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SPECIAL ISSUE

Critical Animal Studies / Estudios Críticos Animales

Negative Capability, […] when man is capable of
being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without
any irritable reaching after fact & reason.
John Keats, Letter to George and Thomas Keats

I want to know what it is like to be a wild thing.
Charles Foster, *Being a Beast*

INTRODUCTION

Margarita Carretero-González
University of Granada (Spain)

In 2013, Charles Foster chose a most peculiar way to know life as a wild creature when he decided to immerse himself in the habitats of other animals, not as an observer, but as experiencer. *Being a Beast*, the book which resulted from this experiment, chronicles Foster's life (or, rather, lives) as a badger, an otter, a fox, a red deer and a swift. This eccentric piece of nature writing, in which Foster details the lengths he went to in order to *be* each of these animals, can at least claim the merit of succeeding where "the excursion format" (Tallmadge 1998) –according to Randy Malamud– fails. Indeed, the human Foster and the nonhuman animals he temporarily lives with/as are rendered "coterminous; cohabitants; simultaneous, and thus ecologically and experientially equal" (Malamud 2003, 33). That is, up to a point.

Foster approaches the task of translating into human discourse these five forms of nonhuman experience with the self-awareness and humility required to render *Being a Beast* an interesting example of interspecies transcreation (Carretero-González 2021). From his particular situatedness as a human animal, he admits to having committed the two sins "that beset traditional nature writing: anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism" (Foster 2016, xiv), and acknowledges that, despite his original intentions, *Being a Beast* has too much of him in it (xvii). However, as the book title suggests, humility fades at the level of linguistic delivery. Foster claims to "describe the landscape as perceived by a badger, a fox, an otter, a red deer and a common swift. […] When I'm being a badger, I live in a hole and eat earthworms. When I'm being an otter, I try to catch fish with my teeth" (xiv). Although his whimsical rhetoric prevents readers from taking such assertions at face value, they nonetheless hint at a vindication of embodiment (imitation, rather) as a most reliable key to knowledge, as if catching fish with one's teeth or scavenging for food will provide a more accurate tool for understanding –*knowing*– life as an

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otter or a fox. With different sensory receptors how can one *know* what it is like to be a deer? In order to walk into someone else's shoes, isn't having feet a prerequisite?

Humanity's cultural history overflows with all sorts of art forms that reveal *homo sapiens'* fascination with other animals, and the ways members of our species have conceived of, experienced, and represented their relationship with the nonhuman. For the most part, nonhuman animals have occupied the position of a complement –direct, indirect, or prepositional– in human syntax. The human animal loves, admires, kills, eats, liberates, exploits, mourns, looks at, cares for, lives with other animals. When any other animal occupies the subject position in a narrative, the human one ceases to be on safe ground, and no amount of earthworm-eating will make it any wiser. To think oneself into the being of any Other (Coetzee 1999, 35) requires the sympathetic imagination to perform acrobatics that become more complex as the phylogenetic distance between species widens: thinking one's way into the existence of any other human being would require more or less basic forward rolls; doing the same with an octopus or a bat would ask for the equivalent of a Produnova vault. Daunting, but not impossible. After all, Elizabeth Costello claims, "there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination. [...] If I can think my way into the existence of a being who has never existed, then I can think my way into the existence of a bat or a chimpanzee or an oyster, any being with whom I share the substrate of life" (Coetzee 1999, 35).

The Animal Turn in literary and cultural studies has brought about a paradigm shift in the way human animals have started thinking about other-than-human animals and the many forms humanimal relationships take. Critical Animal Studies scholars meet animals as subjects, "not as shadows to human stories, or as beings we want to understand biologically or for purely our benefit, but as beings who have histories, stories, and geographies of their own" (*The Animal Turn*). The articles in this special issue look into some of the ways in which the human animal has looked at, perceived, (mis)understood, and represented nonhuman animals in written and filmic texts. Their analyses challenge traditional anthropocentric perspectives and reveal the extraordinary potential of literature and other artistic discourses to affect humans' treatment of animals. In the pages that follow, readers will encounter and be invited to think with cats, performing dogs and horses, captive orcas, rodents, insects, and imaginary dragons; question the ethics of animal suffering at the hands of humans in laboratories and slaughterhouses; and confront the moral implications of human actions towards nonhuman beings.

The first article in the collection, Katarzyna Łogożna Wypych's "The Supercats. Portrayals of Cats in Texts of Celtic Origin," is a case in point of classic anthropomorphic narratives where animals have been used as mere tools for moral instruction or entertainment. In her exploration of her chosen texts –in which cats are often depicted as treacherous creatures– Wypych not only reveals the way anthropomorphism strips animals of their specificity, but also illustrates the inconsistent and contradictory nature of the human-feline relationship throughout history.

In contrast, the nonhuman animals in Lorna Crozier's poetry appear to tell a very different story, judging by Núria Mina Riera's exploration of the Canadian poet's work. Drawing on literary animal studies theory, ecopoetry, and material ecocriticism, Mina Riera analyzes the collections *The Wild in You* (2015), *The House the Spirit Builds* (2019), and *God of Shadows* (2018), and concludes that Crozier's poetry denounces human abuse of the nonhuman world and advocates for a shift from anthropocentrism to biocentrism. By granting saliency to often overlooked species such as insects, rodents, amphibians, and reptiles, Crozier's poems invite readers to embrace a more inclusive perspective on the natural world.

The contributions by Ignacio Ramos-Gay and Matthias Klestil look at anthropomorphism from a different angle, exploring the value of the language of sentiment in appealing to emotions and evoking empathy. In his essay on Eliza Fenwick's canine autobiography *The Life of Carlo, or the Famous Dog of Drury-Lane Theatre* (1806), Ramos-Gay examines Fenwick's narrative through the lens of melodramatic conventions, while Klestil chooses two animal autobiographies by Mark Twain, the short story "A Dog's Tale" (1903) and the novella *A Horse's Tale* (1906), to reveal Twain's use of sentimental anthropomorphism as Anthropocene critique. These fictional autobiographies offer alternative narratives that challenge species boundaries and advocate for collective ethics of care. By rescaling the imagination through anthropomorphised characters, Twain's narratives invite readers to reconsider the arbitrary constructions of species and race, while Eliza Fenwick used melodramatic theatrical aesthetics to connect the humane values of animal protection to feminism.

Vanesa Roldán Romero's article underscores the power of speculative fiction to defamiliarise humanimal relationships and look at them afresh when placed in a secondary world inhabited by animals that only exist in the human imagination. Her assessment of human-dragon relationships in Rebecca Yarros' *Empyrean* series through the lens provided by ecocriticism and critical posthumanism, reveals a bond that challenges traditional anthropocentric hierarchies and calls on interspecies cooperation, mutual dependence, and agency as a posthumanist response to the environmental crisis of the Anthropocene.

The last two essays in this special issue take readers away from the world of literature and into the realms of direct animal advocacy: Ana Muñoz Bello's vindicates the pioneering efforts of Emarel Freshel and The Millennium Guild in advocating for animal rights in early 20th-century North America, while Claudia Alonso-Recarte's takes Gabriela Cowperthwaite's *Blackfish* (2013) and William Neal's *Long Gone Wild* (2019) to explore representations of orcas on animal advocacy documentaries and connect them to the wider context of the marine park industry. Freshel's comprehensive approach to animal justice, from her fierce opposition to vivisection and the use of fur and feathers in fashion to her enthusiastic promotion of vegetarianism, paved the way for future abolitionists and renders her an interesting figure to explore from an ecofeminist perspective; Cowperthwaite's and Neal's documentaries insist on close-up presentations orca faces and gazes to evoke moral shock and ethical reflection, highlighting the dichotomy between captivity and wilderness.

To close this special issue on Critical Animal Studies, Ida M. Olsen's review of *We Loved It All: A Memory of Life* (2024), American novelist Lydia Millet's debut into the world of non-fiction, invites further reflection on what modern society has done to humanimal relationships and the brutality with which humans have historically treated other species we claim to love.

As a form of academic activism, Critical Animal Studies underscores the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in understanding and advocating for other-than-human animals. I would like to extend my gratitude to Juan Ignacio Oliva for entrusting me with the edition of this special issue, and to the contributors for their rigorous scholarship and compassionate advocacy, which urge for an ethical reconsideration of humanimal relationships.

To them, for them.

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ARTICLES

THE SUPERCATS. PORTRAYALS OF CATS IN TEXTS OF CELTIC ORIGIN

Katarzyna Łogożna Wypych
John Paul II Catholic University Of Lublin, Poland

Abstract

Cats have been featured in various cultural texts, teaching and setting examples to or, on the contrary, opposing humans. Not only would the reality without the presence of a cat in the text be less unpredictable, but specific plot changes could also not occur. Despite being present in the world's literature for centuries, cats are one of the most underappreciated and misunderstood species, often used and abused by writers portraying complex, challenging, and forbidden aspects of people's lives, the Celts being no exception. Felines portrayed in texts of Celtic origin are, in most stories, treacherous creatures prone to deception and mischief and need to be eradicated. Stories covering cats with bad reputations have been retold throughout the centuries, validating their ill-treatment in the non-fictional world. The analysis of the character of Grimalkin provides a fascinating insight into the early symbolic and disturbing world of the most ambiguous and volatile relationships the animal world and humankind have ever known: cats and people.

Keywords: Grimalkin, Iruscan, Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Cat Sith, Cath Palug.

LOS SUPERGATOS: REPRESENTACIONES DE LOS GATOS EN TEXTOS DE ORIGEN CELTA

Resumen

Los gatos han sido representados en diversos textos culturales, enseñando, dando ejemplo o, por el contrario, oponiéndose a los humanos. No solo la realidad sin la presencia de un gato en el texto sería menos impredecible, sino que ciertos giros narrativos tampoco podrían ocurrir. A pesar de estar presentes en la literatura mundial durante siglos, los gatos son una de las especies menos valoradas y más incomprendidas, frecuentemente utilizados y explotados por escritores para representar aspectos complejos, desafiantes y prohibidos de la vida humana, sin que los celtas fueran una excepción. Los felinos retratados en textos de origen céltico son, en la mayoría de las historias, criaturas traicioneras, propensas al engaño y la travesura, que deben ser erradicadas. Las narraciones sobre gatos con mala reputación han sido repetidas a lo largo de los siglos, justificando su maltrato en el mundo no ficticio. El análisis del personaje de Grimalkin ofrece una visión fascinante del temprano y simbólico mundo inquietante de una de las relaciones más ambiguas y volátiles que han existido entre el mundo animal y la humanidad: los gatos y las personas.

Palabras clave: Grimalkin, Iruscan, Irlanda, Gales, Escocia, Cat Sith, Cath Palug.

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Embedded in nature, the Celts respected the sanctity of all living creatures. Wild and domesticated animals were the focus of intricate ceremonies and the heart of belief systems of profound significance. The intimate relationship between human and non-human animals and the mutual dependence stimulated the concept of the beast as sacred and numinous, "[t]o the Celts, animals were special and central to all aspects of their world" (Green 1992, 4). Non-human animals possessed divine status in their own right or had powers to mediate between humans and gods. As Green states, the secular and ritual aspects of the life of the Celts should not be separated, as it was "[...] a world where heroes straddle the realms of the mundane and the supernatural, where animals can speak to people and where divine beings can change at will between human and animal forms" (Green 1992, 4). Non-human animals, felines included, were often seen as sacred to various deities and, as such, had to be connoted with the unfamiliar, the uncanny, and the powerful. In later centuries, the defamiliarisation of the domestic cat created the grounds for the concept of a witch's familiar, the Devil's associate, a shapeshifter, a nocturnal beast dangerous to soul and body. People ascribed so many harmful qualities to cats that it is hardly surprising that, in time, they were charged with causing (deliberate) harm to humans: stealing breath and souls and bringing death about by simply looking at a human. Similarly, the circulating stories fuelled and rooted the perception of felines as untameable, dangerous and supernatural beings that could and should be eradicated. The analysis of the place of domestic cats in texts provides a fascinating insight into the symbolic and disturbing world of the most ambiguous and volatile relationships the animal world and humankind have ever known: cats and people.

1. THE (UN)DOMESTICATED FELINE

One of the mysteries of cat history is connected with the fact that the domesticated cat is supposed to have arrived in Northern Europe as late as the 11th century, yet images of the cat, securely domesticated, are found in 8th or 9th-century Celtic crosses (Gettings 1989, 60), which would suggest that the domesticated cat had arrived in Northern Europe much earlier than is generally believed. The monks who travelled northwards to establish their monastic systems in the British Isles from the late 4th century imported the domestic cat —Gettings notices that a series of related "Christian" cats are present at the base of the Muiredach Celtic cross of Monasterboice in Ireland. One of the felines appears to be licking a kitten, while the other is teasing or eating a captured bird. Both images are representative of the perception of cats having a dual nature: simultaneously being devoted mothers and ruthless hunters. That dichotomy of the cat's nature is perhaps why people often see the species as uncivilised and almost feral. Many texts on cat care, treatment, and socialisation have been widely approved and appreciated in the twenty-first century.

The inability to categorise cats in human culture causes a "semantic discomfort" dealt with using domestication or destruction[1] (Michalski 2011, 109). Michalski warns that the particular instability of the meaning concerning cats may be, on the one hand, considered a wealth of diversity; on the other hand, however, it could be risky for the feline itself (2011, 112). On the one hand, the intricacy of cats' traits, their elusiveness and dexterity have amounted to feline popularity, "[t]heir independence, cunning evil and patient intelligence" (Morris 1967, 22) mesmerised humans for centuries. On the other, as people "project onto [...] animals the physical appetites that they [do] not want to recognise in themselves –dogs are dirty, pigs are greedy, goats are lustful […], donkeys are stubborn and stupid" (Rogers 1998, 4) cats became the treacherous ones. Not surprisingly, the human / cat relationship has been full of inconsistencies and contradictions. Felines represent most uncanny abilities, self-contained aloofness, and superior strength, making them a perfect symbol of unreliability. At the same time, people admire cats for their cleanliness, independence, and devoted motherhood. In *Cult of the Cat*, Patricia Dale-Green proposes a division into "The White Cat" and "The Black Cat" archetypes, referring to the "light and dark aspects of the cat's reputation rather than its natural colouring" (Dale-Green 1962, XVI). The author classifies attitudes towards cats based on the positive or negative powers aligned to the felines, "The White Cat" being associated with goddess Bastet, whereas "The Black Cat" holds occult, demonic, and deadly connotations. The two sides of felines, seen as opposites nowadays, were considered complementary in Ancient Egypt. The Egyptian goddess Bastet ruled the heart and protected the household. Sekhmet, her sister, was a symbol of feline strength and cunning. Hathor, another Egyptian deity in the *Myth of the Eye,* is described as the one who "rages like Sekhmet and is friendly like Bastet." (qtd Malek 2007, 144). Isis, a mistress of magic, the goddess of the night and one of Ra's daughters, a goddess of fertility, motherhood and femininity, was naturally connected to cats (Malek 2007, 144). As a result, cats became associated with both solar (Ra) and lunar (Isis) deities, and the domestic cat served as a vessel carrying connotations that supplemented, rather than contradicted, each other.

Fuelled with ascribed bipolar superpowers, the cat is a perfect example of how symbolism ascribed to one species may diverge into powerful contradictory meanings. The difficulty in domesticating felines, who "carrying the immense symbolic responsibility with which our culture has always charged the feline race" (Derrida 2008, 378), has amounted to various attempts of categorising and entrapping them in the fictional and non-fictional worlds equally. The cat denotes the commonplace as often as she does the mystic realm. Felines can be a farmer's and a monk's friends, just as a philosopher's and a witch's apprentices, without causing unnatural incongruity; the discrepancy is intense and conflicting. In some literary texts, felines appear as an accessory, a necessity of the hearth, an inseparable element of domesticity; in others, they take an active part in the story, transgress

[1] Destruction meaning either eradicating or banishing from the society.

human, authentic, and imaginary boundaries, have their own life and biography, in all cases never entirely losing their association with spirituality and superpower. Hence, the status of a feline as a symbol is ambiguous and complex to define; one cat can be, at the same time, beautiful and demonic, a defender of the hearth and a devil's accomplice.

2. THE CAT'S WORTH

Cats have never had widespread economic or status-affirming significance or provided well-established services to humans; hence, they rarely have had any social value. Unlike other domesticated animals, people usually left them to their own devices. Consequently, as late as the fourth century CE, a term referring to the species *catus* first appeared (Palladius 1807, 162). The typical Greek name for a cat was *ailouros*, meaning "the one that twitches its tail" (Engels 1999, 57). The lack of one specific and established species name has not discouraged scholars from studying cats and making "mostly accurate observations;" however, no ancient records of inquiries devoted solely to cats survived (Engels 1999, 73). The available resources demonstrate that domestic cats must have been a common sight and living amongst humans; moreover, the observations provide proof of an active interest in felids, however mysterious and misunderstood their behaviour must have appeared.

