaps Anderson is suggesting that Adams' Lapine posits an originary language shared by animals and primitive humans, a concept which permeates many stories told in primitive, oral cultures. This would explain why modern, "civilized" humans are the only species in the novel with whom rabbits, or any other nonhuman animals, cannot communicate. Rabbits are able to converse with other animals, but only by simplifying their language, which implies that rabbits possess a more sophisticated language than Kehaar the seagull, the field mouse, or the cat, for example. Even in comparison with the human speech which appears in the text, Lapine is written as Standard English. However, it is not that Lapine is more sophisticated, only that it is more comprehensible to the reader on account of the rabbit's perspective the novel adopts. In order for different nonhuman animal species to communicate in the novel, they rely on 'a very simple, limited *lingua franca* of the hedgerow and woodland' (143). This is later described as a 'hedgerow patois' (179) when Hazel speaks with Kehaar. Of course, the accents with which different species speak are loosely based on accents we as humans would recognize. It has been remarked that the speech of the field mouse possesses an Italian lilt ('No wait owl. But a what I like a say. You 'elp a mouse. One time a mouse 'elp a you. You want 'im, 'e come.' (147)), while Kehaar's accent resembles an even more foreign way of speaking. It is described in the first instance as 'harsh gabbling' which the rabbits 'all felt immediately to be exotic. Wherever the bird came from, it was somewhere far away. The accent was strange and guttural, the speech distorted. They could only catch a word here and there' (179). Human characters in the text speak with a Hampshire accent ('Ah! Best get 'un in quick. Leave loights on!' (218)), which would be the accent spoken by most people from the area in which Watership Down lies.

Why create a fictional language for rabbits? What makes rabbits as likely to possess a form of communication similar to our own than other, "higher" mammals (primates and cetaceans)? In *Animals in Translation*, Temple Grandin cites a study of the distress calls of prairie dogs undertaken by Con Slobodchikoff. Using sonograms to analyze these calls, Grandin writes that

[Slobodchikoff] has found that prairie dog colonies have a communication system that includes nouns, verbs, and adjectives. They can tell each other what kind of predator is approaching – man, hawk, coyote, dog (noun) – and they can tell each other how fast it's moving (verb) [...] If the prairie dogs are signalling the approach of a person, they can tell one another something about what color clothing the person is wearing, as well as something about his size and shape (adjectives).<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>409</sup> Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson, *Animals in Translation: The Woman Who Thinks Like a Cow* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), p. 273.

This sounds like a very complex communication system for a species of rodent, almost as complex as Lapine. Moreover, Slobodchikoff found that they ‘aren’t born knowing the calls. They have to learn them. He bases this on the fact that the different prairie dog colonies around Flagstaff all have different dialects’. This is also true of the rabbit warrens of *Watership Down*. The Efracans in particular speak in a very different dialect from the other rabbits. ‘Since genetically these animals are almost identical’, explains Grandin, ‘genetic differences can’t explain the differences in the calls. This means the calls have been created by the individual colonies and passed on from one generation to the next’.<sup>410</sup>

How does Adams’ multiple uses of the supposedly anthropomorphic trope of language depict his rabbits as “humanimals”? While rabbits in the novel speak Lapine, they cannot transcribe it, and do not understand the concept of written language or signs. As Lapine is preserved purely in its oral form, it thus remains immaterial, a product of the natural world. The Lapine language is not used by Adams’ rabbits to formulate abstract concepts or categories, even though the Lapine terms which feature in the novel are inevitably translated by the author into words we can understand in human language. Lapine is thus a language, and yet not a language in the human sense, but more a natural sign system which rabbits and many other animals could plausibly possess. Adams’ deliberate incorporation of the rabbits’ non-vocal signals into their communicatory matrix, a sort of language of the senses, also troubles the notion that his rabbits communicate in a way which is primarily anthropomorphic. If we take the distinction between *language* and *communication* (which actually subsumes language) as a semiotic analogue of the human/animal distinction (the animal likewise subsuming the human), then the language, or rather languages, spoken or transmitted by Adams’ rabbits are neither/both human language and animal communication.

### **Rabbits Are So Human**

As we have so far proceeded through our problematic gradient of anthropomorphic tropes, it has become apparent that no trope or mode of writing in particular is wholly anthropomorphic or non-anthropomorphic in *Watership Down*. Having reached the point at

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid, pp. 273-4.

which tropes begin to take on a more naturalistic hue, I now turn to discuss the ways in which Adams draws analogies between rabbits and humans. These analogies are sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly drawn. This section will draw out instances of both as we leave behind the more obvious, and seemingly anthropomorphic, constructs of the epic quest narrative, rabbit mythology and the Lapine language, and begin to explore elements of the natural history mode and realistic representations of the ways in which rabbits live, breed, fight, and die in the natural world.

A frequently cited remark in discussions of Adams' novel is from R.M. Lockley's *The Private Life of the Rabbit* (1964): 'As we shall see throughout our story, humans are so rabbit.'<sup>411</sup> Lockley's text provides much of the material for Adams' description of rabbit behaviour. However, this does not imply that the rabbits in *Watership Down* are portrayed any less anthropomorphically. As Charles A. Meyer observes, a 'casual reading of the novel hints that Lockley had anthropomorphized his rabbits by tagging them with human characteristics *a la* Chuck Jones and Beatrix Potter. In *Private Life*, a dominant buck is a "king" or a "dictator"; a run-of-the-mill is a "husband"; the doe is a "woman" or a "young wife"; a burrow becomes a "palace"; kittens are "children"; a warren is a "society".'<sup>412</sup>

It is not the case, however, that Lockley simply anthropomorphises rabbits. He rather draws attention to similarities between rabbits and human beings which emphasise the cyclical trend of anthropomorphising nonhuman animals and, in the process, theriomorphising humans. Thus he writes: 'Man is a rabbit [...] and consciously and subconsciously engages much of his life in the same situation, of eating to live, of avoiding death from many and numerous sources, such as war and disease, and being killed by his enemies or by the machinery which he himself has invented.'<sup>413</sup> Adams adopts this tendency to present human and rabbit experiences as permeable in his novel. A particularly telling passage is when Adams' describes the rabbit's lack of a concept of time, at least in the same way modern humans possess such a concept. 'Rabbits, of course, have no idea of precise time or of punctuality. In this respect they are much the same as primitive people, who often take several days over assembling for some purpose and then several more to get started. Before such people can act together, a kind of telepathic feeling has to flow through them and ripen to the point when they all know that they are ready to begin.' (16) Adams even makes observations about affinities between human and rabbit behaviour through the voice of his

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<sup>411</sup> Lockley, p. 22.

<sup>412</sup> Charles A. Meyer, 'The Power of Myth and Rabbit Survival in Richard Adams' "Watership Down"', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 3.3/4 (11/12), *The Lost Issues* (1994), p. 141.

<sup>413</sup> Lockley, p. 22.

characters. For example, on hearing about the notice board at the start of the novel, Blackberry, considered the most intelligent of the company, remarks that ‘he had always felt sure that men left these things about to act as signs or messages of some kind, in the same way that rabbits left marks on runs and gaps’ (13).