When the illuminated manuscript of the Book of Kells was created, as the numbers of domestic cats were limited, they were owned mainly by the elite. Such was their value in Ireland that legal material relating to cats, the *Catslechtae* ('cat-sections'), was created, outlining the fines attached to stealing, injuring or killing a person's cat. Unlike other sources, the laws refer to cats' names, including Méone ('little meow') and Cruibne ('little paws'). Apart from focusing on the compensation owed for the killing of a cat, the mediaeval legal material seems to be primarily concerned with sorting cats into different categories, i.e. cats for women, cats for children (playful things), pantry cats or barn cats (Murray 2007, 143-159). The price stated in the document for a successful purring mouse catcher is three cows. If it only purrs, however, it is worth half the price (Murray 2007, 146). The value ascribed to cats in Ireland does not seem exceptional, as "the status of the cat had never been higher than in early mediaeval Western Europe" (Engels 1999, 17). However, due to cats' lesser value than the horse and the hound, there is much less documentary evidence for the mediaeval feline. It seems that cats played a pragmatic role in human households. This role, however, was not unnoticed or underappreciated, which is probably why King Hywel Dda of Wales also clarified the value of a cat in his legal codes: "[a]t birth she is worth a penny, two pence after she has opened her eyes, and a goat if she has caught a mouse" (qtd Vocelle 2016, 82). If a cat was killed, Hywel ordered the owner to be compensated with enough grain to cover the dead animal from the tip of the tail to the head. The Laws of Hywel Dda state, among the other attributes of a good cat, that it should not be "caterwauling every new moon" (qtd Vocelle 2016, 82).

On the other hand, mousers were probably not fed much to keep them hungry for their work: cat bones from archaeological sites indicate that the typical mediaeval Scottish animal was smaller than the modern domestic feline, with altogether slimmer mid-shaft dimensions. This size difference may be due to the better nutrition of cats today (Smith 1998, 859-885). Similarly, Finbar McCormick found that mediaeval urban cats in Ireland were smaller than those from Early Christian period rural sites, perhaps indicating that town cats were left to fend for themselves regarding food and shelter (McCormick 1988, 24). Mediaeval cats' existence in the proximity of human settlements was hazardous, as indicated by cat bones showing evidence of fracture or other lesions caused by trauma; it was not uncommon for cats to be treated with the highest levels of cruelty (Smith 1998). The fact that cats breed freely and, when left to their own devices and not socialised with humans at an early age, tend to shy from people only added to the perception of the species as being fierce and untameable; their nocturnal habits, hunting and sexual behaviours facilitate attributing felines with superpowers. Only a real superhero can deal with such a powerful creature.

3. THE MIGHTY CAT

We have never fully domesticated cats; as John Bradshaw states, they remain semi-domestic, partly wild, and partly domesticated (Bradshaw 2013, 5). Thus, it is not surprising that, more often than not, it is the cat rather than any other animal that is considered a beastly and unpredictable but powerful creature. In the past, it was not uncommon for people to believe that parts of the felines' bodies carry magical powers. The Celts considered cats' tails very precious and potent, for they thought that if one were disrespectful enough to tread on a cat's tail, a serpent would come out and sting the perpetrator (Dale-Green 1962, 31). Cats' body parts were used to cure human ailments, with the eyes, tails, and head being the most powerful. To see into the future, the Druidic priests in Ireland performed a ritual known as *Imbas Forosnai*, consisting of chewing the raw flesh of a cat (Davies 1998, 110).

Simultaneously, the Celts believed cats to be mystic, 'druidic' beings, and Celtic heroes often had callous cats to contend with (Dale-Green 1962). It is not easy to fight a feline (a divine or a demon), even for a superhero. When Cúchulainn, the Hound of Ulster, a fierce semi-divine character, and two other heroes of Irish heroic legend and sagas of the Ulster Cycle were attacked in a cave by three magic cats, it was not without difficulty that they killed the felines. When one of the cats stretched its neck for food, Cúchulainn, encouraged by his comrades, attempted to slaughter the feline. The hero gave its head a blow with its sword, but "the sword skidded off the cat's neck and struck the stone floor, ringing a high, clear note like a golden bell" (Eickhoff 2001, 321). However, the human heroes had to win against the magical creatures to retain their status. As the stories at the time circulated fairly quickly, Cúchulainn features similar stories in Scottish and Manx (Isle of Man) folklore, which share identical roots (Eason 2008).

The Irish legend *Voyage of Maelduin* tells the story of a cat possessing many treasures, with a moral showing what happens if treasures are stolen instead of received as a gift. A young man called Maeldune, the adopted son of an Irish queen, set out in a boat one day with his three foster brothers to avenge the death of his father. They arrive on an island with a stronghold with white walls surrounded by white houses, all of which were open and deserted. In the best home, the young man finds a small cat. The house was filled with treasure; in the middle of the house, they found an ox roasting on fire. The young man asked the cat whether it was all for them, and the cat "looked at him for a minute." Reassured, the man ate, drank and slept. Unfortunately, the next day, one of the brothers could not resist and took one of the necklaces. At the stronghold, the cat leapt through the thief "like a fiery arrow, leaped through the thief like a fiery arrow, and burned him to ashes" (Jacobs 1919, 104).

It is not uncommon for cats to be associated with snakes (serpents); the glowing eyes with vertical slits, the hiss and the apparent aloofness all amount to the fear they are still able to instil in humans. A legend concerning St Brendan tells a story of the time when the Celtic saint arrived at the Island of Promise and met an old man who warned him: "[o] holy man of God, make haste to flee from this island. For there is a sea cat here, of old time, inveterate in wiles, that hath grown huge through eating excessively of fish" (qtd Bryant 1997, 250). The sea cat is "as big as a young ox or a 3-year-old horse, which has thrived on the fish of the sea and of this island [...] each of its two eyes was as big as a cauldron, [with] tusks like a boar, sharp-pointed bristles, the maw of a leopard, the strength of a lion, and the rage of a mad dog" (Bryant 1997, 250). Unlike in the previous legend, here, a Christian motif is added: the saint conquers the sea feline with the help of God. In many folk tales, demons are described as ferocious, mighty black cats with blazing eyes. Cats' eyes are more intense than humans' because they enable non-human animals to see into the higher and lower realms. In classical Greek mythology, for example, the lynx is said to have the ability to see through stone walls (Gettings 1989, 23). According to some mythologists, the eye of the cat is supposed to be one of the eyes of the Egyptian god Horus, looking down from the skies. The magical books of the late Middle Ages claim that cats not only can see in the dark, but they also can see ghosts and demons invisible to man (Gettings 1989, 26). Not surprisingly, Celts believed cats were on intimate terms with all inhabitants of the invisible world and that cats' eyes were the windows of the fairy king's palace. Through them, human beings could see in, and fairies could see out, and they illuminated the fairies' abode with a strange light (Dale-Green 1962, 132).

Felines prove to be powerful supernatural creatures in a variety of texts. In early Welsh poems known as the "Welsh Triad," *Cath Palug*, 'the clawing cat' (also interpreted as a personal name "Palug's Cat"), the feline is to be offspring of the sow Henwen[2] and born "at Llanfair in Arfon under the Black Rock... and the Powerful

[2] According to the late Welsh Triad, Cath Palug was born to the enchanted pig Hen Wen, sometimes the offspring of Ceridwen, a white witch/goddess, mother of the 6th century famous Welsh bard Taliesin.

Swineherd threw it from the Rock into the sea" (Bromwich 1964, 52). Having been chased to the sea's edge, Henwen dropped a kitten, who swam to the isle of Anglesey and was adopted by the sons of Palug. The cat grew to an enormous size and devoured at least 180 warriors. In France, the author of the *Vulgate Merlin* recalls the tale of Chapalu, the cat, when King Arthur's battle with a hellish feline on the Hill of the Cat, near Lake Bourget in the French Alps, is discussed. The struggle remains commemorated in the local names of places: Col du Chat (cat's neck), Dent du Chat (cat's tooth) and Mont du Chat (cat's mountain), to name but a few. In one variety of the French Chapalu tale, King Arthur fought the cat in a swamp and was said to have been slain by the creature, who then conquered England and became king. What counted in earlier thought was the multitude of transitory implications, only dimly noticeable and therefore interchangeable. Thus, similar stories live in various versions and regions. A legend of "King Arthur's Fight with the Great Cat" from the fifteenth-century prose romance *Merlin, or The Early Life of King Arthur,* focuses on a creature that "repaireth a devil that destroyeth the country. It is a cat so great and ugly that it is horrible to look on" (Wilde 1919, 167). The "black as coal" cat was caught as a kitten by a fisherman and drawn from the lake; later, the nourished cat slays the man and his family, flees to a high mountain, lives in a cave and destroys all living creatures. Upon hearing the story, the King rides to the desolate Lac de Lausanne with Sir Gawain and Merlin, and after a lengthy fight, King Arthur wins.

Similarly, the cat's killing was of utmost importance in other stories. Ireland had darker cats before the monks sought refuge in that land (and wrote the magnificent poem "Pangur Ban"), as can be witnessed in accounts of *The Cat of Finn*. Old tales tell of Iruscan, "The King of Cats", who was as big as an ox and lived in a cave at Knowth in Meath (Jacobs 1894, 293-295). Blessed with acute hearing, the cat overhears the great bard, Senchan Torpeist, who satirises both mice and cats. Infuriated, Iruscan decides to devour the bard. However, St. Ciaran saves the poet by hurling a red-hot bar at the cat, killing it. Irish folklore often tells a slightly altered version of the tale.

Driven by misunderstanding and superstition, a countryman decides to kill an ordinary cat who happens to appear on his way. Before the feline dies, it urges the man to tell his wife he killed the King of Cats. The man does as he is told. Upon hearing the story, the resident house cat lying idly by the fire leaps up and tears out the man's throat. The tale has been retold and changed numerous times, varying from region to region. In a story in the south of Lancashire, a man sitting quietly by his fire is surprised to see a cat coming down the chimney saying, "[t]ell Dildrum, Doldrum's dead!". Upon hearing the story, the man's wife's cat concludes: "Is Doldrum dead? Then I am the King of the Cats!". He leaps from his mistress's arms and disappears up the chimney. In Northumberland, a similar narrative has been recorded, set in the Newcastle area, the cat belonging to Johnny Reed; in Durham, the same thing happened to John Bonner. There is also a Shropshire tale featuring the death of "old Peter," news of which causes a family cat to disappear up the chimney, shrieking "By Jove! Old Peter's dead! And I am King of the cats!" (Burne 1884, 23). The "King of the Cats" story was skilfully interwoven in *Beware the Cat*, the first original prose fiction (Ringler 1995, ix) written in 1553 by William

Baldwin. In the narrative, a man is confronted by a cat who orders him: "Commend me unto Titton Tatton and to Puss the Catton, and tell her that Grimalkin is dead" (Baldwin 1553, 11). The man returns home and shares the cat's words with his wife, upon which his cat "hearkened unto the tale," sadly looks upon the human and says, "And is Grimalkin dead? Then farewell dame" (Baldwin 1553, 11). So many versions of the same story are characteristic of migratory traditions, and it attests to the fact that the tale has survived for more than four hundred years, altered slightly from region to region. However popular the stories must have been, they do not seem to have a clear point or conclusion, apart from the fact that cats have a king and are truly supernatural beings who can understand human language and disappear when in need.

According to the *Old English Dictionary* (*OED*), a grimalkin is an old or evil-looking she-cat; it stems from 'grey' and 'malkin', an obsolete term for a cat, derived from the hypocoristic form of the female name Maud (*OED*), who, as with virtually all cats, became associated with the devil and witchcraft in the Early Modern period. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the witches summon the devil with the words "I, come Graymalkin" (Shakespeare, 1.1.10), which is clear evidence that the cat's place in witchcraft has been long-established. Grimalkin is a mighty cat. Henry Fielding, in *Tom Jones* (1749), recounts a story of Grimalkin, "a feline inferior in strength, [...] equal in fierceness to the noble tiger himself" (Fielding 1749 [1904], 31) with whom the owner falls passionately in love. The man manages to persuade Venus into changing "Grimalkin into a fine woman;" however, the woman retains "her pristine nature," and when one evening she spots a mouse, she immediately leaps up after it (Fielding 1904, 298). The author explains the story: "If we shut Nature out at the door, she will come in at the window; and that puss, though a madam, will be a mouser still" (Fielding 1904, 298). One of Aesop's fables, *Venus and the Cat,* might have inspired the story, further indicating the depth and influence of cats on folklore and later narratives. In *The House of Seven Gables,* Nathaniel Hawthorne mentions that "…a strange grimalkin…was seen by Hepizibah while looking into Clifford's back-yard garden." According to the narrator, a grimalkin is a cat that seems "…to have more than ordinary mischief in his thoughts…" and should be avoided at all costs as " [t]his grimalkin has a very ugly look. Is it a cat watching for a mouse, or the devil for a human soul?" (Hawthorne 1851, 7)

In a Scottish legend, a Grimalkin (or Cat Sith) is a fairy cat from the Highlands (Matthews & Matthews 2005, 91). It is depicted as having the size of a dog and tends to present itself with its back arched and its bristles raised. There are also stories of Elfin Cats, described as large black beasts with arched backs and white spots over their chests (a spitting image of Iruscan). These disturbing cats are also said to have lived in the Scottish Highlands. The Scottish wildcat or Kellas cats may have inspired the Cat Sìth (Cat Sidhe), a unique hybrid of Scottish wildcats and domestic cats found exclusively in Scotland. In the Highlands, it was highly unlucky if a cat passed over a corpse, for it might be a Cat Sith coming to steal the soul before the Gods claimed it. The soul lingered close to the body after death, so it had to be watched day and night until the burial. These watches were called "Late Wake." The Cat Sith was such a powerful creature that people performed

a series of activities to keep him away: games of leaping and wrestling (meant to keep the cat distracted since they loved to watch such events), and putting catnip all over the house (in every room but where the body rested) to lure them away. Riddles were asked but never answered to stop Cait Sidhe from puzzling the replies; music was to make the cat dance. They put out all the fires in the room where the body was lying, as the warmth could attract any cat, and a Cat Sith might slip in among them. On S*amhain* (All Hallow's Eve), "a saucer of milk was set out on the steps for them, for they would pass blessings on those houses for the gifts" (MacGillivray 2012). Such firm belief was in the cat's supernatural powers that people practised the calling of the dead, or *Taghairm*, requiring the practitioners to burn the cats' bodies over four days and nights. The feared cat was to grant wishes to those participating in the ceremony (Moffet 2018). Simultaneously, a belief in the Cat Sith being a witch capable of voluntarily transforming into a cat and back up to nine times was present. If the witch chose to return to their cat form for the ninth time, she would remain a cat for the rest of her life. Consequently, all cats seemed to be witches; it might be how the idea of a cat having nine lives originated (MacGillivray 2012). The association between cats and witches has deep historical roots. Cats, particularly black ones, were often viewed as supernatural entities or "familiars" —animal companions believed to assist witches in performing magic. This link was reinforced by cultural and religious narratives that demonized both women accused of witchcraft and the animals associated with them. Cats' elusive behaviours, nocturnal habits, and perceived independence made them fitting symbols for the mysterious and often feared world of sorcery. The cat's symbolic role as a witch's familiar was further cemented during the witch hunts and trials, where accusations frequently extended to the alleged involvement of animals in magical practices. Folkloric tales portrayed cats as shape-shifters or beings imbued with dark powers, capable of acting as intermediaries between witches and demonic forces. These narratives reflected broader anxieties about social control, gender, and religious orthodoxy.

Although the image of the cat has transformed in more contemporary contexts, with felines often reclaiming their role as a positive symbol of independence, intuition, and mystery, they still are readily used as liminal creatures existing on the borders of worlds in horror and sci-fi narratives. Nonetheless, the historical association between cats and witches continues to influence literature, film, and cultural imagination, serving as a potent metaphor for marginalized identities and esoteric knowledge.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Cats have occupied the minds of the greatest minds from the early days. Worshipped in Ancient Egypt, tormented in later centuries and brought back to conquer the real and virtual worlds, cats' history has been far from joyful. With such an enormous number of texts, with cats being bridges between the worlds, witches' familiars, or human saviours, it seems logical that they must have originated

from earlier oral or written stories. Given the divine element as early as Ancient Egypt (or even before), later misunderstood and transformed into an evil being, felines still enchant humans with the acute abilities a human being cannot enter or possess. It is that duality of cats that enables them to serve as a convenient means of connecting the most forceful powers, with Celtic beliefs being no exception. Cats must have been powerful mystique creatures; otherwise, they would not have been included in various cultural and religious activities. In most available texts, whether of Celtic origin or not, cats are the notorious evil creatures aiming to conquer humans. Usually, "black as coal" has a devilish origin and ferocious character, and they populate many legends, myths, folklore beliefs, and other stories. Notably, their dominance has not ceased. Several earlier beliefs are incorporated into today's world of literature, cinematography and current misconceptions about cats. It is a most enjoyable adventure to be able to trace them back to their origins, or at least to the roots available for us to find nowadays. Considering the early depictions of cats, it's no surprise that the most dangerous, complex, and unpredictable aspects of human life have often been associated with cats in various art forms, including paintings, literature, film, theatre, music, and video games. Thankfully, there appears to be a growing trend towards including non-humans in society rather than excluding them, suggesting hope for a more culturally sensitive approach towards non-human creatures.

The tumultuous history of felines and humans has profoundly impacted literature. The once-feared 'cattiness' has gradually become a more endearing and sought-after cuteness. Cats' behaviours have adapted to fit into human life, while human attitudes toward them have also evolved. This shift is reflected in the emergence of new literary genres focused on cats (such as pet memoirs), changes in how cats are portrayed (from sly, mysterious creatures to human heroes), and the increasing number of publications about them. The needs and rights of cats are now recognised, with felines seen as partners to humans, even though their traditional role as pest controllers is no longer necessary. They have become a global cultural phenomenon, equally influencing humans' real and fictional worlds. The rich symbolism ascribed to felines still influences their treatment in fictional and non-fictional worlds, enabling and fueling 'cat-literature' to flourish and mesmerise readers with an instant hint of the unknown and the unknowable.

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"HOW MUCH THEY CAN TEACH US": LORNA CROZIER'S PORTRAYAL OF NONHUMAN ANIMALS

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Abstract

Drawing on literary animal studies theory, ecopoetry and material ecocriticism, and following Shapiro and Copeland's (2005) analysis criteria, this article examines Lorna Crozier's depiction of non-human animals in her poems. The corpus consists of the poetry and photography collections *The Wild in You* (2015) and *The House the Spirit Builds* (2019), and the prose poetry collection *God of Shadows* (2018). I contend that Crozier criticises the human abuse of the nonhuman world; proposes ways for humans to discard anthropocentrism in favour of biocentrism; and grants saliency to insects, rodents, amphibians, and reptiles as animal species that have usually been despised in the West.

Keywords: Lorna Crozier, Ecopoetry, Critique of Animal Abuse, Superiority of Nonhuman Animals, Biocentrism, Critique of Speciesism.

«CUÁNTO NOS PUEDEN ENSEÑAR»: LA REPRESENTACIÓN DE LOS ANIMALES NO HUMANOS EN LA POESÍA DE LORNA CROZIER

Resumen

Partiendo de la teoría de los estudios literarios sobre animales, la ecopoesía y la ecocrítica material, y según los criterios de análisis de Shapiro y Copeland (2005), este artículo examina la representación de los animales no humanos en la poesía de Lorna Crozier. El corpus abarca los volúmenes de poesía y fotografía *The Wild in You* (2015) y *The House the Spirit Builds* (2019), así como el volumen de prosa poética *God of Shadows* (2018). Sostengo que Crozier critica el maltrato al mundo no humano; propone nuevas formas de dejar atrás el antropocentrismo en favor del biocentrismo; y otorga visibilidad a insectos, roedores, anfibios y réptiles en tanto que especies a menudo menospreciadas en occidente.

Palabras clave: Lorna Crozier, ecopoesía, crítica del maltrato animal, superioridad de los animales no humanos, biocentrismo, crítica al especismo.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Canadian writer Lorna Crozier, who was born in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, in 1948, has written extensively about nonhuman nature and the interaction between human and nonhuman beings in her poetry, with both wild and domestic animals featuring prominently. Indeed, Crozier's admiration of the natural environment and love for it has strongly shaped her writing career, which spans almost fifty years. Often defined as one of Canada's pre-eminent poets[1] and a mentor for young generations of writers (Governor General 2011), both the quality of her work and some of her thematic concerns are comparable to that of fellow Canadian writer Margaret Atwood. Specifically, Crozier's critique of patriarchal systems and her rewriting of mythological stories to re-inscribe female experiences, as well as her ecological awareness are in line with Atwood's work. Nevertheless, a comparative analysis of the work of these two authors is beyond the scope of this article.

The environmental concerns that Crozier voices in her poetry have been influenced by the profound impact that place has exerted on Crozier throughout her life. In this respect, her poetry is imbued with a strong sense of connection to both her birthplace, namely Saskatchewan, and the place that became her home in adulthood, Vancouver Island. As such, on the one hand, the vast fields, open skies, and treeless landscapes of the prairie environment populate her poetry. On the other hand, the West-Coast mild weather, evergreen forests, and the lush home gardens that Crozier grew with her late husband, the fellow poet Patrick Lane, also permeate her poetry. Crozier's cultivation of affective ties to place resonates with Yi-Fu Tuan's concept of topophilia, i.e. "human love of place" (Tuan 1974, 92) or, to put it in other words, "a space-conscious 'awe' combined with and resulting from a place-centred commitment to the world itself" (Bryson 2002, 108). Indeed, Crozier herself has often voiced in interviews that her strong connection to place is closely associated with her deep concern about the natural environment. For instance, in her interview with Elizabeth Philips (2002), when Philips asks her:

> You use a lot of imagery from the natural world, and more specifically, of wild and domestic animals. Is this, in some ways, the mark of a writer of place, who is interested in the animals of that place? (145)

Crozier replies:

[1] Crozier was awarded the prestigious Governor General's Literary Award for the poetry collection *Inventing the Hawk* (1992); was recognized as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 2009; and was named an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2011. Furthermore, she has received five honorary doctorates, among other awards and distinctions, such as British Columbia Lieutenant-Governor General's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2013 and the 2018 George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award.

> I do think I've been put on Earth to defend skunks. And cats and shrews and spotted owls […] I see animals as pure beings, unsullied. We're smudged and they're clear about who they are. […] There are things they know that we don't. […] They make me aware of a world that's invisible to my lesser senses. (145-146)

Crozier's willingness to both protect and honour the more-than-human world often becomes a desperate call for human stewardship in the face of environmental degradation and endangered animal species in the era of the Anthropocene. That is to say that Crozier's poetry fits into the category of ecopoetry, as, to borrow from J. Scott Bryson's words when describing ecopoetry, she highlights "the interdependent nature of the relationship between people and the worlds they inhabit" (2005, 11). Particularly, Crozier's poems are imbued by an attitude of humility towards other-than-human animals. Such an attitude is foretold in the quotation from Crozier's poem "God of Birds" (*God of Shadows* 2018, 16) that conforms the first part of this article's title, namely "How much they can teach us." In this line, "they" refers to birds and, therefore, the line –actually the whole poem– is about the life lessons that humans can extract from birds' behaviour. Crozier's ecopoetry is thus aligned with that of other Canadian ecopoets of a similar generation to hers, notably Robert Bringhurst (Martínez-Serrano 2021), Jan Zwicky (Dickinson 2010), Don Mackay (Mason 2008), Tim Lilburn (Rigby 2020; Kerber 2004), and Dennis Lee (Dickinson 2018).

The ensuing article focuses on animal-centred poems in three of Crozier's latest poetry collections, in which the poet's advocacy for environmental responsibility has become more vocal, namely the poetry and wildlife photography collection *The Wild in You: Voices from the Forest and the Sea* (2015) –with photographs by Ian McAllister; the collection of poetic prose *God of Shadows* (2018); and the collection of poetry and photography *The House the Spirit Builds* (2019), with photographs by Peter Coffman and Diane Laundy. Following Kenneth Shapiro and Marion W. Copeland's analytical framework for human-animal scholarship (2005), I will argue that in Crozier's poems animals are presented true to themselves. That is, in Shapiro and Copeland's own words, "an animal could appear as him or herself –as an individual with some measure of autonomy, agency, voice, character, and as a member of a species with a nature that has certain typical capabilities and limitations" (344). Specifically, Crozier's depictions of animals often involve their interaction with humans; thus, my examination of her poems will also comply with Shapiro and Copeland's request that human-animal scholarship incorporate "an analysis of human-animal relationships" (345). In this line of thought, I will contend that Crozier criticises the human abuse of the nonhuman world; proposes ways for humans to discard anthropocentrism in favour of biocentrism; and grants saliency to insects, rodents, amphibians, and reptiles as animal species that have been usually despised or considered inferior in Western culture.

2. ECOPOETIC UNDERPINNINGS

As Leonor María Martínez Serrano and Cristina M. Gámez-Fernández argue in their introduction to their edited collection of essays, *Modern Ecopoetry: Reading the Palimpsest of the More-Than-Human World* (2021), "poetry represents a powerful inquisitive tool to explore and interrogate the nonhuman world, to understand how *Homo sapiens* relates to other species and the nonhuman world, and to figure out alternative ways to dwell responsibly on Earth" (2). In this line of thought and in order to shed some light on Crozier's poetic portrayal of nonhuman animals and the relationships humans establish with them, J. Scott Bryson's seminal definition of ecopoetry as a "subset of nature poetry [that] takes on distinctly contemporary problems and issues" (2002, 5) will prove helpful. In a similar vein, Adeline Johns-Putra (2016) further states that "[e]copoetry […] can be distinguished from traditional nature poetry by its emphasis on the inter-connectedness of human and nonhuman life in a time of unprecedented anthropogenic environmental damage" (5). Bryson lists the following three characteristics of ecopoetry:

> [First,] an emphasis on maintaining an ecocentric perspective that recognizes the interdependent nature of the world[…] [second] an imperative toward humility in relationships with both human and nonhuman nature[…] [and third] an intense skepticism concerning hyperrationality, a skepticism that usually leads to an indictment of an overtechnologized modern world and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe. (5-6)

As regards the second characteristic, an attitude of humility towards the nonhuman world is essential to wish to protect it (Bryson 2005, 21). Likewise, Josh A. Weinstein (2015) further explains:

> In our time, a time of growing concern about global warming, air and water degradation, and an overall anxiety with regard to environmentally unsustainable development, humility, and particularly an ecological humility, helps provide a framework for approaching the world in a manner that respects not only our own narrow interests but those of the other elements of our ecosystems. (760)

Regarding Bryson's third characteristic of ecopoetry, Anne Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street (2013) clarify in the preface to their edited collection of ecopoems, entitled *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, that the reason why ecopoetry is skeptical of hyperrationality is that it "would separate mind from body –and earth and its creatures from human beings– and that would give pre-eminence to fantasies of control" (xxviii). In this sense, ecopoetry, in line with ecocriticism, discards the Cartesian split.

Bryson (2005) further asserts, borrowing from a Tuanian notion of place, that ecopoetry ultimately aims "to create place [and] […] to value space" (8), as "the more we view the rest of our world as place and home, the more care we will take not to damage it" (15-16). Bryson summarises ecopoetry's objectives in the following manner: "to know the world and to recognize its ultimate unknowability" (8). This

is precisely what Crozier does in her poetry, as she openly acknowledges that she will never be able to fully translate into words what she observes in the non-human natural world or her understanding of it, because it "means more than you / can ever say" ("The Beauty of Opposites," *The Wild in You*, 18, ll. 9-10).

3. CROZIER'S PORTRAYAL OF NONHUMAN ANIMALS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH HUMANS

3.1. Crozier's Criticism of Human Abuse of Nonhuman Nature

In order to illustrate Crozier's critique of animal mistreatment and water pollution, respectively, the poems "A Murder of Crows" and "The Return," both from the collection *The Wild in You* will prove useful. In "A Murder of Crows," Crozier does not elaborate on crows, as the title suggests, but describes bears' hibernation in such a way that the readers might find bears charming:

> Sure, at the end of fall,
> bears dig shallow bowls to plop
> their fat bellies in
> when they lie down to nap
> and they love to nap. (ll. 5-9)

Without faltering to a true portrayal of bears, Crozier uses humour to encourage a view of bears which might slightly remind us of teddy bears, but is not reductive in any sense. Together with this literary technique, Crozier also wonders about the group noun for bears, and plays with imaginative possibilities:

> How about a burliness of bears,
> a bulk of bears?
> A balladry, a bedazzle,
> a bamboozlement of bears,
> a brouhaha! How about
> a magnificence, a blessing of bears. (ll. 11-16)

Beyond mere wordplay, the alliterative pattern of the voiced bilabial plosive sound, /b/, present in each collective noun reveals a twofold purpose. Firstly, Crozier selected words that begin with the letter *b*, like the word *bear* itself, in order to create an aural amplification of the animal's name. By so doing, Crozier both grants space to this nonhuman being in her poem and acknowledges the bear as subject, as opposed to the hunter's vision of the bear as object, as trophy. Secondly, the word choice emphasises characteristics related to bears; namely, the fact that they are amazing and imposing creatures, as suggested by the nouns "bedazzle" and "bamboozle," and the fact that they have been mistreated throughout history, as implied by the

nouns "balladry" and "brouhaha." On the one hand, "balladry" critiques the dancing shows that bears were trained to perform through pain-inflicting techniques in zoos and street entertainment from the Middle Ages into the late twentieth century ("Bear Conservation" par. 2), a practice which, unfortunately, is still present in some countries ("Bear Conservation" par. 6). In turn, "brouhaha" refers to the public outcry that such a mistreatment of bears should spur. The following quotation clearly illustrates this point, as Crozier's criticism of bear hunting becomes vocal:

> If we say a *blessing of bears*
> over and over again
> will we come to believe it?
> Will we swear to do no harm?
> Will we call the trophy hunters
> what they really are? Try as we might,
>
> we find nothing made of letters
> to spell the evil that they do.
>
> Bears haunt our sleep, bang without heads
> into the walls of our nightmares, batting
> the air with the stumps of their legs,
> their paws gone. (ll. 17-28)

The possible group nouns for bears that Crozier suggests connect with the title of the poem, "A Murder of Crows." That is, Crozier creates a pun involving the collective noun for a group of crows and the fact that a new collective noun for a group of bears should be coined in order to avoid their being murdered at the hands of humans. However, the ending to the poem no longer contains any traces of humorous word play, as it depicts the atrocities carried out by humans on bears. The poem ultimately advocates for the need to see them as wild animals, as beings to be grateful for and who deserve living in peace, undisturbed by humans. The image that accompanies the poem, taken by renowned American wildlife photographer Ian McAllister, contributes to regarding the bear in the poem in its vulnerability. That is to say, whereas throughout the poetry and photography collection there are other images of bears that both show their might and present them as awe-inspiring ("Genesis: Rainforest" (11), "Spirit Bear, Ghost, Moon" (41-42), and "Being Seen" (54)), in "A Murder of Crows" the picture presents a grizzly bear laying down on the moss, with what from a human perspective would be a sad regard, and with its paws in the forefront of the image. Thus, Crozier's last line in the poem, "their paws gone," which structures the poem into both a lament and critique of bear trophy hunting and a celebration of bears, seems to have been inspired by the bear's attitude and bodily position in McAllister's photograph.

Crozier's poems relate to McAllister's and Coffman and Laundy's photographs in an ekphrastic way. The concept of *ekphrasis* in relation to poetry is concerned with "giving voice to a mute art object," providing "a rhetorical description of a work of art," or, in a more general sense, a 'set description intended to bring

person, place, picture, etc. before the mind's eye" (Mitchell 1995, 153). While it is true that there has been a "problematic history of ekphrasis" (Spicer and McDermott 2017, 62) due to conceptions based on the pre-eminence of poetry versus painting in gendered readings of each art form, such as in Heffernan's theorisations of ekphrasis (2004) (Spicer and McDermott 2017, 62), this is not the case of Crozier's work. Instead, the relationship established between Crozier's poems and the photographs that accompany them aims to foreground an ecological ethics.

In a similar vein to "A Murder of Crows," "The Return" also voices Crozier's critique of human abuse of nonhuman nature and the nonhuman animals that live in marine environments. Specifically, "The Return" is concerned with ocean pollution, while celebrating the end of whale hunting and the return of the whales to the coasts of British Columbia, Canada. Within this area, the Great Bear Rainforest is the particular ecosystem that is the focus of attention not only in this poem but throughout *The Wild in You*. Crozier describes whales' agency in her description of their decision to return to the BC coasts, and imagines their voice in spreading the word about the cessation of whale hunting:

> How did they know the slaughter had stopped?
> The news travelled far across the ocean floor–*the whalers*
> *are gone*–and the humpbacks began their journey home.
>
> After twenty years away, only the oldest knew the smells,
> the depths, the places of birth and feasting. Deeper
> and wider than where they'd lived in exile, the silence
> they remembered remains. It's quiet enough
> for the teaching, for the calves and mothers to thrive. (ll. 1-8)

After this story about the success of conservation strategies, Crozier reminds her readers that while whales are not hunted anymore, they cannot live in peace either, as their lives –along those of many other marine creatures– are disturbed by noise pollution produced by cargo ships:

> This is a good story, the return of the humpbacks,
> a story we like to tell, but the silence is dying,
> the seas poisoned with noise. Tankers fracture
> the whales' calls, hammer the herrings with clamor,
> rip the fabric of dolphin dreams. (ll. 9-13)

As a result, Crozier imagines whale speech and thought, as she voices whale criticism of human disrespectful interaction with the nonhuman world:

> In all whale dialects, when they speak of us,
> they don't call us "humans," they don't call us
> "woman" or "man." We are the-beings-
> who-wound-the-waters, who-shatter-
> the-ocean's-eardrums, who-blacken-its-lungs. (ll. 14-18)

That is to say that Crozier campaigns for the stewardship of wild species by not only condemning human cruelty towards them but also by using human language to convey what animals might think of humanity. To use Margarita Carretero-González's terminology, Crozier's translation of nonhuman animals' experiences into poetry is an instance of "interspecies transcreation," which encourages "empathy and ecosocial change" (850). As such, Crozier changes the focus from an anthropocentric to a biocentric one. The image that accompanies the poem shows a humpback whale near the coast, with the rainforest blurred in the background of the photograph. The picture features the beauty of the whale's tail and lower body while submerging into the water, which is magnified by the bright sunshine that makes its skin glow. Moreover, the photograph is also spectacular in its capturing of the curtain of water that the thrust of the whale's tale fashions. In this case, the details in the photograph do not seem to have inspired Crozier's poem; in its stead, the picture underscores Crozier's denunciation of continued human disturbance of marine habitats by presenting the whale as a magnificent creature that we should both admire and respect. In Crozier's own words in her introduction to *The Wild in You*:

> It wasn't only the days I spent in the rainforest and Ian's photographs, brilliant as they are, that turned me to poetry. It was also learning about the vulnerability of this place and its inhabitants. I share Ian's passion for the natural world, and though it may sound crazy, I believe that if we honor living things other than ourselves – orcas, ravens, wolves, cedars– our attention will remind us that they are holy. To see them clearly is the deepest kind of praise, the deepest kind of love. To wound them and their habitats is to wound ourselves. (6)

Crozier's description of nonhuman nature and animals as holy in this quotation bespeaks her advocacy for the superiority of the nonhuman world and thus, for a de-centring of humanity. Therefore, her ecocentric stance aligns with indigenous' worldviews, as the interdependent nature of the world lies at the core of their belief systems. That is, Crozier's poems not only aim at promoting conservation strategies and exploring more sustainable interspecies relationships, but in this particular collection, they also aim at paying respect to the First Nations that inhabit The Great Bear Rainforest, as well as their ontologies, and epistemologies.