Adams also draws our attention to essential differences: ‘No human beings, except the courageous and the experienced blind, are able to sense much in a strange place where they cannot see, but with rabbits it is otherwise. They spend half their lives underground in darkness or near-darkness and touch, smell and hearing convey as much or more to them than sight.’ (71) Adams exempts courageous and experienced blind people from this experiential difference between rabbit and human. Meyer concludes from his reading of the novel alongside Lockley’s text that ‘Adams perceives rabbits and humans as representing autonomous threads within a weave of animalness understandable as much through sociological and psychological similarity as through anatomical and psychological difference’.<sup>414</sup>

Regarding sociological and psychological similarity, we should turn first the warren societies Adams depicts in the novel and on what political systems these societies are supposedly based. Returning to the discussion of genre, and allegory in particular, Miltner writes:

*Watership Down*’s political/Utopian qualities strongly support the claim that the novel is a special type of allegory. A semi-allegorical relationship exists among the different rabbit warrens and specific social and political systems: Sandleford (twentieth century status quo), Cowslip’s (fatalist-defeatist-existentialist), Nuthanger Farm (unnatural deprivation), Watership Down (democratic freedom), and Efrafa (totalitarian dictatorship).<sup>415</sup>

If we subscribe to this view of *Watership Down* as a kind of multi-allegory, then we could consider it an extension of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945), the most famous animal allegory of modern times. While the closest resemblance to Orwell’s Animalist society in Adams’ novel is Efrafa, there are other political systems not allegorically portrayed in *Animal Farm* that might, as Miltner suggests, be read allegorically in *Watership Down*. However, Miltner is reducing Adams’ warren societies to a series of *homologous* representations which are supposed to explicitly resemble human sociopolitical ideologies.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the affinities that Adams emphasises between rabbits and humans in the narrative is the shared conflict between the interests of the group

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<sup>414</sup> Meyer, p. 142.

<sup>415</sup> Miltner, p. 69.

and the interests of the individual. Edward O. Wilson writes that at some stage in human evolution in which we had begun to develop social intelligence, ‘a conflict ensued between individual-level selection, with individuals competing with other individuals in the same group, on the one side, and group-level selection, with competition among groups, on the other’. Wilson notes that group-level selection ‘promoted altruism and cooperation among all the group members. It led to innate group-wide morality and a sense of consciousness and honor [...] Within groups selfish individuals beat altruistic individuals, but groups of altruists beat groups of selfish individuals’.<sup>416</sup> This is aptly portrayed in the conflict between *Watership Down* and Efrafa. While we could view this conflict as an analogue of democratic vs. totalitarian societies, it is arguably reflective of the more innate and sociobiological conflict that Wilson describes, and which Adams suggests is a conflict common to rabbits and humans alike. ‘Social integration, a community working together,’ writes Bridgman, ‘is seen as a desirable aim in *Watership Down*. The individual can achieve nothing by himself: all the animals must cooperate with each other’. Not only do Hazel and his companions cooperate with members of other species (Kehaar, the field mouse), but they also accept rabbits from each of the other warrens – Holly and Bluebell from the Sandleford warren, Strawberry from Cowslip’s warren, Blackavar and later several others from Efrafa – as well as the rabbits from Nuthanger Farm.

The rabbits of *Watership Down* encounter many adversaries within their own species who demonstrate clearly unusual or disturbed behaviour for rabbits. The first instance is when they meet the dancing, singing and laughing rabbits of Cowslip’s warren. The first appearance of Cowslip suggests something un-rabbit-like: ‘They could see now that he was a big fellow, sleek and handsome. His fur shone and his claws and teeth were in perfect condition. Nevertheless, he did not seem aggressive. On the contrary, there was a curious, rather unnatural gentleness about the way in which he waited for them to come nearer.’ (61) It strikes Hazel and the others that Cowslip’s manner seems unnatural in light of his large size and pristine claws and teeth. Outward appearance and inward character do not match and this confuses them. Of course, the warren of the snares is partially man-made and perhaps this explains the foreign, perhaps even otherworldly impression that Hazel forms of the stranger, who has ‘an unusual smell, but it was certainly not unpleasant. It gave Hazel an impression of good feeding, of health and of a certain indolence, as though the other came from some rich, prosperous country where he himself had never been’ (61-2). Cowslip also possesses the ‘air

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<sup>416</sup> Edward O. Wilson, *The Meaning of Human Existence* (New York: Liveright, 2014), p. 33.

of an aristocrat', emphasising a class distinction which we already exists in Adams' rabbit world in the form of the Chief Rabbit and the Owsla, and which we find to exist even more prominently in the dictatorship of Efrafa. Cowslip's strangeness comes from his human taint, although this is completely hidden from Hazel, who spends much time trying to deduce the root of his strange manners: 'The stranger's manner told nothing [...] If there was some kind of trick, he had no idea what it might be.' (62) Again, only Fiver foresees danger in trusting Cowslip and entering his warren.

The first display of strange behaviour from other rabbits in the warren is the dancing pair that greets them on their arrival:

Both rabbits together made a curious, dancing movement of the head and front paws. Apart from sniffing, as Hazel and Cowslip had done when they met, formal gestures – except between mating rabbits – were unknown to Hazel and his companions. They felt mystified and slightly ill-at-ease. The dancers paused, evidently waiting for some acknowledgment or reciprocal gesture, but there was none. (70)

The purpose of their dancing is unclear to them, serving no natural purpose, at least no natural purpose in the lifeworld of the rabbit. Humans, conversely, dance for all sorts of reasons. The unnatural manner and behaviour of these new rabbits prompts Hazel to consider whether he should act unnaturally in their presence: 'He wondered if he ought to be very formal [...] He decided that it would be best to be plain and friendly. After all, there would be plenty of time, as they settled down in the warren, to show these strangers that they were as good as themselves, without putting on airs at the start.' (71) This consideration of social airs seems implicitly anthropomorphic and unnatural for rabbits, and the un-rabbit-like manner of the rabbits in Cowslip's warren seems to sub-consciously influence Hazel's thinking.

The next significant instance in which the rabbits of Cowslip's warren show signs of strange behaviour is when they burst into laughter, which frightens Hazel and Blackberry. As Adams explains to the reader,

The phenomenon of laughter is unknown to animals; though it is possible that dogs and elephants may have some inkling of it. The effect on Hazel and Blackberry was overwhelming. Hazel's first idea was that Cowslip was showing the symptom of some kind of disease. Blackberry clearly thought that he might be going to attack them and backed away. Cowslip said nothing, but his eerie laughter continued. Hazel and Blackberry turned and scuttled up the nearest run as though he had been a ferret. (78)

While laughter is something that comes more naturally to human beings, Adams' explanation immediately conveys to the reader that laughter is unknown and unsettling to the more 'natural' Sandleford rabbits, who interpret this 'phenomenon' as a sign of either imminent

attack or the onset of myxomatosis. Cowslip's body language here implies – one might say, translates as – something very different for Hazel and Blackberry as it does for the human reader.