Further criticism of water pollution can be observed in the prose poem "God of Water" (*God of Shadows*, 36), in which Crozier compiles a number of water-related myths, such as the fountain of youth and the River Styx. Through an invented, female god of Water that Crozier imagines being present during the Flood in Genesis, Crozier voices the following criticism: "all around her / the rivers running. That was the best of times, the undamned / rivers running" (ll. 13-15). With this statement, Crozier alludes to the ongoing environmental harm inflicted on the nonhuman natural environment that gained momentum during the Industrial Revolution and that capitalism is intent on maintaining. That is, the planetary scale of environmental change that the terms *Anthropocene* and Haraway's *Capitalocene* (2015) capture, each with its specific nuances. More specifically, Crozier focuses on

the vulnerability of rivers to human-centred action. On the one hand, she criticises the contamination of river water by claiming that at the beginning of times, rivers were "undamned;" that is, not condemned, but healthy, thus clearly implying that now they are not. As a result, this initial time period was "the best of times" because drinking water was safe for all living beings. Indeed, as Nadia Morin-Crini, Eric Lichtfouse, Guorui Liu, Vysetti Balaram, Ana Rita Lado Ribeiro, et al.'s review of the available literature on water pollution concludes, "the multiform pollution resulting from our lifestyles and growing consumption patterns are major threats to this vital element that is water, with consequences also for the environment and human health" (2002, n.p.). On the other hand, the adjective "undamned" also creates a pun with *undammed*, namely a river that has not been altered by human action with the construction of dams. According to Jeff Duda, Ryan Bellmore, and George Pess (2019), the ecological effects of placing human-made dams on rivers are the following ones:

> Dams alter riparian and downstream habitats, replace sections of river with impounded lakes, and disrupt the flows of sediment, organic materials, and the migration of aquatic organisms like fish. Altering natural flow regimes also disrupts complex interactions among geomorphic, fluvial, and biological processes that are critical to ecosystem function. (par. 2)

While the human creation of dams in a river may not "damn" its waters forever, given that river restoration is possible when dams are removed, its native species are likely to perish (Duda, Bellmont and Pess 2019, par. 7). Hence, Crozier's prose poem becomes a call for humans to stop exerting violence on fresh water, as all living beings need it to survive and thrive.

3.2. Crozier's Proposal of Ways for Humans to Discard Anthropocentrism in Favour of Biocentrism

The power of the nonhuman world to challenge human perception and progressively transform human beings' behaviour from human-centred to nature-centred can be observed in the poem "Things Are Not What They Seem" (2019), from the collection *The House the Spirit Builds*. In this collection, the poems by Crozier are set in conversation with the photographs taken by Peter Coffman and Diane Laundy at Wintergreen, an educational retreat centre at the heart of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve, in Ontario, on traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee lands. On many occasions throughout the collection, Crozier was inspired to write her poems by Coffman and Laundy's photographs; however, in this case, Crozier wrote the poem from direct observation of a millipede on the walls of the sustainable buildings at Wintergreen and the photograph was taken later to illustrate the ideas conveyed in the poem. Crozier realises that what she is observing is not a "rusted spike" (l. 3), but a millipede. She then envisions the millipede "as one of many nails / a boy was told to pull from a board" (ll. 7-8), and imagines the

boy discarding the fake nail, that is, the millipede, by throwing it to the ground: "He yanked it out, it fell in the dirt and crawled away" (l. 9). Such an encounter with the nonhuman world, Crozier ponders, would then contribute to the boy's upbringing by making him aware that "*Things are not / what they seem?*" (ll. 10-11), as the title of the poem announces. Such wisdom about life might lead the boy to pursue a number of different careers, among which that of "a soft-hearted carpenter / who delights in dovetail, tongue and groove; / who builds walls out of bottles, mortar, cordwood, / broken watches, crockery –and never has to kill a nail?" (ll. 13-16). Crozier could very well be describing by means of this fictional story the process behind the building of Wintergreen walls, such as the one in the picture; a process certainly inspired by the love and respect towards the natural environment of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve.

A shift in perspective from an anthropocentric to a biocentric one is further developed in the poems "Wolves," from *The Wild in You,* and "Frog," from *The House the Spirit Builds*. The splendour of these wild animals is evident in the way Crozier describes how observing a pack of wolves on the hunt may trigger the human's wildness to surface: "The wild in you has gone out / to meet the wolves who are hunting // on the other shore" (ll. 1-3). In this vein, Crozier acknowledges human kinship with the nonhuman world, and encourages the reader to step into the shoes of the wolves' prey. Thus, in an exercise of humility, Crozier reverses human self-centred expectations by distancing the narrative from a position of power. That is, humans, who have tended to think of themselves at the top of the food chain, might find it easy to connect with the wolves' might. However, Crozier reveals that what humans need to do in order to explore more equitable and sustainable interspecies interactions is to empathise with the prey, particularly the deer:

> You can't see
> this wayward part of you
>
> like you see your breath in winter,
> but you feel the bite of canine teeth
>
> as if you now live
> in the throat of a panicked deer. (ll. 3-8)

Therefore, Crozier suggests in her poem a different way for humans to relate to the nonhuman world, namely acknowledging animal superiority instead of human superiority. This idea is further highlighted by Crozier's admiration for the wolf's splendour in its wildness. Nonetheless, Crozier underscores in the subsequent lines that as much as humans would like to also attain such magnificence, they should know that it is ultimately impossible:

> You've never understood before
> what beauty means, how it

blasts the blood and leaves you
shaken, demanding more
than you can ever,
in this human body, be. (ll. 9-14)

The photograph presented alongside the poem showcases a single wolf propelling itself forward in order to cross the river from stone to stone. Unlike the plural form in the title of the poem, the photograph displays a single wolf. On the one hand, the picture draws attention to the wolf's skill and athletic body. On the other hand, it highlights the interaction between the animal and the water, in the wolf's minor splashing while generating momentum to jump forward. In a similar vein to the photograph accompanying the poem "The Return," McAllister uses water to create an aesthetic effect in his presentation of wild animals that works towards underscoring their powerful nature and the beauty implicit in it. In turn, the human admiration for the wolf that permeates Crozier's poem is reminiscent of the Romantics' understanding of the sublime; that is, just like William Blake describes a tiger in his famous poem "The Tyger" with both admiration and fear, Crozier marvels at the wolf and becomes frightened like the deer. Nonetheless, unlike the Romantics, Crozier's depiction of the wolf does not stand for a metaphorical portrayal of human feelings as culturally ascribed to nature, or as a pretext to discuss the nature of God and creation as in Blake's poem. Actually, lineation in the poem contributes to the portrayal of the animal itself, as the lines are relatively long, like the slender figure of the wolf in the photograph who is jumping from rock to rock. The line break is often in mid-sentence, after the verb, symbolising the moment of breath for the animal between one leap and the next. In addition, if we think of this breathing as referring to that of the human, its pattern suggests that the speaker is breathing with effort due to a sense of awe and reverence for the wolf.

A reversal of anthropocentrism in favour of biocentrism is also present in the poem "Frog" (51), in which Crozier again marvels at a wild animal through close observation. Crozier pays careful attention to the frog's body when singing its mating song and grants it saliency by referring to the male frog as "he" rather than "it":

He props his chin
on an orb of music,
thin-membraned, translucent,
more mysterious than
any planet. (ll. 1-5)

Such an attention to detail of an amphibian's body, which Crozier presents as intriguing, allows for a description of this animal from a realistic and positive stance. Crozier is further attracted to the frog by its song:

You're drawn to the pond
by his song, so much bigger
than his body
the size of your thumb. (ll. 6-9)

In these first two stanzas, Crozier offers a poetic rendering of the photograph by Peter Coffman and Diane Laundy that is displayed next to the poem. In the picture, we can observe the profile of the body of a light green frog, sitting in the shallow waters of an unspecified place surrounded by dark-green, submerged plants. Nevertheless, the third stanza in the poem introduces a human being who is standing in awe at the frog's singing power and who wishes "to kiss him" (l. 10) in order to be transformed into an animal. By so doing, Crozier reverses the typical plot in fairy tales in which the frog becomes a prince when the princess kisses him:

> Not sick of being frog as you're
> often sick of being human,
> he'll stay the same
> but what will you become? (ll. 11-14)

Crozier suggests that the main reason to metamorphose into an animal is a disenchantment with human existence; her doubts regarding the nonhuman being that she would be transformed into contain Crozier's implicit criticism towards humanity's often unhealthy ways of being on the planet.

3.3. Crozier's Granting of Saliency to Rodents, Reptiles, and Insects

The subsequent section will examine a few illustrative prose poems by Crozier which discuss nonhuman "animals that do not lend themselves to straightforward anthropomorphism" (Aloi 2015, 23), particularly rodents, reptiles and insects; that is to say, those animals that often undergo speciesist discrimination due to their lack of similarities with humans. In this case, both the three main prose poems under discussion and the two supporting prose poems, belong to the collection *God of Shadows* (2018).

In order to grant saliency to slugs, gophers, and rats, Crozier envisions a god whose work consists in inventing new names for animals that humans despise in "God of Renaming" (*God of Shadows*, 31). Such a creative effort is aimed to make humans like slugs, gophers, and rats better so that they do not "wipe [such animals] out" (par. 1). Crozier imagines an anthropomorphised scenario in which the rats work to protect humans from doom. Indeed, material ecocritics believe in anthropomorphism as a strategy to grant "matter access to articulation, by way of stories that co-emerge with the human in *their differential intelligibility*" (Iovino 2015, 82). Crozier wonders, though, whether this story in which the rats are depicted as being useful to humans might have any real effect on socio-cultural perceptions of such animals and the resulting human reaction when the encounter with these animals occur: "Will it stop you from setting out the poison, the traps? The rats don't think so. And though they'd like the taste of glue, the nepotism, they hang on to *rat* with fierce rodent teeth" (par. 1). Crozier thus humbly questions the ability of art to exert any real change in the world, even if she keeps on trying to do so in her work, because as she confesses: "I do think I've been put on Earth to defend

skunks. And cats and shrews and spotted owls" (Philips 2002, 145). In the poem, Crozier also acknowledges the wildness of the rats and empowers them by presenting them as proud of themselves, even if this is a human quality. In turn, humans are shown to be stuck in their anthropocentric ways. That is to say that Crozier employs critical anthropomorphism "without denying nonhuman specificity, to provoke an empathetic response from a reader" (Carretero-González 2021, 854).

In a similar vein, human fear and disgust towards rats in the Western world (McTier 2013) is examined by Crozier in "God of Rats" (*God of Shadows*, 44), which suggests that human abhorrence of rats is partly caused by their resemblance to snakes:

> He should've made a different tail. Even kept it the same but endowed with curly hair or uncurly hair, enough to hide the nakedness. Many claim the tail looks like a snake, to which, unfair to the snake, we seem to have a natural aversion. (par. 1)

As this quotation suggests, Crozier intends to strip both the rats and the snakes off the socio-cultural prejudices attached to them. In their stead, she presents the (garter) snake's body as pleasing to the eye –"more subtle, beautifully green" (par. 2)– and its attitude as being much more convenient to humans than that of rats: "Unlike rats, they're shy. They don't want to hang around us, they don't want to nest in our attics or piss in the insulation" (par. 2). That is to say that Crozier challenges "the binary that sees insects and rodents viewed by the characters as extreme outsider others to the human," to borrow from Jade E. French's statement in relation to the work of Jean Rhys's late short stories (French 2023, 57).

Similar to rodents and reptiles, insects are often despised due to human fear of the diseases that some of them spread as well as the fact that they "rupture the sanctity of human spaces" (Cooke 2022, 467). Nevertheless, Crozier's poetry endows aesthetic value to all kinds of nonhuman animals, including insects. By so doing, Crozier both underscores the uniqueness of all living beings and challenges fallacies of human superiority, as the prose poem "God of Insects" (*God of Shadows*, 35) suggests.

In "God of Insects," Crozier first acknowledges the large number of existing insects –"a billion billion" (para. 1)– to subsequently admit in a slightly hyperbolic manner that many of them are detrimental to both human and other-than-human beings: "a tiny beetle can eat a pine forest, grasshoppers devour continents of wheat, termites chew until a town turns ghost" (para. 2). However, she continues by stating that despite the destructive might of some insects, there are also others whose bodies and actions are worthy of admiration, such as "the delicacy of monarchs and mayflies, the ballet solo of the praying mantis, the song of field crickets, the dancing cartography of bees" (para. 2). Finally, Crozier closes the prose poem "God of Insects" by stating –via the metonymy of a god of insects that stands for insects themselves– that they have "been around the longest and will outlast" (para. 4). Therefore, Crozier clearly positions those beings that are often considered abject as species that will survive beyond the human species on our planet. Based on Julia Kristeva's theories on the abject, Natasha Seegert (2014) argues that "[a]rt provides

a potential way of exploring the othered abject […] [as] aestheticizing the abject makes the invisible visible and forces people to *see"* (2, emphasis original). In other words, the abject becomes an art object. In this sense, Julia Kristeva claims that "[t]he abject has only one quality of the object –that of being opposed to the '*I*'" (1). For Seegert, the space for observation and reflection that the artistic expression of the abject allows for encourages a shift in perspective on the viewer's part (3). This is precisely what Crozier's poetry urges readers to do; namely, to challenge established binary perceptions of the nonhuman world, such as domestic animals vs. pests, and to render all animals valuable.

It is worth noting that Crozier's poetic eye pays the same careful attention and respect to insects than to other nonhuman beings, as stated, for example, in the prose poem "God of the Moon" (*God of Shadows*, 17). In this text, she offers two metaphors for the moon, namely "a bowl of cherry blossoms as they open" and "a bowl of maggots: when they transmogrify into flies," and later on in the poem attests to the moon's "equal love of flies and blossoms." In fact, Crozier's attentiveness to the more-than-human world is the result of her own learning from it, as the following statement in the prose poem "God of Owls" implies:

> You want the slow unrolling of the owl's vowels to slip into your speaking. So much, so little they have to say. You want the owl's silence to be this god's silence, one that doesn't mean there's no one there, but *a refined and honed attention, a keen listening high above you, and a steady looking down*. (*God of Shadows*, 72, my emphasis)

4. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Crozier's poems in *The Wild in You*, *The House the Spirit Builds*, and the prose poems in *God of Shadows* are outstanding examples of ecopoetry. In line with Timothy Clark's definition of ecopoetry, they create "a space of subjective redefinition and rediscovery through encounters with the non-human" (2011, 139). Notably, and along the lines of Shapiro and Copeland's conceptualisation, nonhuman animals in Crozier's poetry are depicted as close to reality as human language and poetry allow for; they are given both agency and voice, and the uniqueness of each of the different animal species described is acknowledged. As Carmen Leñero (2010) argues, "[for Crozier,] poetic writing is […] an ability to listen to the voice of things, to search out what creatures, phenomena, and objects are capable of 'saying'" (117). Indeed, as my examination of Crozier's poems has revealed, her minute attention to the nonhuman world bespeaks a love and admiration for wild animals which leads her to criticise human abuse of nonhuman nature, specifically whale and bear hunting and water pollution. Moreover, by illustrating both animal superiority and imagining what animals might think of humans, Crozier underscores biocentrism as a healthy way of relating to the nonhuman world, while also offering creative advice on ways to overcome speciesism concerning insects, reptiles, and rodents. The photographs that accompany some of the poems under examination serve

a two-fold purpose, namely to emphasize the importance of ecocentrism and to denounce human exploitation of the more-than-human world. Ultimately, Crozier's poetry foregrounds the need to press the pause button on our rushed, daily lives and observe our surroundings, noticing the nonhuman beings that share the space with us. Hopefully, in an exercise of humility, we will accept Crozier's invitation to deconstruct notions of human supremacy, realizing that we are but one more species on Earth, dependent on healthy interspecies interactions for survival. Hence, in our contemporary capitalist-driven societies, the lessons learnt from nonhuman animals that Crozier's poetry illustrates offer much-needed, alternative ways of being on our planet.

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DOG AUTOBIOGRAPHIES AND ENGLISH CANINE MELODRAMA: *THE LIFE OF CARLO, THE FAMOUS DOG OF THE DRURY-LANE THEATRE* (1806)

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Abstract

This article aims to examine Elizabeth Fenwick's narrative, *The Life of Carlo, or the Famous Dog of Drury-Lane Theatre* (1806), through the lens of the melodramatic conventions that informed Frederick Reynolds's play, *The Caravan; or the Driver and His Dog* (1803), upon which the story is based. Focusing on the centrality of the dog in both works, the study first explores the key elements of classical melodrama evident in the play and the novel. It then investigates how Fenwick's narrative engages with nineteenth-century discourses on the relationship between childhood and non-human animals. Finally, the analysis situates Fenwick's work within the framework of classical melodrama's ideal of citizenship, particularly as it relates to childhood and the domestication of animals.

Keywords: Elizabeth Fenwick, Frederick Reynolds, Melodrama, It-Novels, Performing Animals, Human-Animal Studies

AUTOBIOGRAFÍAS DE PERROS Y MELODRAMAS INGLESES CANINOS: *THE LIFE OF CARLO, THE FAMOUS DOG OF THE DRURY-LANE THEATRE* (1806)

Resumen:

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar el relato de Elizabeth Fenwick titulado *The Life of Carlo, or the Famous Dog of Drury-Lane Theatre* (1806) a la luz de los mecanismos melodramáticos que articularon la obra teatral de Frederick Reynolds en la que se inspira, titulada *The Caravan; or the Driver and His Dog* (1803). Tomando como denominador común el protagonismo del perro en sendas obras, se lleva a cabo, en un primer momento, un análisis de los principales resortes procedentes del melodrama clásico presentes tanto en la obra de teatro como en la novela. Acto seguido, se incide en cómo el relato de Fenwick aborda el vínculo entre la condición infantil y los animales no humanos durante el siglo xix. En tercer lugar, la obra de Fenwick es estudiada a partir de la noción de ciudadanía vehiculada por el melodrama clásico en relación con la infancia y el encuadre doméstico del animal.

Palabras clave: Elizabeth Fenwick, Frederick Reynolds, melodrama, *It-Novels*, animales actores, estudios humanimales.

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On the evening of December 5, 1803, the audience at London's Drury Lane Theatre was treated to an extraordinary spectacle: on the stage, a dog leaped from an elevated platform (fashioned as a rock) into a pool to dramatise the rescue of a child from drowning. The thrilling stunt marked the climax of *The Caravan; or the Driver and His Dog*, a "grand serio-comic romance" penned by Frederick Reynolds with music composed by William Reeve. The production sought to reignite the theatre's profitability after a string of financial setbacks (Rahill 1967, 112). In the play, Julio, the young son of the Marquis of Calatrava, is thrown into the water by an agent of the villainous Count Navarro as an act of vengeance against the boy's mother, the Marchioness, for rejecting the Regent's amorous advances. Equipped with the bravery that is such a defining part of his nature, the dog, a Newfoundland by the name of Carlo, "leaps from the Rock into the Water–and is seen swimming after the Child" (Reynolds 1803, 2). Although London audiences were no strangers to theatrical productions featuring animals as performers (Wilson 2015, 8-25), Carlo's heroic act quickly became the centrepiece of the show. Reviews praised the performance, raving about the audience's enthusiastic applause (Mantzius 1921, VI, 44), and Frederick Reynolds later recounted in his autobiography the anecdote of how the theatre director personally visited the dressing rooms after the show to commend the remarkable canine (Reynolds, 1826, II, 194).

The success of the play marked the beginning of a trend of melodramas centred around quadrupeds' dramatic rescues of helpless children or women from a sure death (frequently by drowning). A striking example appears in the second act of *Timour the Tartar*, a "grand romantic melodrama" by Matthew Lewis (1811). In this scene, Agib, princess Zorilda's son, heroically rescues his mother after she falls into the water. Agib appears riding a white horse in a breathtaking moment where the boy "seizes a banner, leaps his Horse over the Parapet, and disappears," only to reemerge moments later with Zorilda safe in his arms (Lewis 1830, 39-40). Such antics proved crucial to the play's success, with contemporary accounts describing how "the people rose with simultaneous impulse to their feet, and, with canes, hands, and wild screams, kept the house in one uproar of shouts for at least five minutes" (Grimsted 1968, 101). Unsurprisingly, Carlo achieved fame rivalling that of human actors, drawing comparisons to the likes of illustrious performers such as Garrick and Betterton (Mantzius 1921, VI, 44). His celebrity status was woven into the fabric of popular culture with lithographs, illustrations, and journalistic anecdotes that heightened his "persona," contributing to what Diana Donald terms the "glorification of the dog" (Donald 2007, 136) that is characteristic of 19th-century literature, art, journalism, dog breeding, and scientific discourse.

Amid the commodification of theatrical stardom during an era of growing industrialisation in the theatre, a canine autobiography purportedly "written" by the dog himself, *The Life of Carlo, or the Famous Dog of Drury-Lane Theatre* (1806), was published shortly after the premiere of Reynolds's play. The book chronicled Carlo's life, from his birth to his service under the director of the Drury Lane Theatre, and began with a "dedication" ostensibly signed by Carlo. The aim was "to increase [the children's] good opinion of him, and to add to their pleasures" (Fenwick 1806, 4). The author, Eliza Fenwick –a close friend of Mary Wollstonecraft– was known for

her work in children's literature, critiques of slavery, and animal advocacy (Cope 2023, 232, 238). Carlo's account was part of the nineteenth century's so-called "it narratives," a literary subgenre where inanimate objects or animals assumed the role of protagonists, often imbued with subjectivity, consciousness, and a personal voice to recount their own stories (Blackwell 2007, 10). Rooted in the broader philosophical discussions of the late eighteenth century on materiality and animal consciousness, "it narratives" –also called "novels of circulation," "object tales," or "spy novels"– offered insights into the evolving relationship between humans and the objects they possessed. In Blackwell's words, they examined "the ways in which people have been shaped by their changing relationships with the things they own" (Blackwell 2007, 10).

This article seeks to examine Fenwick's work as an explanatory epitext (Genette 1987, 11) to the theatrical play that inspired its publication. *The Life of Carlo* is a narrative that describes the vital circumstances that enabled the canine star to take Reynold's play to the next level. Yet if Fenwick's tale qualifies as an "it-narrative" capable of recounting the animal's "secret history," it is not solely because, as Swenson observes, "the secret history of the *it* is a primary focus" (Swenson 2017, 117), that is, it is a narrative form that, unlike others that treat the animal as a mere pretext, allows readers to intimately connect with the protagonist's personality and story. It is also because the tale probes the mechanisms that fuelled the success of Reynolds's theatrical production in its era. Situated at a crossroads between the "beastly fable" and children's didactic literature, Fenwick's work adheres to the structural conventions of melodrama while simultaneously serving as a metanarrative that reflects those very conventions in Reynolds's play. Through *The Life of Carlo*, readers gain a deeper understanding of the scenographic and symbolic principles underpinning classic melodrama as enacted in Reynolds's production.

To support this claim, I will first identify the principal dramatic devices that define Fenwick's narrative as a classic melodrama. Next, I will explore how the story engages with broader debates surrounding the conditions of animals and children in the early nineteenth century, exemplified by the bond between children and animals in the iconic rescue scene from *The Caravan*. Then, I will analyse Fenwick's work in the context of the ideal of citizenship propagated by classic melodrama, particularly in its connection to childhood and the domestication of animals. I will argue that Fenwick's text transcends the realm of children's literature to serve as a melodramatic blueprint for normative behaviour, equating the dog's actions with those of a child within the framework of national identity. I will conclude by stating that Fenwick employs the resources of melodrama to articulate early signs of the connection between the animal protection/humane movement and feminism, with values such as compassion at the centre of her ethos.

1. CANINE AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND MELODRAMATIC AESTHETICS

Fenwick's story, featuring a dog as the protagonist who recounts his numerous life experiences, falls within the subgenre known as "animal autobiography" –a narrative told from the first-person perspective of an animal that conveys his/her thoughts to the reader (Smith 2015, 725). Popularised during the second half of the eighteenth century, and often associated with children's literature (Cosslett 2006, 63), animal autobiographies' representation of the mind of another living being constituted a reflection of the cultural beliefs, expectations and knowledge that society had of such species, which was informed by prevailing zoological, natural history and biological treatises. Within this wide array of "speaking" animals, first-person canine narratives led to the emergence of a distinct subgenre in its own right. Largely inspired by the popularity gained in eighteenth-century Britain by Cervantes's *El coloquio de los perros* (1613) –translated into English by Harry Bridges in 1728 as *The Dogs of Mahudez*, and again in 1766 as *The Dialogue of the Dogs* by Robert Goadby– works such as *History of Pompey the Little* (Francis Coventry, 1751), *Biography of a Spaniel* (attributed to a certain "Mrs. Showes", 1797), *Keeper's Travels in Search of His Master* (Edward Augustus Kendall, 1798), and, moving into the nineteenth century, *Dog of Knowledge; or, Memoirs of Bob the Spotted Terrier* (Harrison Weir, 1801), established key features of the (sub)genre, creating a form of "canine subjectivity" through human writing. Fenwick's novel represents a distinctive link in this chain, notable for its ability to illuminate and serve as an "external" entry point (Genette 11), an epitext that circulates alongside Frederick Reynolds's play, showcasing both the inherent goodness of the animal and the intricacies of his life, which lead to his success on the stage. As Lissa Paul notes, Fenwick demonstrated her skill by drawing upon "her keen awareness of her immediate environment and her potential for fiction (…) [she] took the news of the day and quickly fashioned a variation on a 'Lassie-come-home' adventure story/celebrity biography, (…) capitalizing on the popularity of the dog. The hit stage play would generate a market for *The Life of Carlo*, a kind of prequel to the play" (Paul, 2019, 318).

With its very title, Fenwick's canine autobiography intertwines Carlo's destiny with the theatrical world. *The Life of Carlo, or the Famous Dog of the Drury-Lane Theatre* links the celebrated quadruped to one of London's patent theatres, where illegitimate drama was gaining ground as a rival to the circus (Purinton 2017, 138). The visual emphasis is evident from the title page itself, which pairs the main title with an explanatory subtitle: "with his portrait, and other Copper Plates" (Fenwick, front cover, 1806). This visual focus is further amplified by the frontispiece engraving, portraying Carlo in full profile. The dog dominates the frame, nearly eclipsing the faintly rendered landscape in the background. The image's composition underscores the dog's proportions relative to his surroundings, with the side-profile view offering a complete depiction of his shape. Carlo's imposing size is a deliberate nod to the attributes of the "Majestic Newfoundland, of which size is a prominent characteristic" (Walsh 1872, 166). This physical grandeur reinforces his strength and bravery – qualities epitomised by his heroic rescue of a child from certain drowning, a feat frequently lauded in nineteenth-century canine manuals (Lydekker 1893-1898, I,

528). This type of rescue first appeared in *Biography of a Spaniel*, and would just as much be present in other canine biographies prior to Fenwick's story, such as *Keeper's Travels in Search of His Master* (Brown 2010, 133). The engraving is accompanied by a caption that reads: "The Portrait of Carlo taken from the life" (Fenwick 1806, n.p.). Its purpose is to visually authenticate the dog's image and, by extension, the remarkable deeds that inspired Fenwick to write his story.

The primacy of visuality is a hallmark of melodrama, as Théophile Gautier observed in an era when words "annoy[ed]" (*ennuient*) and "exhaust[ed]" (*fatiguent*) (Gautier 1859, II, 175). Fenwick's work emphasises this visual prioritisation through paratextual elements that complement and enhance the narrative. By doing so, Fenwick remains true to a fundamental principle of melodramatic composition: the image must convey semantic meaning as powerfully, if not more so, than the text itself –what Brooks describes as "a plastic tableau, the arena for represented, visual meanings" (1995, 47). This visual clarity, which allows melodrama to render characters' moral traits immediately apparent, has drawn criticism on the grounds of a perceived "sentimentalism" and "simplification" (Przybos 1987, 9), yet it remains central to the genre's widespread appeal. The opening illustration of Carlo embodies this principle, portraying the dog with a commanding presence: head held high, gaze intent, jaw slightly parted, and legs slightly apart, signalling a poised readiness for action. The depiction exudes vigilance, suggesting the dog's preparedness to respond to any situation requiring his intervention. Through this image, Fenwick sets the stage for a narrative defined by the dog's vitality and profound connection with humanity.

The narrative's textual elements amplify the visual emphasis central to melodrama, as noted by Gautier. The straightforward storytelling, the focus on Carlo's pivotal scenes, the minimal use of rhetorical devices that could detract from the action, and the integration of illustrative imagery, transform the text into a kind of voiceover –one that gives shape not only to the animal's life but also the critical moments of the theatrical production. While Fenwick's text traces Carlo's life from birth, it zeroes in on the heroic deeds dramatised on stage, directing the audience's attention to these enacted exploits. *The Life of Carlo* recounts the dog's relationships with his various masters –first Edward, then Tom, and ultimately the sailors who care for him until his arrival at Drury Lane. It emphasises his steadfast loyalty, moral integrity, and extraordinary ability to rescue those in aquatic peril, including a girl who falls into a river (Fenwick 1806, 38-39) and the wayward Vincent, who is accidentally plunged into the sea (Fenwick 1806, 49). These incidents mirror scenes from Reynolds's play, where Carlo is depicted as both loyal –he refrains from revealing that the maid Rosa broke "one of the Marquis's fine looking-glasses" (Reynolds 1803, 26)– and courageous, capable of attacking a man and sending him "hopping back to Madrid" (Reynolds 1803, 11) or saving someone in distress from drowning –a scene included as frontispiece of Reynolds's published version of the play (Reynolds 1803, n.p.). Both in Fenwick's narrative and in Reynolds's play, the itinerancy of the dog is central to the syntax of the work and the ontological consideration of the canine species. The dog's constant movement is highlighted through an "arbitrary transition" (Brown 2010, 133) between masters and scenes

that illustrates the animal's physical movement –eloquently emphasised by the "caravan" that titles the theatrical work. Being on the move equips the dog with the experiences that allow him to develop a more refined intuition and a deeper understanding of human nature. In the manner of a canine picaresque character, the dog's physical itinerancy aligns with the succession of scenes in Reynolds's play and the progressive action that supplies the rhythm to Fenwick's narrative. Both formally and thematically, Fenwick's narrative functions as a printed counterpart to the theatrical performance –a kind of playbill or stage direction detailing the animal's actions onstage. Through the interplay of text and performance, the two mediums bolster and validate one another. The dog's feats, witnessed by the audience, are immortalised in the autobiography, which itself becomes a near-verbatim transcript of what spectators experienced in the theatre.

The drive to authenticate the dog's actions for both readers and spectators is further echoed in the play. Carlo was not a symbolic representation performed by a human actor or conjured through dialogue; he was a real dog, owned by the proprietor of an "À la mode beef shop" (Reynolds 1826, II 194). His breathtaking jump into the water was no technical artifice or illusion; it was genuine. In his autobiography, Reynolds highlighted the unprecedented nature of these elements, explaining that the introduction of real water on stage, combined with the dog's actions, "were both incidents, at that time, so entirely unknown in theatrical exhibitions, that their very novelty rendered everybody most sanguine as to its success" (Reynolds 1826, II 193). The use of actual water, "hired from Old Father Thames" (Reynolds 1826, II 194), further enhanced this authenticity, as contemporary reviews acknowledged. A certain "Dog-Berry" remarked that "[t]he spectators in the gallery who love nature, are delighted with the scene of real water. None of your made stuff" ("The New Performer" 1805, 45). The incorporation of this natural element aligned Reynolds's play with the aquatic melodramas of the era, often advertised with the enticing phrase "Real Water!" (Singer 2017; Stalter-Place 2023). The *realness* of the water served to further authenticate the truthfulness of the action and the dog's stunt, and so, by breaking with the conventions of theatrical artifice and illusion, the theatre transcended its traditional role as a space of simulation. The set's integration of an element as intrinsically alien to the stage as water helped to transform it into a space where nature was appropriated, domesticated, and commercialised for entertainment purposes.

Furthermore, the presence of real bodies of water evoked the naval victories dramatised in naumachias and aquadramas staged in parks, coastal cities, gardens, and theatres during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Ramos-Gay 2015). The intricate hydraulic engineering that allowed London theatres –particularly Sadler's Wells– to channel water from the Thames symbolised the appropriation and redefinition of nature within the theatrical domain. This interplay between nature and artifice mirrored the role Carlo was meant to embody on stage. Like the water flowing across the set, Carlo personified nature itself, his presence subverting the conventional notion of acting as mere imitation. In contrast to Garrick, whose artistry rested on mimetic skill, Carlo epitomised authenticity. With Carlo, "nature," an anonymous poem stated, "takes the field" (Donald 2007, 136).