### **The Rabbits' Lifeworld and Natural History**

Excluded from Robert Miltner's list of the converging genres in *Watership Down* is natural history. As we have seen in the previous chapter, some natural history adheres to tropes of conventional narrative.<sup>417</sup> However, while Beatrix Potter's natural history and recorded observations of animal life subtly permeate her children's tales, Adams' use of such observations are more explicit and typical of the more narrative examples of the genre. As any reader of *Watership Down* will know, Adams enriches his narrative with descriptions of the flora and fauna which inhabit the world in which his rabbits live. In fact, the opening chapter of the novel grants us an insight into Adams' own natural history writing. Take our first glance at Hazel, for example:

The first rabbit stopped in a sunny patch and scratched his ear with rapid movements of his hind-leg. Although he was a yearling and still below full weight, he had not the harassed look of most 'outskirters' – that is, the rank-and-file of ordinary rabbits in their first year who, lacking either aristocratic parentage or unusual size and strength, get sat on by their elders and live as best they can – often in the open – on the edge of their warren. He looked as though he knew how to take care of himself. There was a shrewd, buoyant air about him as he sat up, looked around and rubbed both front paws over his nose. As soon as he was satisfied that all was well, he laid back his ears and set to work on the grass. (4)

This description bears all the hallmarks of a wildlife documentary, especially if we imagine the scene narrated in the present tense. There is very little that is not factual, and phrases such as 'looked as though' and 'air about him' suggest the speculation of an observer rather than an outright anthropomorphic assumption of the rabbit's nature. Adams may also be deliberately withholding Hazel's name until after the reader has read these observations so as to invoke a sense that what we are about to read is, in part, a work of natural history.

Adams narrates his novel, for much of the time, from the rabbits' perspective, with occasional panoramic observations made by an omniscient, natural history narrator. In reading the text we experience, or at least glimpse, the lifeworld of the rabbit. Scents and

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<sup>417</sup> See also Chapter 2 of Eileen Crist's *Images of Animals* (1999) about the natural history of George and Elizabeth Peckham and Jean Henri Fabre.

sounds pervade the text, disclosing to us the rabbit's sensory matrix. Perspective of physical objects is also a common preoccupation in the novel, and this is described by both showing and telling. While sometimes Adams describes scenes as experienced by a character, at other times he draws upon human perspectives of scenes and objects in order to explain the rabbit's experience of the same scene or object. After Hazel leads the company into the woods on the first leg of their journey, we read that

From a thick pile of dead leaves beneath a holly tree, Hazel looked down a narrow path, lined on either side with fern and sprouting fire-weed. The fern moved slightly in the breeze, but along the path there was nothing to be seen except a scatter of last year's fallen acorns under an oak. What was in the bracken? What lay round the further bend? And what would happen to a rabbit who left the shelter of the holly tree and ran down the path? (23)

Here we are told the position from which Hazel is viewing his surroundings, the objects that are in his immediate view, and the particular considerations he makes as a result of acquiring this knowledge. Humans in the same patch of woodland might not even acknowledge 'fern and sprouting fire-weed', and would likely be able to see farther than 'the further bend' as they are much higher from the ground. The uncertainty, of course, is due to the fact that woodland is a more dangerous terrain for a rabbit than a human (at least in the English countryside). Adams is showing us the rabbit's perspective in this passage.

However, once the rabbits are out of the wood and reach the river, we are told that

Immediately in front of [Hazel], Bigwig and Dandelion were staring out from the sheer edge of a high bank, and below the bank ran a stream. It was in fact the little river Enborne, twelve to fifteen feet wide and at this time of year two or three feet deep with spring rain, but to the rabbits it seemed immense, such a river as they had never imagined. (30)

Here Adams' discloses details of the river's name, width and depth, details which allow us to better understand the rabbit's perspective of the size of the river. Adams is translating human experience into rabbit experience.

One example of the shift between Adams' omniscient narration and the narration of the rabbits' perspective occurs in the opening of the first chapter of the novel's second part: the description of Watership Down itself. We are initially given a view of the surroundings from a human perspective, which is emphasised by the use of numerical measurements: 'Three hundred feet the down rose vertically in a stretch of no more than six hundred – a precipitous wall, from the thin belt of trees at the foot to the ridge where the steep flattened out [...] From the ridge, the light seemed to cover all the slope below, drowsy and still.' Adams deliberately opens the chapter with a wider view of the terrain before descending into

the world of smaller animals, drawing our attention to how humans and other species perceive the environment differently: 'But down in the grass itself, between the bushes, in that thick forest trodden by the beetle, the spider and the hunting shrew, the moving light was like a wind that danced among them to set them scurrying and weaving.' (119) The sunlight, which makes the down appear 'drowsy and still' to the human eye, throws intense rays onto the 'thick forest' trodden by insects and rodents. The second paragraph returns the reader to Hazel and his companions 'crouching under the low-branches of two or three spindle trees', and from there Adams bring us up to speed on their journey.

Adams also sometimes describes objects for which we have names in terms more familiar to rabbits. One frequently occurring example is cigarettes, which are never named as such but are described as white sticks that men burn in their mouths. Describing cigarettes as 'sticks' makes them easier to visualise for the rabbits, who recognise sticks and therefore apply the term 'sticks' to most long, thin objects they come across. When the company first encounter a road, Bigwig names it as such because he has encountered them before, having patrolled further outside their old warren than most. Hazel's immediate impression is one of 'astonishment. For a moment he thought that he was looking at another river – black, smooth and straight between its banks. Then he saw the gravel embedded in the tar and watched a spider running over the surface' (46).

The central aspect of the rabbit's lifeworld is the warren. The warren is portrayed in *Watership Down* as a place of both security and community, as well as a place of danger and oppression. 'The holes and tunnels of an old warren become smooth, reassuring and comfortable with use. There are no snags or rough corners. Every length smells of rabbits – of that great, indestructible flood of Rabbitry in which each one is carried along, sure-footed and safe.' (65) While we might consider such a dwelling dirty and claustrophobic, for the rabbits the old warren, familiar through the rabbit's sensations of touch and smell, is just as homely for them as our houses of wood, stone and brick are for us. Adams' description of the inside of the warren appeals to our sense of home and comfort while also describing an experience, the experience of tunnelling and living underground, which is very different from most human experiences of building and living in their homes, at least in the modern age.

The warren of the snares is an unnaturally open and exposed space for the Sandleford rabbits. As they first approach the warren, we are told that it 'was as conspicuous a warren as could well be imagined' (69). Once inside, Adams narrates Hazel's immediate impression of the space around him:

Suddenly he checked. He had come into an open place. His whiskers could feel no earth in front and none was near his sides. There was a good deal of air ahead of him – he could feel it moving – and there was a considerable space above his head. Also, there were several rabbits near him. It had not occurred to him that there would be a place underground where he would be exposed on three sides. (70-71)

The openness of this new warren is entirely strange to Hazel and his companions. Human dwellings are built with open spaces inside, which provide comfort, but Adams' use of thought report to convey Hazel's unease invites us to imagine how, in a rabbit's skin, we might find an open, airy warren very uncomfortable indeed.

The particular species on which both Adams and Lockley base their narratives is the European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), and the origins of the species reveal that it was introduced into the British Isles by the Romans and later the Normans, where in both instances they were cultivated for their meat and fur. The species originated in southwest Europe and northwest Africa, but mainly from the Iberian Peninsula. Spain is even named after the species, explains John A. Crow: 'When the Carthaginians came around 300 b.c. they called the country *Ispania* (from Sphan, "rabbit"), which means "land of the rabbits." The Romans [...] adopted the Carthaginian name of the country, calling it *Hispania*. Later, this became the present day Spanish name for the country, *España*.'<sup>418</sup> This aspect of the natural history of the European rabbit arguably carries allegorical meaning when applied to *Watership Down*. In Britain, the species is foreign, introduced directly by humans rather than migrating across the English Channel miraculously of their own accord. The capture and transportation of one species by another for exploitation no doubt suggests analogies to the slave trade or even to the Holocaust. The history of migration from Europe is also a macrocosm of events in the novel, although rather than humans capturing and transporting rabbits, Adams' rabbits are forced to migrate by human destruction. Perhaps their introduction by humans explains the differences between the warren societies in the novel. Humans leave their cultural imprint on these societies; Cowslip's warren adopts a strange culture tainted with human influence, while Woundwort was once a hutch rabbit before he escaped.

The natural history of rabbits reveals several ambiguities regarding their classification. Lagomorphs were once believed to be members of the rodent family, and the palaeontologist Albert Wood concluded as recently as 1957 that the rabbit was something between a rodent and an antelope, but obviously neither.<sup>419</sup> Victoria Dickenson writes: 'Not

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<sup>418</sup> John A. Crow, p. 7.

<sup>419</sup> Albert Wood, 'What, If Anything, Is a Rabbit?' (1957); cited in Dickenson, p. 7.

surprisingly for those who love rabbits, primates are also members of the great dynasty that includes the lagomorphs, making our disturbing sense of familiarity with them more plausible.<sup>420</sup> Scientific research has even supported this surprising link between lagomorphs and primates. Dan Graur claims that ‘Lagomorpha is significantly more closely related to Primates and Scandentia (tree shrews) than it is to rodents.’<sup>421</sup> Davis and DeMello remark on the confusion of species within the lagomorph order in the popular imagination: ‘The fact that domestic rabbits, wild American rabbits, wild European rabbits and hares are continually jumbling in the popular mind is not surprising. The names are confusing: jackrabbits, for instance, are actually hares, while both domestic Belgian hares and some wild “hares” (like the hispid hare and the African rockhare) are actually rabbits, albeit of different species.’<sup>422</sup>

Adams’ novel draws on several elements of natural history to distinguish European rabbits from other lagomorphs. Joel Chandler Harris confuses species in the character of Brer Rabbit, who is probably either an Eastern Cottontail or a hare, species which are more widespread in North America. Lewis Carroll, meanwhile, attempts some sort of differentiation with his characters of the White Rabbit and the March Hare, but his representations are so overtly anthropomorphic as to make the question of species redundant. Adams avoids the homogenization of species by his attention to Lockley’s natural history. The hutch rabbits in the novel are also from different breeds of rabbit to Hazel and the rest: ‘Two – Laurel and Clover – were short-haired black Angoras. The others, Boxwood and his doe Haystack, were black and white Himalayans.’ (201) In the film version, these differentiations of breeds are not shown in the animation. Instead, the different warrens are crudely distinguished according to the colour of their fur: Hazel and his warren are generally depicted dark-grey next to Cowslip’s brown rabbits or the light-grey hutch rabbits, but are sometimes also depicted brown next to the dark-grey Efracfans.

The status of the European rabbit as a “wild” animal is also a point of contention. Discussing the keeping of rabbits in the Middle Ages within walled enclosures called “leporaria”, Davis and DeMello write that ‘Though these rabbits were enclosed, they were not “domesticated.” The term “domestic” only refers to those animals that can be force to breed in captivity, because that’s what allows humans to start selecting for various traits. Instead, the “leporaria rabbits” were wild rabbits living in semi-freedom and getting very fat

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<sup>420</sup> Dickenson, p. 8.

<sup>421</sup> Dan Graur, ‘Phylogenetic Position of the Order Lagomorpha’, *Nature*, 379.6563 (1996), p. 333.

<sup>422</sup> Davis and DeMello, p. 60.

on human food.’<sup>423</sup> They further explain that the ambiguities surrounding the domestic/wild status of the European rabbit in the context of its history of transportation by humans:

[T]he fact that the “wild” rabbit in continental Europe was actually transported there by humans has led some commentators to claim that the only true wild European rabbits are those still living in wild in Spain and that all the other wild rabbits on the continent are actually “feral.” [...] Once wild animals have had persistent contact with humans, they’re not really wild anymore, because domestication by definition means that the animals can be bred and sustained in captivity and can’t survive in the wild. The rabbit garden rabbits were an odd case. They weren’t being “domesticated” per se, but they were being “kept” by humans. <sup>424</sup>

We might argue that perhaps even today the European rabbit in Britain occupies a strange halfway position between wild and domestic. Cowslip’s warren provides a glaring example of this half-domesticated status in *Watership Down*. This is emphasised by the absence of actual human contact but the presence everywhere of human traces. Although the hutch rabbits of Nuthanger Farm experience some initial difficulty in adapting to “wild” rabbit behaviour, they do eventually integrate with Hazel’s warren, suggesting that popularly perceived differences between the “natural” behaviour of “wild” rabbits and the “unnatural” behaviour of domestic rabbits are actually not so easily distinguishable. Nevertheless, Adams does portray certain behaviours in his novel as though they were more or less “natural” to rabbits.

The domestic/wild binary as it applies to the European rabbit is an ambiguous construct; this is recognized by Adams in his depictions of the hutch rabbits and the various, supposedly wild, warren societies. Rabbits are thus *neither* wild nor domesticated creatures, and yet *both* at the same time. There are also, as implicit in Adams’ analogies between rabbits and humans, elements of wildness and domesticity that we supposedly share with rabbits, both in the natural world and specifically within the narrative of *Watership Down*. Adams’ representation of wildness and domesticity in the novel certainly tends to favour wildness, which is shown through his use of primitivist tropes, although the intersecting binaries of human/animal and domestic/wild are presented as ambiguous and interchangeable. In Adams’ “humanimal” rabbits we encounter elements of both the domestic animal and the wild human.

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

## Death, Violence and Sexuality

‘While rabbits in books, television shows and movies for children are generally loveable, adorable and childlike,’ write Davis and DeMello, ‘adult rabbit tales feature more mature themes, including sexuality, death and transcendence’.<sup>425</sup> Themes that we might regard as being exclusively suitable for an adult audience are both explicitly and implicitly portrayed in *Watership Down*, a text most critics have read as a children’s tale. However, this is not surprising considering Adams’ own views on ‘children’s’ literature in an interview with Jean Fritz:

He [Adams] has two new books coming out – *The Plague Dogs* and *The Ship’s Cat* [...] When I asked if these were children’s books, I was told there are no such things as children’s books. I explained that I was simply inquiring which department would be handling his new books – adult or juvenile.

“The whole system is like slavery,” he replied with some heat. “It will have to go. And it will go. Children’s lib – that’s what we should be talking about.”

Later in the interview he states: “I believe in telling the truth. I promised my children I would always tell them the truth. When I was a child, adults tried to hide the truth from me, but I found it, the dark underside of the world, in Walter de la Mare’s poetry.”<sup>426</sup> Thus Adams deliberately chooses not to exclude ‘adult’ themes from his writing, to a certain extent at least.