Carlo's portrayal in Fenwick's narrative and on stage is deeply entwined with the moral binaries that structure melodrama. Defined by the stark opposition of good and evil, melodrama thrives on the polarisation of heightened emotion and what Brooks identifies as the "triumph of virtue" (1995, 15). Fenwick rigorously reproduces this framework and devises Carlo as a moral exemplar, thereby taking a firm position in the broader debate over whether non-human species can be moral agents or mere moral patients (Sapontzis 1987; Clark 1984). By endowing Carlo with a clear subjectivity –to the extent of being able to narrate his autobiography– Fenwick attributes to him not only reason, but also, perhaps more importantly, virtuous moral agency, in consistency with Hume's perspective that sentiment, rather than rationality, underpins morality (Clement 2013, 2). Carlo's conduct distances him from the deterministic interpretations of behaviour rooted in Cartesian mechanism, instead ascribing to him moral traits often reserved for humans. Fenwick stops short, however, of extending this "gift" to all dogs or the wider animal kingdom. Her narrative deliberately singles out Carlo –a unique specimen of a specific breed. This individuality is emphasised through his proper name and a detailed engraving designed to set him apart from his peers. By doing so, Fenwick assigns Carlo what Emmanuel Lévinas describes as a "face," not merely as a physical identifier but as an ethical presence that demands recognition and moral responsibility for his distinct otherness. While Levinas maintains that animals possess a secondary or "afterwards" (Lévinas 1988, 172) face compared to humans, he nonetheless acknowledges their capacity to elicit ethical responses: "one cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal" (1988, 169), he claims. In narrating Carlo's life, Fenwick effectively gives him such a face in Levinasian terms. As Una Chaudhuri would have it, this act of storytelling grants Carlo what Cartesian thought denied him: "a soul, a place in our moral universe, and the opportunity to be seen and known as our fellows" (Chaudhuri 2007, 15).

Carlo's virtue must be as tangible as the moral principles that undergird melodrama itself: not merely an abstract concept but a narrative or theatrical action brought to life. As Brooks notes, in moments of heightened emotional and psychological conflict, language alone becomes "inadequate to bear the charge of meaning required," necessitating "mute gesture" to "express its most extreme meanings." In other words, melodrama aims to "make the terms of the moral dilemma visible" (Brooks 1995, 552). For an animal like Carlo, it is insufficient to embody virtue abstractly –his virtue must be rendered visibly apparent. As Steve Baker suggests, what we know about animals is mainly channelled through their representation (Baker 2001, xvi). Given animals' inability to represent themselves –a limitation Fenwick seeks to overcome with Carlo's autobiography– and given that representation inherently involves mediation, Carlo's actions and movements must be cyphered within the convention of pantomimic characterisation, leaving no space for ambiguity in either the theatrical performance or the text. As Brooks emphasises, melodrama thrives on "making its terms clear and stark" (1995, 552), and visual representation offers a medium far less susceptible to misinterpretation than words or abstract actions.

Fenwick adheres closely to this principle, offering vivid depictions of Carlo's heroic leaps into the water to rescue a young girl or his master's rival, the young Vincent. Through these dramatised accounts, Fenwick eradicates all moral uncertainty regarding Carlo's behaviour: his actions only allow one interpretation. Even when Carlo hesitates –briefly swayed by resentment– before saving Vincent, who had previously abused Carlo's friend, Edward, he ultimately follows the dictates of his virtuous nature. "I believe my resentment against him was so strong that I should have suffered him to perish (...) My heart relented (...) I leaped into the sea, and saved the boy" (Fenwick 1806, 51-52). Whether or not Carlo consciously and fully comprehends the reasons and maxims behind his actions almost becomes a secondary issue; it is his moral integrity that remains unequivocal and acquires a visible dimension.

And in the same way that virtue is to be made visible, so must suffering be explicitly displayed as well. Scenes that depict Carlo's hunger or his self-sacrificing decision to leave Edward's care to avoid burdening the boy serve as Fenwick's response to eighteenth-century debates over animal suffering (Wolloch 2012, 123-144). In opposition to claims that animals do not suffer, melodrama –which is particularly reliant on pathos for its impact– presents animals as emotional mirrors of humanity. These scenes evoke audience identification by framing suffering as an internalised experience. Carlo's anguish mirrors that of the child beside him, a compelling image that encourages the audience to empathise with both subjects equally.

Ultimately, *The Life of Carlo* is an it-narrative that exposes the structural mechanisms of melodrama, grounded in the presence of providence as the locus of the protagonist's conflict. Swenson interprets the text as a "narrative about nonhuman perspective (...) that reveals privileged information thanks to its protagonist's undercover sentience" (2017, 117). Swenson argues that Fenwick's account underscores Carlo's capacity for autonomous decision-making in defiance of his natural instincts. The dog's hesitation –termed "Carlo's dilemma" (Swenson 2017, 125)– over whether to rescue Vincent, who falls into the water due to his own malicious behaviour, demonstrates a degree of agency. This dilemma, as Swenson puts it, encapsulates "the paradox of so-called subjectivity as an organic, evolving, unknowable conversation between native qualities, environment, and what the hero perceives as choice" (2017, 118). Rather than merely showcasing a simplistic "power-of-choice," Carlo's actions "radically reframe consciousness and personality as products of organic, ongoing, unknowable negotiation between nature, conscious choice, and the unpredictable effects of environment and experience" (Swenson 2017, 123).

2. DOGS AND CHILDREN ONSTAGE

A striking feature of canine melodramas is their tendency to centre the spectacle of their climactic scenes on the rescue of a child in peril. While these works often depict dogs attacking villains, defending women, or obeying their masters' commands, the culmination of the action usually involved the combination of water, a helpless child and a brave dog coming to the rescue. Such scenes were frequently performed by child actors whose emotive portrayals made them a perfect match for the protective canine characters, and their action-packed chemistry certainly contributed to their critical acclaim as a pair. Referred to as "infant prodigies," actors like William Henry West Betty –also known as Master Betty– "created sensation" (Varty 2008, 78) in Europe's leading theatrical capitals at the beginning of the century. The widespread admiration for young actors, whose tender age contrasted with their remarkable stage mastery, extended in some respects to the realm of performing animals. As Grimsted observes, "after all, who could say that the six-year-old who had learned all these lines and accompanying gestures might not develop into a more competent player?" (Grimsted 1968, 103). Both child performers and animals, as previously noted, defied theatrical conventions by embodying a "natural simplicity" (Grimsted 1968, 103) that contrasted with more intricate forms of artifice. Beyond the protective domestic role often attributed to canines –illustrated by French writer Alphonse Esquiros, who observed that "these model dogs protect the weak and oppressed, watch over their master's corpse, and defend on the stage with a thorough national ardour the flag of Old England" (Esquiros 1862, 210)– melodramas forge a symbolic bond between animality and childhood. The dog's most honourable role would be that of guarding the child's innocence, an idealisation of the domestic ethos that could visibly materialise itself in the triumph of the rescue before an enraptured audience.

The connection between children and animals emerged as a recurring motif throughout the nineteenth century, influencing not only culture but also the economy, philosophy, politics, and the legal framework of the state. The association was rooted in "a connection of the child with the animal as similar 'feeling subjects'" (Flegel 2016, 41). At a time when the concept of the child was still "a figure very much under construction," its identity was shaped by debates about "what it could or should do, what could or should be done to it," and "how one could or should react to it" (Flegel 2016, 3). The analogy between children and animals thus offered a lens through which to better understand and define the child's place in society.

The dog, as the quintessential domestic animal, provides a compelling example of this parallelism. During the nineteenth century, both animals and children underwent a transformation from being integral to the household economy to becoming symbols of domestic affection (Ritvo 1987; Kete 1994; Howell 2015). The ideal of domesticity that emerged during this period positioned them as central to the family, not as labourers but as sentimental figures. Over time, children and domestic animals became signatory recipients of an ethic of care and compassion, shaped by the Romantic ideal, the stigmatisation of cruelty as a marker of lower-class behaviour, and the influence of Christian evangelicalism.

Children and animals also shared a set of cultural representations. Both were seen as lacking the inherent power of language, as children had not completed full verbal mastery and development. Both were also portrayed as vulnerable victims, and framed within a binary construct that emphasised their profound emotional bond. This bond was further reinforced by the growing investment in the affective economy of domesticity. The emergence of child protection organisations, such as the Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (SPCCs), underscores this shared perception of both groups as "oppressed sufferers worthy of legal intervention" (Pearson 2011, 2). The founding of the first American SPCC in 1875 by Henry Bergh and Elbridge Gerry (the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NY-SPCC)), as an offshoot of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), epitomises this connection. Prompted by the so-called "myth" (Pearson 2011, 191) of Mary Ellen Wilson (a pivotal figure in the history of child protection in the United States whose case in 1874 was the first documented instance of child abuse to receive widespread attention), the movement to safeguard both children and animals under a unified framework of rights reflected "an ideology of sentimental liberalism, a rhetoric forged by animal and child protectionists that reconciled dependence with rights and pledged the use of state power to protect the helpless" (Pearson 2011, 3-4).

Drawing on advancements in psychology, anthropology, and philosophy, animal studies have underscored the evolutionary bond between children and animals, encapsulated in the "biophilia hypothesis" (Beck and Katcher 1996; Melson 2001). This theory posits that "through the course of evolution humans have developed an innate orientation towards the natural world" (Tipper 2011, 146). Melodrama as a genre vividly exemplifies this connection, intertwining the lives of children and animals. In *The Life of Carlo*, the dog's fate is inseparably linked to that of his young owner from the outset. Carlo, born to a father he "never saw" (Fenwick 1806, 6) and "torn from [his] mother's side" (Fenwick 1806, 7), is saved from the dreadful fate suffered by his sixteen siblings, all of whom are drowned, and taken in by a young boy called Edward. The narrative follows the structure of a classic *Bildungsroman*, in which "a young person fac[es] the challenges of growing up" (Graham 2019, 1). Like a canine counterpart to *David Copperfield*, Carlo recounts his adventures from birth to his eventual role at Drury Lane. The choice to begin Carlo's story at the very moment of his birth reflects an effort to provide the most comprehensive and authentic account possible. Moreover, as in classic *Bildungsroman*, in Fenwick's work, the journey shared by dog and child constitutes "the earlier bourgeois, humanistic concept of the shaping of the individual from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience to the threshold of maturity" (Sammons 1991, 42). The parallelism between Carlo and his young owner is highlighted through their shared physical and moral traits. The dog and the boy are both small in stature and suffer the pangs of hunger (Fenwick 1806, 18). Little is known about their parents, Edward lives under the care of an uncle. Thus, from the beginning, the domestic sphere appears devoid of traditional caregivers. The tragic drowning of Carlo's "sweet sisters" and "darling brothers" –who long struggled to survive in the water amidst "sad (...) terrors" (Fenwick 1806, 8)– intensifies the

narrative's emotional weight and introduces a formative trauma that allows him to come full circle, as in time he will go on to rescue another innocent from drowning both in real life and onstage (two restorative acts that symbolically right the fatal ending that the universe had in store for his brothers and sisters).

Morally, the bond between Carlo and Edward is rooted in shared values of generosity and virtue. Both Edward and, later, Tom, Carlo's new owner, show compassion toward the dog. Edward even goes so far as to steal food for Carlo, despite being threatened to be taken "before the Lord Mayor" for his actions (Fenwick 1806, 27). Thrown into the harshness of the world, the boy and the dog are defined by a difficult and unstable past, and their present revolves around a ceaseless yearning for affection and domestic belonging. Carlo's journey, in particular, is marked by transience, as he moves from one home to another –living on a ship, residing in a monastery, and eventually establishing himself as a professional actor at Drury Lane. His ultimate reward comes in the form of recognition, as his bravery and selflessness secure him a place within the human world of labour and social significance.

In her exploration of the psychological bond between children and their pets, Tippet (2011, 146-147) criticises a pervasive flaw in childhood studies: the tendency to perceive the child not as a fully realised state –what she calls "being a child"– but rather as a transitional phase that is teleologically directed toward adulthood, which is regarded as the one true and fixed ontology. Such view positions the child as a liminal figure, whose actions are often dismissed as insignificant due to their presumed lack of the maturity necessary to render them meaningful. Fenwick's depiction of Carlo's life mirrors this framework: the dog's actions are recounted not to illuminate his past but to justify and provide a logic to his present role on the stage. The narrative charts Carlo's metaphorical journey to "adulthood," culminating in his initiation in the world of labour. His integration into the Drury Lane Theatre signifies stability, marking the end of his nomadic existence. The theatre offers Carlo a space of protection and purpose within the otherwise chaotic force of the public sphere, and it incorporates him in the wheel of production by making an actor out of him. His past experiences legitimate his value as a performer of the type that is truly able to comprehend the feats of the character he plays because he has known and confronted similar perils in his real life.

As traditional *Bildungsroman* journeys go, transformation and change mark the stages of the life of Edward and Carlo, setting them apart from the adult human world. They both acquire knowledge through lived experience rather than formal education, learning through the trials and tribulations of their respective journeys. Key to their transformation is a formative process of instruction, which will allow them to grow into an identity of their own. In this sense, learning to read acts as a mechanism that tempers the innate qualities of the dog, singling him out as an individual that deserves moral and civic consideration. Fenwick's text, much like Reynolds's theatrical work, underscores this educational process as fundamental to Carlo's potential. Fenwick recounts how the child teaches the dog to read (Fenwick 1806, 13) and how their companionship becomes a pedagogical relationship, with Carlo emulating the boy's virtuous behaviour. The boy's kindness and generosity toward Carlo instil in the dog a similar capacity for benevolence toward others

–"Gratitude! Thou dog's best virtue! Teach me to repay, with a faithful relation of his kindness to me, the preserver of poor Carlo's life!" the dog states as a foreword to his narrative (Fenwick 1806, 8).

As if anticipating modern insights from animal psychology (Huber, Range and Virány 2014), the autobiography suggests that the dog mirrors the conduct of his owner. Within the Romantic framework, where children are idealised as embodiments of virtue –"Where there are children, there is a Golden Age" (Novalis 1837, 271)–, this reading becomes central. It foregrounds the animal's ability to be educated, a theme that Fenwick's narrative highlights and that Reynolds's theatrical adaptation renders vividly before the audience. This dual portrayal celebrates the potential for moral and social refinement in both child and animal, illustrating their shared capacity for growth and transformation.

Carlo's acquired literacy, coupled with his eventual heroic act of saving a human from drowning, draw attention to the nineteenth-century debate on the potential capabilities of children and animals: What are they truly capable of? More specifically, what can they achieve with their bodies? In both cases, the physical possibilities of children and animals are seen as vital markers of identity. Taken to the space of the theatre, their physicality and their movement become inserted in a public sphere that operates through (adult) visual consumption. The autobiography's grand theme of the performing animal interrogates the very behavioural act of playing –an activity shared by both children and animals. While both dogs and children engage in play for recreational and developmental purposes, they can also perform in a professional sense, signalling their potential inclusion in the labour force within the spectacle, where their efforts can be fully appreciated. This is suggested by Carlo himself in Fenwick's story, "when implying that Reynolds's play capitalized on his impressive feats" , "and [his] reputation as a good actor [was] universally established" (Fenwick 1806, 66).

The "testing" of physical capabilities became, unsurprisingly, problematic. For one thing, the stunt in the water was inherently risky, which was yet another reason laid out by child protection societies at the time to have children removed from the hazards of the entertainment industry and street performances (Pearson 2011, 3). As Monica Flegel observes, the child actor was "a vexed figure, straddling, on one side, the world of Fancy, imagination, and pleasure, and on the other, the world of commerce, training, and labour" (2016, 73). In Fenwick's novel, Carlo's master is responsible for his initiation in the theatrical realm. The dog was tested by the company so as to find out his capability to perform. "Noises were made in the pit, and in many parts of the house, to see if I should be alarmed by them, but I played my part with zeal and sagacity" (Fenwick 1806, 65-66). Both in Fenwick's narrative and in Reynolds's play, the theatrical space becomes the arena where the dog's full range of actions is realised, much to his own contentment. In Carlo's own words, "the praises bestowed on me by my young friends (…) have been my highest gratification" (Fenwick 1806, 66).

Flegel further highlights that in mid nineteenth-century Victorian novels such as Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839) and *Hard Times* (1854), and Wilkie Collins's *Hide and Seek* (1854), the theatre "provides protection for those rejected

or endangered by the outside world, and in particular, by the failings of their own families" (2016, 81). In this sense, rehabilitation comes in the form of productivity, as the theatre offers them salvation from previous states of aimless wandering and "homelessness," that is, lack of domesticity. The theatre thus becomes "a kind of surrogate family," a "kind of home a place of safety, acceptance, and love" (Flegel 2016, 81). By turning child and dog into productive subjects, they become agents that contribute to the larger fabric of the state and national identity. It is their integration into the labour force that truly marks their status as respectable citizens, and so the child actor thus transitions into adulthood and Carlo achieves recognition as a valuable member of society. They become active participants in the cultural and economic structure of the nation, and their earned, "elevated" role legitimates their contribution to social order.

3. DOGS, CHILDREN AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

As suggested thus far, the portrayal of the dog as a wandering orphan, bereft of stable domesticity and social connections, mirrors the nineteenth-century literary archetype of the child-victim. Reformist and philanthropic literature of the era often featured children as nomadic orphans in need of rescue from neglectful parental figures that could bind them to a life of crime or prostitution. As Lydia Murdoch (2006) notes, reformist writings by figures like Barnardo, along with state child protection laws, leaned heavily on melodramatic stereotypes to craft an image of the child as a vulnerable being in need of moral guidance from caring adults. Murdoch contends that this vision was less a reflection of reality than an "imagined" construct –a cultural narrative intended to legitimise the imposition of formal education, one that would integrate children into a national ideal of civility and citizenship rooted in Victorian bourgeois values.