Death, pain, torture and sexual relationships are all explored in the novel to a certain extent. Perhaps the most striking and harrowing passage is Bigwig’s mutilation in the wire trap near the warren of the snares. Adams describes the scene thus:

A length of twisted copper wire, gleaming dully in the first sunlight, was looped round his neck and ran taut across one fore-paw to the head of a stout peg driven into the ground. The running knot had pulled tight and was buried in the fur behind his ear. The projecting point of one strand had lacerated his neck and drops of blood, dark and red as yew berries, welled one by one by one down his shoulder. For a few moments he lay panting, his side heaving in exhaustion. Then again began the struggling and fighting, backwards and forwards, jerking and falling, until he choked and lay quiet. (107-8)

The description is drawn out with graphic relish, and at first glance is not a particularly suitable passage for children. The violence depicted here is a far cry from the gruesome trials of Tom Kitten in *Samuel Whiskers* or Benjamin and Peter in *Mr. Tod*. Adams emphasises here the bodily vulnerability we share with all animals, how the lives of all species are finite, our flesh corporeal.

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<sup>425</sup> Davis and DeMello, p. 190.

<sup>426</sup> Jean Fritz, ‘An Evening with Richard Adams’, *Children’s Literature in Education*, 9.2 (1978), p. 68.

There is a deeply unsentimental aspect to this passage, however. As soon as the other rabbits presume Bigwig to be dead, Hazel is concerned only with keeping up appearances: ‘He turned away from the body and looked for Fiver among the rabbits behind him. But Fiver was nowhere to be seen and Hazel was afraid to ask for him, in case to do so should seem like weakness and a need for comfort.’ (111) Bigwig has become, simply, ‘the body’. When he eventually comes round and musters the strength to stand, he looks ‘more like some demon-creature than a rabbit. The immediate sight of him, which should have filled them with relief and joy, brought only terror. They cringed away and none said a word’ (111-112).

The threat of death is everywhere for rabbits, and *Watership Down* conveys this to the reader throughout the text. This accounts for the seeming lack of mourning for the departed. On their dangerous return journey from Efrafa, accompanied by the does they have broken free from the warren, two of these does are taken suddenly. ‘The Way Back’ opens with a matter-of-fact statement: ‘The first thing that Hazel learned the next morning was that Thrayonlosa had died during the night.’ (379) Remaining true to the nature of rabbits (and several other nonhuman species), Adams writes: ‘Evidently the poor creature had felt that she was going to die and, in the manner of animals, had slipped away.’ (380) Not much is mentioned beyond the facts, other than ‘[t]he news depressed Hazel’. In the same chapter another doe is killed by a fox: ‘It landed between the two does, grabbed one by the neck and dragged her up the bank in a flash.’ (386) Blackavar, the Efrafan buck that joins the company on the return to Watership Down, is ‘matter-of-fact and detached’ about the situation: ‘“Poor little beast,” he said. “You see, their instincts are weakened by life in the Mark. Fancy feeding under bushes on the windward side of a wood! Never mind, Hazel-rah, these things happen.” ’ (386-7) The way in which Blackavar regards the doe as a ‘poor little beast’ is similar to the way in which a human might respond to the situation. To the sudden death of one of our own species we would likely respond with horror and shock. However, the fact that Blackavar’s manner is mentioned as detached suggests it is unusual amongst the Sandleford rabbits.

The novel’s preoccupation with death and the terror of death for rabbits may reflect upon Adams’ own childhood experiences. In his autobiography, *The Day Gone By* (1990), he recalls an incident in which he witnesses rabbits being skinned:

One of my early memories is of walking hand-in-hand with my mother along Bartholomew Street, when we saw coming towards us a dirty, bearded man who was pushing up the roadway a home-made handcart, a thing of soap-boxes and old pram wheels. This was full of and hung about with dead rabbits. Their back legs were tied together and as the cart rattled along their ears and poor, eye-glazed

faces swung and bobbed. The man, to leave his hands free, had tied the shafts with a bit of cord under the armpits, and as he went he was very deliberately skinning a rabbit with an old knife, and tugging off the loose fur where he had got a grip.

I burst into tears; from shock, I think, as much as pity. It was, of course, a piteous, ugly sight, but apart from that the man's unconcerned, workaday air as he plied his knife made me realize in an instant that rabbits were things, and that it was only in a baby's world that they were not.<sup>427</sup>

Adams' graphic imagery in recollecting this troubling experience is an imagery which permeates his first novel. Perhaps his emphasis on death and on the grotesque appearance of rabbits in death is a deliberate attempt on Adams' part to evoke the same feeling of piteousness and ugliness which with he is overcome as a child. However, Davis and DeMello remark that Adams was explicitly unsentimental about rabbits. 'Ironically,' they write, 'Richard Adams himself wasn't any big rabbit advocate. He told *The Ottawa Citizen* in 1998 that he supported a massive cyanide "cull" of wild rabbits in England because it was a "regrettable necessity." The *Citizen* noted that Mr. Adams also told a London newspaper, "I've never been one of these sentimentalists. I'm not a fluffy bunny sort of person at all. If I saw a rabbit in my garden, I'd shoot it."<sup>428</sup>

The subject of violence is treated with a degree of indifference in the novel. Adams even explicitly states: 'One respect in which rabbits' lives are less complicated than those of humans is that they are not ashamed to use force.' (103) Thus with the threat of force do Hazel and Bigwig coerce Fiver into Cowslip's warren. When Fiver leaves the burrow the next morning, Bigwig immediately thinks of a violent resolution to bring him back: "I'll hold him down while you kick him, if only we can find him. Come on!" (105) In Efrafa, of course, violence is the norm. The first description of Blackavar is both pitiful and grotesque: 'He was dreadfully mutilated. His ears were nothing but shapeless shreds, ragged at the edges, seamed with ill-knot scars and beaded here and there with lumps of proud, bare flesh.' (314) This is the first instance in which the effects of violence can be visibly seen after the event, Blackavar divulging all the details to the rest of the company once they are safely back at Watership Down. Blackavar is displayed by General Woundwort as a means of setting an example for any rabbits who might try to escape or rebel. The description of his appearance prompts us to imagine the scene in which his wounds were inflicted, to imagine his assailants using their claws and teeth to inflict them. To compound the brutality of such violence,

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<sup>427</sup> Adams, (1990), pp. 80-81.

<sup>428</sup> Davis and DeMello, p. 195.

Adams focalizes the description of Blackavar through Bigwig, the rabbit of the Sandleford company most used to violence.<sup>429</sup>

The ever-present danger of death, particularly for rabbits, does not lessen the rabbits' fear of death. Charles Meyer remarks: 'Anxiety about death preoccupies these rabbits with their pathetic creatureliness and links Adams' rabbits inextricably with humans in their anxiety about death and meaninglessness.'<sup>430</sup> In the novel's preoccupation with death, perhaps Adams is prompting us to recognise in ourselves as humans a certain paradox. Meyer writes that humans are 'unique symbol-making creatures who can soar in our urge to imagine the infinite, the transcendent; and creatures who inhabit a frail body vulnerable to disease and accident, one that inevitably will weaken, die and rot. At our center, we know our ambiguity'.<sup>431</sup> The first instance in the novel in which the company encounter death and witness firsthand the physical finitude and vulnerability common to all creatures is when they see the mangled corpse of a hedgehog in the road. Adams describes it as 'a flattened, bloody mass of brown prickles and white fur, with small, black feet and snout crushed round the edge. The flies crawled upon it and here and there the sharp points of gravel pressed up through the flesh'. Blackberry, clearly shocked at the sight, asks: 'What harm does a yona do to anything but slugs and beetles?' (47) What does the hedgehog do to deserve to die so horribly? Of course, the hedgehog's death is incidental. The vehicles on the road, as Bigwig asserts and recklessly demonstrates, take no notice of animals.

The notion of mortality as the site of commonality between species is also explored in *The Plague Dogs*. Mr Ephraim, a Jewish tailor, whom we learn is a survivor of Auschwitz, finds a sense of affinity in suffering with the terrier Snitter, who has undergone brain surgery which has intensified his sensory perception. Initially, Mr Ephraim means to shoot the dog, but feels too much pity when he finally beholds the grotesque sight:

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<sup>429</sup> Talking about attitudes towards the subjects of sex and cruelty in his youth, Adams remarks that 'in those days, incredible as it may seem to younger people today, sexual fantasies and imaginings were regarded as morally worse and much more unmentionable than cruelty'. He writes: 'If it had been suggested to people in the nineteen-twenties that writing or talking about cruelty was at all connected with sex, they would have denied it vigorously and the person who suggested would have been 'cut'. If they had actually come to believe it, they would have been overcome with mortification because to them the idea of sex was far more embarrassing than the idea of cruelty.' (1990, p. 104) While sex and cruelty are both addressed in *Watership Down* to a certain extent, they do not seem to be interconnected in the way that Adams suggests would have been an unmentionable notion in the 1920s. In fact, sexual allusions in the novel are treated with much the same detachment and matter-of-factness as instances of death.

<sup>430</sup> Charles A. Meyer, 'The Efracan Hunt for Immortality in Richard Adams' "Watership Down"', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 6.1 (21) (1993), p. 71.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid*, p. 72.

Snitter went hesitatingly closer. And now, he perceived clearly, there was, pouring both towards and from the strange man, irresistible as a swift current, a flux – shaggy, with bloody hide – composed of terror and inflicted pain, of ruin, grief and loss [...] Children’s voices he could hear, weeping and calling for help as they were swept away; women’s, clutching after them and crying in agony; men’s, trying to utter prayers and fragments of liturgies cut short as the flood engulfed them. Mockery, too, there was, and echoes of mean, cruel violence.<sup>432</sup>

Both Snitter and Mr Ephraim are traumatised by previous encounters with death, Snitter by the death of his old master, and Mr Ephraim by his family’s murder at Auschwitz. Snitter recognises in Mr Ephraim this intimate knowledge of death: ‘This voice [Mr Ephraim’s], he now realized, was that of Death; but Death who must himself die – had himself died – and would therefore not be hard on a mere dog. In this place there was, in any case, no distinction between him who brought life to an end and him whose life must be ended.’<sup>433</sup> Indeed, the roles are reversed in a cruel twist of fate as Snitter accidentally shoots Mr Ephraim with his own gun when his paw gets caught in the trigger guard in a panic.

Adams draws deliberate affinities between human and dog in this passage with regards to the trauma of pain. Both have survived experiences in places where cruel experiments have taken place. *Watership Down* also explores this affinity; the destruction of the Sandleford warren recalls the horrors of the Holocaust. Holly tells the other rabbits how the warren is filled with poisonous gas and the rabbits inside driven mad with desperation to escape: “Very soon the runs were crammed with rabbits clawing and clambering over each other [...] And then the runs began to be blocked lower down with dead rabbits and the live rabbits tore them to pieces.” (152-3)

Regarding the subject of sexuality, the novel initially seems to follow in the same vein as *The Wind in the Willows* in its general exclusion of female characters from the narrative. We do not encounter any does until Hazel’s raid on Nuthanger Farm, and they only domestic rabbits. Wild does do not appear in the novel until Bigwig’s appearance in Efrafa. It is acknowledged at several points in the novel that the digging of rabbit warrens is a task reserved for the does, and it soon occurs to Hazel and his company, once they have settled in Watership Down, that they will need does in the warren, not only for digging but more importantly for breeding: ‘It may seem incredible that the rabbits had given no thought to so vital a matter. But men have made the same mistake more than once – left the whole business out of account, or been content to trust to luck and the fortune of war. Rabbits live close to death and when death comes closer than usual, thinking about survival leaves little room for

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<sup>432</sup> Richard Adams, *The Plague Dogs* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 163.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid*, p. 164.

anything else' (185). Sex and breeding, in other words, are peripheral to the heroic, epic narrative of the rabbits' journey. Selma G. Lanes remarks: 'Clearly "the whole business" is a bother to Adams. Does are desperately needed, but only as instruments of reproduction, to save his male rabbits' triumph from becoming a hollow victory.'<sup>434</sup>

However, it is this survival instinct for breeding and populating the warren that drives the narrative in the second half of the novel. Moreover, I would argue that Adams does not regard the subject of sex with the same deliberate distance as Grahame. In fact, he takes several opportunities, as the natural history narrator, to educate us on the nature of sexual relationships amongst rabbits, once again emphasising both the similarities and the differences between rabbits and humans in this regard:

The kind of ideas that have become natural to many male human beings in thinking of females – ideas of protection, fidelity, romantic love and so on – are, of course, unknown to rabbits, although rabbits certainly do form exclusive attachments much more frequently than most people realize. However, they are not romantic and it came naturally to Hazel and Holly to consider the two Nuthanger does simply as breeding stock for the warren. (246)

The fact that Adams also acknowledges that the does are regarded merely as 'breeding stock' by the male bucks suggests that he is not evincing such an unsentimental attitude towards sexual relationships but is simply presenting such relationships as they exist in the rabbits' world, narrating as the observer.

Sexual pairings are not sentimentalized in the novel, although sexual dominance is certainly a central means of control in Efrafa. When Bigwig asks Chervil about mating in the warren, Chervil replies: 'Mating? [...] Well, if you want a doe you can have one – any doe in the Mark, that is. We're not officers for nothing, are we? The does are under orders and none of the bucks can stop you. That just leaves you and me and Avens; and we shall hardly quarrel. There are plenty of does, after all.' (316) The privileges of rank that allow Efracan bucks to mate with the doe of their choosing suggests that rabbits are generally polygamous, although the bucks in Hazel's warren tend to mate with one doe exclusively, which is perhaps less a reflection of actual rabbit behaviour and more a conveyance of monogamous values to the audience. While the Efracans' behaviour might appear more realistic in that bucks occasionally lose their mates to rivals in the wild, the controlled and monitored environment of Efrafa seems less natural and more enforced, which explains why does in Efrafa are increasingly reabsorbing their litters. Dickenson writes that 'bucks fight to establish a breeding hierarchy, the most dominant males having the greatest access to willing does'.