In this context, educating children in accordance with bourgeois principles became a pressing necessity. It was up to society to rescue children from the streets and to integrate them in environments that restored their lost sense of domesticity –a cultural investment in the creation of productive members of society. Orphaned and vagrant children, often referred to as "street Arabs" in nineteenth-century fiction and philanthropic texts, were likened to stray animals –rootless, in need of rescue, and requiring social reintegration. Their "independence and liberty to the rights of property" constituted "a direct defiance of the state" (Murdoch 2006, 28), a threat paralleled by the stray dog, whose aimless street presence stood in stark contrast to the pet confined within bourgeois spaces such as "homes, shops, and schools" (Pemberton and Worboys 2007, 9). These philanthropic narratives employed a profoundly melodramatic tone that sought emotional support for their cause by presenting a dichotomous world of antagonistic opposites (Murdoch 2006, 24).

Fenwick's narrative adopts this same framework, applying the reformist view of childhood to dogs. Carlo, like the children in such literature, is depicted as an orphan consigned to the streets, stripped of property and domestic stability. His life unfolds in episodic adventures evocative of the traditional picaresque,

ultimately culminating in a happy resolution founded on key societal values. Carlo is reclaimed as property, symbolising his reintegration; he gains social productivity by taking a role in a theatre, and he secures a position within the social hierarchy. Fenwick's tale thus echoes the principles of philanthropic literature, portraying the dog, like the child, as a figure with the potential to adapt and equip himself with the skills and functions to serve the state and the nation as a spoke in the wheel of employability, societal contribution, and domesticity. Until this ideal is achieved, both the child and the dog are viewed as existing in a transitional state, their value tied to their potential for future integration. In Carlo's case, this transformation reaches its final stage with his employment at Drury Lane, a milestone that justifies and immortalises his journey in an exemplary narrative.

Furthermore, Fenwick's narrative, anthropomorphic as it may be, is indicative of an evolving and enlightened awareness of the dog as a self-conscious subject (Cosslett 2006; DeMello 2013). The story's repeated assertion that the dog himself authored the narrative ("it is to increase their good opinion of him, and to add to their pleasures, that he has now composed the narrative of his life," Fenwick states (1806, iv)) positions the text as a kind of Lacanian mirror stage *avant la lettre*. Through a tripartite temporal framework, Carlo's story portrays a dog with an acute sense of self. By acquiring speech, the dog transcends his status as the etymological *infans* –an entity lacking *logos* and, consequently, substance or identity, according to classical anthropocentric views. Anthropomorphisation, while a fictional device, becomes a necessary strategy deployed by Fenwick –like many other storytellers– to convey a profound message: the dog has achieved the status of a human narrator, rising above the significance of species taxonomy and standing on equal footing with the author, whose own identity is eclipsed by that of the animal.

Yet Carlo's tale sits at a paradoxical crossroads, for although in the narrative the education of the dog is conveyed as a means through which to mold a rational subject from whom goodness can be extracted, the reality of theatrical "education" functioned quite contrarily. Training for the stage was carried out through conditioning –Reynolds states that, so as to make him jump from the rock into the water, Carlo's attention had to be "removed from the distraction of stage lights, boards, *et cetera*" (Reynolds 1826, II 194)– and the dog's capacity to learn in such ways was deemed as less impressive than the possibility of him having an innate moral virtue, which is what the play sought to convey to audiences. The theatrical performance aimed either to refine or to accentuate this moral valuation. To project and represent canine moral goodness for the audience, the dog, therefore, had to undergo a process of "denaturalisation" (if conditioning is to be understood in such terms) so as to make him controllable and to automate his response into a reaction. Reynolds's comment in his biography that water was easier to handle than the dog further highlights Carlo's agency as a "battle of wills" (Howell 2019, 207) as much as a token of "resistance" (Despret 2013, 41). In Reynolds's terms, "The water we found tractable and accommodating; but during the first and second rehearsals, Carlo (…) sulked, and seemed, according to the technical phrase, inclined to 'play booty'. After several other successive trials, he would not jump; but at last (…) he immediately made the desired leap, and repeated it at least a dozen times, as much

to his own, as to our satisfaction" (1806, 194). Reynolds's statement reveals not only the shared view of both elements –water and the dog– as external to the theatre and subjugated to human control but also the necessity of breaking and taming them to reintegrate them into a space governed by illusion.

4. CONCLUSION: CHILDREN, MELODRAMA AND ECOFEMINISM

A timeworn theatrical adage advises against sharing the stage with children and animals. Their unpredictability and their potential to eclipse adult performers in the eyes of the audience can put the play or the performance in "danger." Perceived as intruders in the theatrical realm, the risk of imploding the simulation taking place on the stage becomes too great, and brings the performative act into a precarious tension between the "natural" and the artificial.

Fenwick's text laid the groundwork for a series of popular canine autobiographies, extending the tradition of the subgenre well into the nineteenth century. Riding the wave of breed fancy, many authors continued to rely on the Newfoundland as the most apt narrator and protagonist –the most famous being Mary Burrow's *Neptune, or, The Autobiography of a Newfoundland Dog* (1869). Other species soon joined the trend: horses and donkeys entered the literary scene, gradually advancing an exploration of the animal perspective and its broader significance in the art of narratology –the Comtesse de Ségur's *Mémoires d'un* âne (1860) and Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877) probably being the most renown. As popular culture integrated animals (and dogs, in particular) in the theatrical and literary expressions of a growing appreciation for the urban and the domestic, their representation must also be read in light of additional literature and texts aiming to redefine their proper "place" and behaviour in these changing social spaces. These texts often advocated for the humane treatment of dogs, recognising them as sentient beings deserving of protection from pain and proper education. While the primary concern remained the utility of the dog to human interests (that is, anthropocentrism was never really questioned), these works nevertheless ventured, however tentatively, into the realm of canine psychology in order to identify and establish the conditions that could best guarantee their wellbeing.

It is unavoidable to link Fenwick's defence of Carlo as a sentient being to the animal protection movements that gained prominence in nineteenth-century Britain and that ultimately led to the founding of the first Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1824. This connection becomes even more significant considering, as Diana Donald (2020) has shown, these movements were largely initiated, organised, and led by women –despite the intellectual credit for these efforts often being attributed to men (Gaarder 2011, 95). As Lissa Paul (2019) observes, Fenwick was a prominent figure in early modern feminist activism, though the interplay between this activism and her advocacy for children and animals in her work remains to be fully explored. Undoubtedly, in her text, the association of the dog's vulnerability with that of the child is closely tied to a portrayal of women as victims of oppression, in alignment with the classical melodramatic aesthetics

of victimhood (Thomasseau 1984, 35). As contemporary ecofeminist criticism has argued, both animality and femininity form two key vertices of a shared "constructed connection" (Gruen 1993, 61), recognised as expressions of the natural, the vulnerable, and the oppressed under patriarchal systems of exploitation (Gaard 1993; Birkeland 1993; Adams and Donovan 1995).

It could therefore be argued that Fenwick was a pioneer in connecting the humane values of animal protection to feminism, particularly through her use of melodramatic theatrical aesthetics. Her work plays a crucial role in the emerging defence of children, animals, and, by extension, women, articulated through a rhetoric of sentiment. In line with contemporary ecofeminist thought, the expression of suffering in this context should not be interpreted as a passive, helpless element reflective of female inaction, but rather as a proactive one, embodying feminine agency through the "performance of emotion" that underpins "the politics of protest and reform of the period" (Newey 2018, 149). This performance aims to evoke empathy from the audience, encouraging solidarity for the animal, the child, or the woman. As Laura Brown observes, there is an "engagement with the literary representation of dogs" that "coincides with and contributes to the rapid development of the humanitarian movements of this period" (Brown 2010, 130). This engagement is most evident in the deliberate use of melodramatic aesthetics, emphasising compassion, visual immediacy, and the suffering of the most vulnerable. The stage itself was instrumental in cultivating this sentiment, delving into what Haraway terms "multispecies companionship" (Haraway 2003, 11-14) –a concept also articulated by the French historian Jules Michelet, who, in his *Bible de l'humanité* (1864), described such companionship as "fraternity" among living beings (Michelet, 1864, 61). Amy Hughes notes the rise of *dogaturgy* –the proliferation of melodramas featuring dogs in the first half of the nineteenth century– and observes that these animals, including Reynolds's Carlo, exuded "loyalty, care, warmth, affection, determination," and if the audience "loved" them, it was because they were portrayed onstage as more than mere beasts: "they are love. They are more than beasts; they are best friends" (Hughes 2021, 225). As Laura Brown further asserts, in canine narratives, both dogs and children speak "the idiom of sentiment," functioning as a "trans-species mode of communication" (Brown 2010, 135). The language of sentiment thus appeals to emotion, evoking empathy and a mood that are central to the success of melodrama. Fenwick's text, therefore, not only illustrates how sentiment transcends species boundaries, but, like the mechanisms of melodrama, it demonstrates how this sentiment can bridge the gap between stage and audience, as well as between theatrical and literary forms. In other words, Fenwick's conjoining of humane and feminist sentiment is rooted in her ability to integrate melodramatic aesthetics into her work, channelling a "creative compassion" (Gilmour 2020) that fosters a sense of kinship among all vulnerable living beings, beyond the confines of species, literary genres, and cultural formats

Tragically, Carlo's real-life fate stood in stark contrast to the ideals espoused in Fenwick's narrative. Contemporary newspapers revealed that the dog was destroyed only a few years after achieving theatrical fame, following an attack on Reynolds's son. An article titled "Death of Carlo" published by *Sporting Magazine* in

1806 reported that, following such "crime," and by virtue of his "ungrateful nature," the dog was led to a butcher's slaughter-house in Clare market "where his vital thread was cut 'with edge of penny cord'" (1806, 6). The bitter irony lies in the fact that Carlo's stage training, designed to depict him as a rescuer of children, ultimately and in reality resulted in aggression toward a child. This anecdote of course echoes the numerous accounts of animals exploited for entertainment who, after enduring the relentless demands of show business, eventually "turn against" their handlers or owners (Peterson 2007, 33). One may deduce that Carlo's training –of which little is known beyond Reynolds's remarks about his lack of cooperation– mirrored the coercion and cruelty often associated with Victorian accounts of child performers exploited behind the scenes of theatrical productions (Flegel 2016, 73-108). It is not difficult to imagine that Carlo, a victim of the theatre industry's negligence, long runs and pursuit of profit, became in life the antithesis of the symbol he represented on stage and in Fenwick's narrative. Once again, human interference appears to have warped the natural goodness of the animal, fulfilling its tragic propensity to corrupt what it seeks to control.

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MARK TWAIN'S LATE ANIMAL TALES: SENTIMENTAL ANTHROPOMORPHISM AS ANTHROPOCENE CRITIQUE

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Abstract

This article rereads two of Mark Twain's late and most explicitly political but understudied texts involving non-human animals, the short story "A Dog's Tale" (1903) and the novella *A Horse's Tale* (1906), within an Anthropocene context. Although the texts came into existence long before the notion of the Anthropocene was around, the article argues that Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism has relevance as Anthropocene critique and offers models for alternative narratives of the Anthropocene. After briefly introducing relevant historical and conceptual contexts, my analysis focuses on two specific facets of Twain's narrative technique, spotlighting its potential as Anthropocene critique and for Anthropocene storytelling. On the one hand, the article shows that Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism resonates with the Anthropocene by rescaling the imagination through its anthropomorphized people and arguing for an alternative, collective ethics of care that transcends species boundaries. On the other hand, I demonstrate how Twain's technique allows for rethinking and troubling the caesurae of species and race as arbitrary constructions, which interlinks with recognizing the Anthropocene as (also) a racial process.

Keywords: Animal Narrators, Anthropocene, Anthropomorphism, Mark Twain, Race, Species

LOS ÚLTIMOS CUENTOS DE ANIMALES DE MARK TWAIN:
EL ANTROPOMORFISMO SENTIMENTAL COMO CRÍTICA DEL ANTROPOCENO

Resumen

Este artículo es una relectura de dos textos tardíos y políticamente más explícitos, aunque poco estudiados, de Mark Twain, que incluyen animales no-humanos, el relato corto "A Dog's Tale" (1903) y la novela corta *A Horse's Tale* (1906), dentro del contexto del Antropoceno. Aunque los textos existieron mucho antes de que la noción del Antropoceno se usara, el artículo argumenta que el antropomorfismo sentimental de Twain tiene relevancia como crítica del Antropoceno y ofrece modelos para narrativas alternativas del mismo. Tras introducir brevemente contextos históricos y conceptuales relevantes, mi análisis se enfocará en dos facetas específicas de la técnica narrativa de Twain, destacando su potencial como crítica del Antropoceno y para la narración del Antropoceno. Por un lado, el artículo demuestra que el antropomorfismo sentimental de Twain tiene resonancia con el Antropoceno al redefinir la escala de imaginación a través de la gente antropomorfizada y al argumentar una alternativa, colectiva ética de cuidado que trasciende los límites de las especies. Por otro lado, demuestro cómo la técnica de Twain permite replantear y perturbar la cesura de las especies y la raza como construcciones arbitrarias, que se interrelaciona al reconocer el Antropoceno (además) como un proceso racial.

Palabras clave: narradores animales, Antropoceno, antropomorfismo, Mark Twain, raza, especies

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1. INTRODUCTION

Readers familiar with Mark Twain have long been aware of his love of non-human animals and their prominent role in much of his writing. While this is reflected in animal-focused Twain collections as well as a growing ecocritical and animal studies engagement with the writer's work,[1] there is still comparatively little attention to Twain's most openly political texts involving non-human animals, written during the last two decades of his life. Being darker, more sardonic and often expressing both the author's pessimistic vision of humankind and his animal welfare activism, this late animal-writing, as Twain notes in his correspondence, came with "a righteous purpose" (Rasmussen 2013, 231), and had "a sermon concealed in it" (qtd. Fisher Fishkin 2010, 30). In the following, I focus on two of Twain's most explicitly political yet still understudied texts of this period, the short story "A Dog's Tale" (1903) and the novella *A Horse's Tale* (1906), to analyse what I read as their sentimental anthropomorphism and to argue for their relevance for contemporary Anthropocene discourse.

Although the stories came into existence long before the notion of the Anthropocene was around, I propose that Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism has the potential to function as Anthropocene critique and to offer strategies for storytelling in the Anthropocene. Building on historian Jean-Baptiste Fressoz's (2021) proposal to recognize the "main strength" of the Anthropocene concept as "primarily aesthetic" (288), my argument is that Twain's technique of using anthropomorphized animal narrators in "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* addresses aspects (e.g. scale, species) relevant to contemporary Anthropocene discourse and can be part of alternative aesthetic responses.

Ironically, one of the reasons for a traditional lack of attention to these stories is also the reason why they are so promising in relation to the Anthropocene discourse: namely their use of animal narrators to convey a bleak view of the (moral) qualities and supposed superiority of humankind. As Fisher Fishkin (2010) has pointed out, over the course of Twain's career, non-human animals turned from providing a "reliable source of humor at the start of his career" into functioning as "an Archimedean point from which to view –and evaluate– humans" (2). This trajectory toward an often stunningly pessimistic evaluation of humankind, combined with the overwhelming sentimentalism and pathos of the texts considered here has often led critics to either ignore them "in uncomfortable silence or dismiss them as occasional accidents or use them to damn Twain altogether for capitulating to a turn-of-the-century 'feminized' culture" (Camfield 1991, 97). Although more recent scholarship has increasingly returned to and found value in the stories, e.g. in light of language

[1] Collections of Twain's works focusing on non-human animals are found in Fisher Fishkin 2010; Rasmussen 2016; and Dawidziak 2016. For ecocritical work on Twain cf. e.g. Marcus 2016; Wolff 2018; Morel 2020; see also the contributions to the special issue of *The Mark Twain Annual* on "Mark Twain and Nature" (2019).

and interpretation (Guzman 2015), as a response to Modernist anxieties of isolation (Jacobs 2016), or as representing frontier values (Bradshaw 2019), Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism, with its dark view of the human animal, was traditionally one of the reasons for a relative scholarly silence on "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale*.[2]

However, it is precisely this narrative technique of Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism that, I argue, holds potential as Anthropocene critique. Not only do I concur with and build on claims that Twain's animal writing "speaks to readers today as much as it did in his own day, as we continue to grapple with the status of animals in society and to debate the ethical limits to the uses of animals for entertainment, science, food, and fashion" (VanDette 2020, 272). Moreover, I propose that Twain's technique in "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* resonates particularly with concerns of contemporary Anthropocene discourse. The stories are relevant, for example, for discussions of Anthropocene storytelling as they involve questions of (temporal) scaling through their animal narrators and their ideas about family and lineage, thus corresponding with the critical questions highlighted by Ursula Heise (2019): "If the Anthropocene indeed calls for a scaling-up of the imagination, how might that imagination translate into narrative? What characters and plot architectures would it involve? What models do existing narrative forms offer for telling the story of our climate-changed presents and futures?" (279). Additionally, Twain's stories help us focus on aspects of species and race, as they interlink slave narrative discourse with animal welfare activism, thus highlighting the Anthropocene as a racial process and providing strategies to aestheticize the Anthropocene in ways that enhance socio-political critique.