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<sup>434</sup> Selma G. Lanes, 'Male Chauvinist Rabbits', *The New York Times* (30 June 1974).

Additionally, within rabbit mating pairs, ‘during the breeding season both [bucks and does] will mate with other rabbits, and there is evidence that litters can contain offspring from more than one buck’.<sup>435</sup> This suggests that Adams’ representation of mating practices in Efrafa are not far from reality; it is only the sentiment (or lack of) with which he describes the warren’s mating hierarchy, which invites an anthropomorphic reading.

Adams introduces a much darker but more realistic trope into the children’s animal story: the mortality and bodily vulnerability shared by all species of animal. The cultural constructions of myth by which the rabbits acclimatise themselves to this universal truth is certainly one of the most anthropomorphic tropes in the novel, although the physical and biological realities are, on the whole, accurately portrayed in *Watership Down*. The subjects of death, violence and sexuality, while explicitly treated and thus marking a departure from traditional tropes of children’s animal stories, nevertheless bring to this literary tradition an element which counterbalances the projection of purely human concerns and characteristics onto animals in fable and allegory. Fabular and allegorical elements do exist in the novel, elements which are absent from natural history novels like *Tarka the Otter*, although this in itself raises the question of whether an animal narrative as complex and rich in meaning as *Watership Down* can ever fully depart from the fabular tradition if it is to convey the commonalities we share with nonhuman species to its human readers.

### **Post-Lagomorphs**

If posthumanism implies the deconstruction of the human-animal binary in an attempt to decentre and reconfigure the human within, rather than apart from, the animal, might we not extend the discourse of posthumanism to reconfigure preconceived notions about other species? We have already seen that what it is to be a (European) rabbit is much more plural and fluid than a matter of absolute essentials. How do we identify with certainty when Adams attributes ‘rabbit’ characteristics onto rabbits, let alone ‘human’ characteristics? Perhaps we need a term analogous to posthumanism which deconstructs definitions of the attributes of rabbits: a *postlagomorphism*, so to speak. Considering the ambivalence between definitions of natural and unnatural rabbit behaviour, this might be a useful term which to approach the deconstruction of species in Adams’ novel.

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<sup>435</sup> Dickenson, p. 24.

Donna Haraway's concepts of "companion species" and "becoming with" the animal provide a useful channel through which to explore this notion of the *post-lagomorph*. Adams' rabbits might be seen to exemplify Haraway's concept of the "figure", which, she explains, 'are not representations or didactic illustrations, but rather material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another. For me, figures have always been where the biological and literary or artistic come together with all of the force of lived reality. My body is just such a figure, literally'. The *post* indicated in *post-lagomorph* results from the same process of figuration that results in the *post* of the posthuman. 'The partners do not precede the meeting,' writes Haraway, 'species of all kinds, living and not, are consequent on a subject- and object-shaping dance of encounters'.<sup>436</sup> As we have seen, Adams stresses the connectedness between rabbits and humans by exposing the reality of our shared mortality and vulnerability, as well as exploring and blurring the boundaries between concepts such as "wild" and "domestic" which are already problematized due to the "becoming with" implicit in the process of rabbit and human domestication throughout history.

Human intervention plays a critical role towards the end of *Watership Down*. Throughout much of the novel, humans have brought destruction and death to many of the rabbit warrens and are the most feared of elil for the very reason that they do not kill for the sole purpose of survival. However, in the chapter titled 'Deus ex Machina', in which Hazel's struggle in the clutches of the cat is this time focalized through Lucy, Adams reminds the reader of the extent of human compassion while also reminding us of the complex history we share with rabbits. Adams describes Lucy's sensory experiences upon waking from sleep, narrating through thought report: 'A wood-pigeon was calling in the elms. But it was some other sound, she knew, that had woken her – a sharp sound, a part of the dream which had drained away, as she woke, like water out of a wash-basin. Perhaps the dog had barked.' (452) Lucy, perhaps the only significant human character to appear in the novel, is depicted as just as sensorially responsive to her lifeworld as the rabbits have been depicted in the narrative.

In 'Deus ex Machina', Hazel and Lucy's lifeworlds converge at a point of contact. Hazel's cry has a profound effect on Lucy: 'Suddenly there was another sharp sound. It ripped through the still, early morning like something spilt across a clean floor – a squealing – something frightened, something desperate.' (453) It could be argued that Hazel's single cry conveys fear and desperation to Lucy in a language of emotion which is understood

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<sup>436</sup> Haraway, (2008), p. 4.

between all creatures. This is moment of contact which pre-empt the encounter in *The Plague Dogs* between Ephraim and Snitter. Adams uses the scene of Hazel's rescue as a means of reminding us that we are capable of such compassion towards nonhuman animals and that amidst our destructive tendencies as a species there is something much stronger and more benevolent (hence the title of the chapter). Even the author is brought into contact with the rabbit in the narrative; the doctor to whom Lucy brings the injured Hazel is Adams' namesake.

## Conclusion

The concept of the post-lagomorph and its relation to Haraway's notion of figuration and "becoming with" the animal invites interesting contrasts with Marchesini's concept of the theriosphere, which has also been central to this study. While the theriosphere is a space in which the human and its nonhuman other are *preconceived* categories which enter into a mutually implicative relationship of anthropomorphism and theriomorphism (otherwise the categories of *anthropos* and *therios* would not apply), Haraway's notion of "becoming with" negates the idea of preconceived categories altogether, without necessarily eroding differences to the point of homogenization, which Derrida warns against when he writes:

We have to envisage the existence of "living creatures" whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single figure of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity. This does not of course mean ignoring or effacing everything that separates humankind from the other animals, creating a large single set, a single great, fundamentally homogenous and continuous family tree going from the *animot* to the *homo* [...] [I]t is rather a matter of taking into account a multiplicity of heterogeneous structures and limits.<sup>437</sup>

With these variations on anti-anthropocentric posthumanism in mind, we should consider the place of *Watership Down* and its legacy on animal narratives compared with the Edwardian narratives of Grahame and Potter.

At the beginning of this study I posited a deconstructive model by which I would explore the human-animal relationship and its anthropomorphic component as it was played out in each text. This model suggested a shift from conceptions of the human-animal binary as alternatively an either/or or a both/and structure (which fluctuated differently in Grahame and Potter's works) to a conception of the binary as a neither/both structure, essentially *not* a binary at all. Whether we examine Adams' use of primitivist tropes, his fictitious

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<sup>437</sup> Derrida, pp. 415-16.

construction of language, or his oscillation between omniscient and individual narrative perspectives, we rarely find in *Watership Down* that any aspect of the narrative situated along the ambiguous gradient of anthropomorphic tropes conforms to the either/or or both/and structures of relation. Humans are *so* rabbit, rabbits are *so* human. Humans are not rabbits, or rabbits humans, *per se*. Nor, however, are humans entirely humans or rabbits entirely rabbits.

Focusing his narrative on a single species rather a multitude of species also allows Adams to depict rabbits in ways which are analogous to humans in order to expose anthropocentric thinking. By virtue of our interconnectedness, do rabbits therefore perceive their place in the world as centrally as humans? More importantly, do they perceive the world as an extension of themselves; do rabbits *lagomorphise*? Adams' complex interweaving and blurring of preconceptions of human and rabbit behaviour speculates that this may be the case. Following Kafka's philosophical dog in *Forschungen eines Hundes*, Adams reimagines the world according to the experience of another species, a world which is revealed to be not so different from ours, but without recourse to a reductive symbolism which casts the animal as a mere metaphor.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, examining works of fiction which are traditionally, and reductively, categorized as children's animal stories, through a posthumanist lens, prompts us to consider in a new light the tropes that writers use to depict animal characters which are considered, however explicitly, to be anthropomorphic. The last fifty years have marked a pronounced shift in representations of the "humanimal" in literature from depicting animal characters as repositories of intersecting human and animal tropes to depictions of animals on their own terms, while not entirely divorcing such representations from human concerns. An element of resonance with human concerns is necessary in these narratives in order to enable a more complex understanding of what it means to be an animal, including what it means to be a human animal. Indeed, anthropomorphism is not only necessary, but unavoidable.

The argument for *Watership Down* as the prototype of the modern epic animal fantasy, as put forth by MacRae, is a convincing one, and situates Adams' novel in a unique place within the tradition of animal narratives in the fantasy genre. However, I would also argue that Grahame and Potter's works demonstrate an originality of their own. Grahame's novel is an experiment in style, evidenced most clearly in the diversity of critical responses to the text. Grahame's animals have been variously read as resembling different conceptions of childhood, archetypes of class in Edwardian England, and even a projection of aspects of Grahame's own psyche. Multiple symbolic uses of the animal in representing the human converge in *The Wind in the Willows*, but these in turn occasionally blend into more naturalistic depictions of the animals on their own terms. Grahame's novel perpetuates elements of several animal narrative traditions, and perceiving his characters as "humanimals" consolidates these divergent styles of writing into a reading of *The Wind in the Willows* as a work of literature determined by its indeterminacies, as we have seen by employing Wolfgang Iser's notions of concretization and the implied reader. Grahame's work emerges, first and foremost, as an experiment in the plurality of anthropomorphism.

Beatrix Potter's work demonstrates originality in a different sense from Grahame's. Instead of an experiment in style, Potter's tales blend traditional and overtly anthropomorphic tropes with naturalism and attention to the real habits of animals. This is evidenced in her meticulous watercolor illustrations. Simultaneously, her characters are depicted in a state of continual flux between anthropomorphic and theriomorphic tropes. While critics have offered such a diverse array of interpretations in exploring the significance of Grahame's animals,

they have tended to concur on the point that Potter's animals are anthropomorphic and yet naturalistic at the same time. Her tales are therefore best understood as representing animal characters through a double perceptive. While the anthropomorphic tropes in Grahame's novel explicitly fluctuate throughout the narrative, Potter's dual anthropomorphism is constant, and prompts the reader to draw out the humanized or animalized aspects of her characters.

Richard Adams reinvigorates the complexity of the "humanimal" in fantasy literature, blending not only different styles of writing like Grahame, but also different genres of animal narrative, including allegory, epic, and natural history. *Watership Down* is perhaps one of the most experimental animal narratives of twentieth-century literature; it incorporates the natural history of Lockley's *Private Life of the Rabbit* and draws on the traditions of the epic quest narrative as well as his predecessors in the tradition of fantasy animal narrative (Joel Chandler Harris, Beatrix Potter, Walter de la Mare). Adams also uses his different depictions of warren societies as allegories to point out human social structures while complicating the human-animal binary by using primitivist tropes to point out the "natural" and "unnatural" aspects of our shared history with the European rabbit, such as our transportation and domestication of the species.

Since *Watership Down* there have been a vast number of animal narratives which take many of their stylistic cues from Adams' novel. I have already briefly mentioned Colin Dann's *The Animals of Farthing Wood* (1979) in the last chapter. While Dann's novel features a diverse cast of animals, as opposed to just rabbits, other works of fiction follow in the tradition of depicting societies within a single species. I use 'species' in a vague sense here, as some of these narratives actually explore differences within a genus, family or class (in the zoological sense) of an animal. *Farthing Wood* explores the differences between hares and rabbits, for example, depicting hares as faster and braver than their rabbit cousins, while some of the texts already discussed, such as Jan Needle's *Wild Wood*, play on the differences between species within the mustelid family of mammals, namely weasels, stoats and ferrets. Brian Jacques' Redwall series casts most mustelids as natural antagonists, with the exception, as in Grahame's novel, of badgers and otters. The differences between mice and rats are often explored in narratives. In Robert C. O'Brien's *Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (1971), genetically-enhanced rats and a family of mice work together to foil humans, while in Jacques' Redwall novels they are explicitly delineated on opposing sides. The villain of Jacques' first novel, *Redwall* (1986), is a rat named Cluny the Scourge; the main hero is a young mouse named Matthias.

Species differences, even between closely-related species, are often symbolically invoked in order to point out human social structures, although the degree to which they are used as symbols fluctuates. Some narratives feature nonhuman animals working together to combat threats from humans, some feature animals from one species divided into different social structures representing conflicting values and ideologies, and some depict different species in conflict with one another and representing human social hierarchies. The question of species is also complicated by domestication and the domestic/wild binary. Many of the animals which feature in these narratives are species which have been domesticated by humans to some extent, even the supposedly “wild” rabbits of Adams’ novel. While Grahame’s animals – moles, badgers, water-rats (voles), toads, otters, weasels – are not species traditionally kept as pets, many of Potter’s animals – cats, dogs, rabbits, mice, even squirrels – are widely recognized as such.

These ambiguous and intersecting categories – the categories of species, the domestic/wild binary – are further complicated and appropriated by categories applied to the human – the adult/child, the civilized/primitive. It is often the case that animal narratives deliberately establish a conflict of values between the primitive/wild/child/animal and the civilized/domestic/adult/human, but these formulations depend on the author’s concept of childhood, the animal, the primitive, and so on. These also depend on the subjective interpretation of the reader. Child readers may identify with the animal characters while adult readers, recognizing this identity link between the child and the animal, identify with a sense of nostalgia, or compassion, that the narrative in question supposedly seeks to convey, even though such a reading is often very reductive.

Franz Kafka’s work, as we have already seen, has often provided critics with a blueprint for exploring the various modes by which the human/animal, the “humanimal”, is represented in fiction. Gregor Samsa, Red Peter, and others are amongst the most recognizable “humanimal” characters in twentieth-century literature. However, by examining the anthropomorphic, and indeed theriomorphic tropes, inherent in many of Kafka’s short stories, and by identifying manifestations of such tropes in other genres (children’s literature, natural history, epic, etc.), we discover that the figure of the “humanimal” lurks within a much more diverse corpus of texts than we first imagined. Grahame, Potter and Adams’ characters are never simply or consistently human or animal, nor do they resemble human and animal traits simultaneously. By reading the animal characters in these narratives as “humanimals”, we begin to understand that in literature, anthropomorphism never simply entails the projection of human characteristics onto nonhuman animals, but entails processes

of mirroring and blurring in which supposedly human and animal characteristics are reflected, or refracted, back onto each other by reassessing the very assumptions that anthropomorphism and conceptions of the human and the animal rest upon.

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