To demonstrate the relevance of these Twain stories to the Anthropocene discourse and contribute to a growing ecocritical engagement with the writer's work, I will analyse his sentimental anthropomorphism in "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* in three steps. First, I will briefly introduce the most relevant historical and conceptual contexts. Subsequently, my analysis focuses on two specific facets of Twain's narrative technique, spotlighting its potential as Anthropocene critique and for Anthropocene storytelling. On the one hand, I argue that Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism resonates with the Anthropocene by rescaling the imagination through its anthropomorphized people and arguing for an alternative, collective ethics of care that transcends species boundaries. On the other hand, I suggest that Twain's technique allows for rethinking and troubling caesurae of species and race as arbitrary constructions, which interlinks with recognizing the Anthropocene as (also) a racial process.

[2] More scholarship on both texts has appeared in recent years, in addition to the studies mentioned above e.g. by Skandera-Trombley 1997; Fisher Fishkin 2010, 26-32, 270-280; Marcus 2016, 225-228; Jassim 2019; and VanDette 2020. Scholars, however, still tend to treat the texts in passing or by doing the (important) work of historical contextualization, rather than providing close readings.

2. CONTEXTS: TWAIN'S SENTIMENTAL ANTHROPOMORPHISM, EVOLUTIONISM, AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

Before analysing more specific facets of Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism in relation to the Anthropocene discourse, a brief introduction and contextualization of the stories is in order. There are two primary contexts for my reading of "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale*, an immediate historical one of post-Darwinian evolutionism, and the conceptual context of the Anthropocene. With respect to the former, Twain's historical context, scholars have drawn attention to how both stories polemically participate in a late-nineteenth-century animal welfare discourse, particularly the Transatlantic anti-vivisection movement and the activism against bullfighting in Spain (cf. Fisher Fishkin 2010, 257-270). Inspired by the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* in 1871, Twain contributed to this discourse by publishing various texts that negotiated the much-debated question of the biological and psychological relationships between human and non-human animals, and which often actively take a stance against cruelty toward non-human animals. While others have explored in much detail how Twain acted on the question of vivisection (cf. e.g. Fisher Fishkin 2010, 267-270), the crucial aspect of the historical context for my argument is Twain's broader attack on the notion of (evolutionary) human superiority. His late texts frequently respond to Darwinian discourse by de-throning the human, have a strong impulse against anthropocentrism, and "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* –perhaps counterintuitively given their anthropomorphism and their overt animal welfare concerns– are no exception in this respect. Though gaining a special place in Twain's *oeuvre* as featuring animals as narrators, they also mirror the concerns of pieces such as the "Letter to the London Anti-Vivisection Society" (1899) or the anonymously published philosophical dialogue "Instinct and Thought" (1906). The stories are an expression of Twain's famous renunciation of his "allegiance to the Darwinian theory of the Ascent of Man from the Lower Animals" and his proposal that a "new and truer" theory should be "named the *Des*cent of Man from the Higher Animals" (2010 [1896], 117, emphasis in original), and thus to be read as part of a deep and fervent critique of the human as a superior figure.

At the same time, this critique intimately relates Twain's stories conceptually to the second context of my argument, contemporary Anthropocene discourse, especially if we theorize the Anthropocene as a concept that, as Fressoz (2021) claims, is not merely to be viewed as "a scientific discovery" but whose "main strength" is "primarily aesthetic" (288). The Anthropocene thusly understood "provided the thrill of a new grand narrative, a new grandiose horizon for political and technological action" (298), yet it is rooted in, drawing from, and must be seen in relation to "old cultural tropes" (297). While Fressoz reads the Anthropocene primarily in relation to old cultural tropes of the sublime, considering Twain's late animal stories raises the question of how a sentimental anthropomorphism, too, might speak to and provide strategies for (narrating in) the Anthropocene. With their anthropomorphism, the texts' focus lies explicitly on the question of species –the primary way through which Twain's stories conceptually interlink with questions of the Anthropocene discourse. After all, this discourse centres on introducing the human as species,

if we recall its "official narrative" that "'we,' the human species, unconsciously destroyed nature to the point of hijacking the Earth system into a new geological epoch. In the late twentieth century, a handful of Earth system scientists finally opened our eyes. So now we know; now we are aware of the global consequences of human action" (Bonneuil/Fressoz 2016, xii). The human species central in this narrative is always on the verge of translating into human hubris seeing our (im) potence as we recognize humanity as the first geological superpower to be conscious of its role. There is, of course, awareness in the Anthropocene discourse that "[t] his story of awakening is a fable" (xiii) and inadequate in a variety of senses. In this context, reading stories like Twain's reminds us of historical forms of human hubris and gives us insights into earlier critiques of humankind as (in Twain's case evolutionarily understood) the crown of creation. Here, we could thus learn from additional cultural tropes by probing the potential of (narrative) strategies and forms of (socio-political) critique for today's contexts. This, I argue, can also be true for anthropomorphic forms of narration such as Twain's, especially if we recognize with Dipesh Chakrabarty (2016) that, for the humanities, our current "crisis requires us to 'imagine sympathetically the predicament' of not just humans but of nonhumans as well" (380). Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism can be enriching as one way to "imagine sympathetically" beyond the human in its anthropocenic negotiation, if we understand Twain's critique of the human as providing open (and imperfect) strategies that might help politicize the Anthropocene in alternative ways. A sentimental anthropomorphism may offer frameworks to represent and act well in the Anthropocene understood as "a far more perverse and unequal process that accentuates other forms of vulnerability and injustice" (Fressoz 2021, 292-3).

In the context of the Anthropocene discourse, Twain's sentimental tales with their animal narrators serve important functions not only as reminders of our entanglements within the more-than-human (whether in light of potential recognition of ourselves, in Twain's times, as crown of evolution or, today, as geological force), but also because they provide opportunities to rethink the processes and caesurae that construct the (multiplying) figure of the human and offer narrative models that Anthropocene storytelling could rely on. The central and most obvious function of Twain's strategy of sentimental anthropomorphism is that it is counter-intuitively driven by an impulse against anthropocentrism, and seeks to dethrone the human as a superior figure. The stories are in this respect cases supporting theoretical positions and analyses that argue against anthropomorphism as a primarily damaging form of discourse (cf. for an introductory overview e.g. Herman 2018, 5-7). Ecofeminist Val Plumwood (2002), for example, though conceding that there are damaging forms of anthropomorphism, has suggested that "cross-species representation, like cross-cultural representation, is not automatically colonising or self-imposing, and may express motives and meanings of sympathy, support and admiration" (60), and Twain's texts are certainly examples of the latter. They do not withstand charges of sentimentality, to be sure, but the "anthropodenial," understood with primatologist Frans de Waal (1997) as the attempt "to build a brick wall to separate humans from the rest of the animal kingdom" (50-53), that is reflected in the traditional ignorance and devaluing of these two Twain-stories –often precisely through terms such as

anthropomorphism or sentimentality– is symptomatic of hyper-separating forms of thought that are much more damaging than Twain's stories' featuring of non-human animals as narrators.

In their sentimental anthropomorphism, the stories share a fundamental strategy of establishing strong empathy and emotional bonds between readers and their first-person animal narrators, with an aim to radically expose through gruesome endings what human hubris and disregard for non-human others leads to. Both "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* begin with engaging readers emotionally by introducing their animal narrators –a female canine named Aileen Mavourneen and a male equine named Soldier Boy– as admirable protagonists displaying flawed reasoning capacities but high ethical standards. In the first story, first published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1903 and subsequently as a hardcover book in 1904, the dog as first-person narrator begins to tell her tale light-heartedly enough and with typical Twain-humour, as she reveals to her audience "My father was a St. Bernard, my mother was a collie, but I am a Presbyterian" (Twain 2010 [1903], 165). Aileen shows herself equipped with an admirably selfless ethics, inherited from her mother's "kindly ways, and from her we learned also to be brave and prompt in time of danger, and not to run away, but face the peril that threatened friend or stranger, and help him the best we could without stopping to think what the cost might be to us" (167). As the protagonist is sold to another family and bears a "little puppy," she continues to embrace this philosophy when rescuing the family's baby from a burning nursery, only to be beaten and severely injured by the head of the family, Mr. Gray, a "renowned scientist," who initially fails to see her heroism and suspects an attack on the newborn. Gray ultimately kills the narrator's puppy in a laboratory for the purpose of proving a point to his scientist friends (169, 168). Though turning into an obvious condemnation of the mistreatment of animals, the tale has also been read as more than just literary anti-vivisection activism and one of Twain's "worst sentimental excesses" (Rasmussen 1994), for instance, as criticism of Calvinism (Fulton 2009) or as a condemnation of slavery (Herzberg 1977-78).

With *A Horse's Tale*, written during the fall of 1905 and first published in *Harper's Weekly* in the fall of 1906, parallels in terms of narrative strategy abound. This novella, too, which has been read e.g. through themes of crossdressing (Skandera-Trombley 1997) and the frontier (Bradshaw 2019), deploys anthropomorphism through a first-person narrator, as its equine protagonist, the military horse Soldier Boy, begins to introduce his admirable pedigree and character features. Although different from "A Dog's Tale" in featuring a variety of both human and non-human narrators, and partly presented through letters, the text centrally involves dialogues and monologues by non-human animals to tell its tale about nine-year-old Cathy Allison, orphaned in Europe, who is sent to live with her uncle, General Allison at a frontier outpost in Oregon. Cathy becomes the fort's darling and Soldier Boy's best friend and is made a mock officer. In episodes set on the prairie that seemingly turn a large portion of the text into a harmless children's story, during which the horse saves the child from a pack of wolves (Twain 2010 [1906], 219), Cathy lives through various adventures before eventually moving back to Europe with her uncle and Soldier Boy. The most striking structural parallel with "A Dog's Tale" occurs with

the radical, dramatic ending of *A Horse's Tale*, which, like the former story, does not spare readers feelings of despair. In Southern Spain, the horse is abducted, sold multiple times, mistreated by various owners, and ends up as a mount in a bullfight, where little Cathy, accidentally in the audience, recognizes her lost companion, tries to save him, and is killed together with her equine friend.

In both cases, it is crucial to see that Twain, through his sentimental anthropomorphism, humanizes non-human animals as narrators, but that he does so with an aim to deconstruct notions of human superiority. Both texts overtly refrain from proposing through their anthropomorphism that animals were reasoning in a human way or that they had identical capacities for human knowledge and means of communication, but at the same time attack the notion that reasoning capacity marks the singularly most valuable form of life. This reflects Twain's idea that "just because animals didn't put their thoughts into human language, it didn't mean that they did not think, and just because animals didn't put their emotions into human language, it didn't mean that they did not feel" (Fisher Fishkin 2010, 260). "A Dog's Tale," while stressing (and drawing humour from the fact) that non-human animals do *not* have reasoning powers –as signalled unmistakably through the various misunderstandings and canines' inability to use (human) language meaningfully, as they mix up words and "flashed out a fresh definition every time"– implies that such reasoning powers, especially in what is presented as unfeeling science with its "frosty intellectuality," should not be considered the single most significant factor in designating value in forms of life (Twain 2010 [1903], 166, 168). *A Horse's Tale*, on the other hand, offering a more complex communicative situation with multiple human and non-human narrators, deconstructs the singularity of human knowledge production by implying through its animal characters that, though unable to communicate with humans through shared language, they do possess a deep knowledge and (especially ethical) understanding about the world, for example, about the character qualities of their owners and of their plans, such as an ambush on Buffalo Bill that the non-human animals sense (cf. Twain 2010 [1906], 216). As pathetic and pessimistic as the endings of both stories are, Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism therefore also presents a broader philosophy set against notions of human superiority that emerges historically out of Twain's anti-Darwinian stance, but that also bears relevance in an Anthropocene context.

3. RESCALING THE IMAGINATION THROUGH ANTHROPOMORPHIZED PEOPLE

One of two specific observations I wish to make regarding the potential of Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism as a means to think about aspects of the Anthropocene discourse concerns the ways in which his writing may help expand our imagination of life in the Anthropocene with respect to questions of scale. Chakrabarty (2012) explains what is at stake with scaling as a principal factor of the Anthropocene when describing how "the need arises to view the human simultaneously on contradictory registers: as a geophysical force and as a political

agent, […] belonging at once to differently-scaled histories of the planet, of life and species, and of human societies" (14). The Anthropocene changes the conditions and coordinates of human existence, as it conceptually multiplies dimensions of the human figure by introducing "other modes of being" that, in Chakrabarty's (2015) view, humans have "no way of experiencing" (180). Others disagree with the latter assessment and literary scholars in particular have weighed in by thinking about representational strategies and asking through numerous concepts and analyses which literary forms could provide adequate means of scaling up the imagination for the Anthropocene.[3]

In this context, a narrative technique such as Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism, too, has the potential to contribute to the discussion of scaling that is central to the Anthropocene discourse. With Twain, I argue, diversifying scales and modes of being occurs not by focusing on human existence and (non-) agencies through explicitly multiplying a figure of the human or a play with (deep) time, but instead through introducing modes of non-human existence, perception and agency through anthropomorphism. My argument at this point aligns with suggestions for (certain) anthropomorphisms' usefulness, e.g. Bekoff's (2013) suggestion that anthropomorphism "allows other [than human] animals' behavior and emotions to be accessible to us" (63) in however limited ways, but extends this idea of accessibility to an Anthropocene dimension. Perhaps surprisingly, given the direction of a "scaling-up of the imagination" that is usually cited with the Anthropocene (Heise 2019, 279), Twain's strategy draws its power from a meaningful *re*scaling (more of a "scaling-down" than a "scaling-up") that multiplies temporalities of life in presents made narratively accessible to humans. Thereby, Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism simultaneously estranges and familiarizes human perspectives, playing with the notion of a multiscalar existence that does not explicitly address a planetary or deep temporal scale but nevertheless resonates with the Anthropocene discourse as it deploys non-human narrators to multiply modes of existence and introduce the thought of collective experience beyond the human.

Twain's strategy in this respect is twofold and involves, on one hand, a play with temporalities through anthropomorphized units, and, on the other hand, a strategy that ridicules ideas of lineage in favor of an ethics of care. With respect to the former, it is important to note how Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism fundamentally relies on a play with narrative time. The texts do not simply have animals tell stories, but also realize their anthropomorphism through what Genette (1980) called anisochronies, i.e. narrative's play with the relation between narrated time and time of narration (cf. 86-95). Both texts, in the space of a few pages, cover considerable time spans, such as entire years or seasons. "A Dog's Tale" begins with Aileen Mavourneen's birth and swiftly depicts her puppyhood and her move to a new home and her own motherhood, deploying phrases such as "[p]retty soon it was spring" or "I have watched two whole weeks" (Twain 2010 [1903], 173). The

[3] Among these analyses are e.g. those by Trexler 2015; Ghosh 2016; Heise 2019.

same is true for *A Horse's Tale*, which does not reveal exactly how much time passes in the diegetic world, but nevertheless suggests a considerable discrepancy between narrated time and time of narration, since the events of the tale probably take more than a year, from the beginning of Cathy Allison's moving from Europe to the U.S. through her prairie adventures to her resettling in Europe.

While such play with narrative time is central to the texts' anthropomorphizing strategy, a related feature of Twain's anthropomorphic play with temporalities that simultaneously makes "animals' behavior and emotions […] accessible to us" (Bekoff 213, 63) and multiplies and rescales modes of existence in ways that resonate with the Anthropocene discourse, comes with the animal narrators' use of humanly perceivable and measurable units. In *A Horse's Tale*, Soldier Boy's language includes human forms of sizing up and measuring the perceived world, as he conveys his perspective in "months" (226) and "years"; weighs the world in "pounds" (195) and marks its distances in "feet" and "miles" (196, 197). In "A Dog's Tale," on the other hand, it is primarily the idea of family that functions as an affective as well as temporal unit enabling accessibility for a human experience. Twain's strategy of making Aileen Mavourneen, her puppy, and the father Robin Adair identifiable as a (nuclear) family not only aims to incite intense emotional responses against the horrific practice of vivisection, but also deploys family as a measurable unit capable of translating a differently scaled way of being into a human perceptive framework. As the stories introduce humanizing categories such as family, age, or stage in life (puppyhood, motherhood, etc.), their engagement is therefore not in an upscaling of the imagination through different figures of the human. Instead, we find a strategy that draws attention to the constructedness of human perceptive frameworks and measuring relations to the physical world that manifest both through Twain's animal narrators, and in his passing comments on the uncertainties that mark human perceptions of time, for example, when suggesting that "nobody can keep account of days or anything else where she is" or that Cathy "[i]n some ways, is just her age, but in others she's as old as her uncle" (2010 [1906], 201, 211). Units seemingly fixed within human perceptive frames are unveiled as non-absolute, as Twain's anthropomorphism deconstructs notions of objectively measurable properties, temporalities of life, and belonging to collectives. Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism may not scale up our imagination, but it forces readers to reconsider more flexibly the ways through which we claim to experience the world and "trains" them thereby to consider potentials for multi-scaling beyond the human.

Additionally, Twain's play with the notion of family is important because his sentimental anthropomorphism thereby engages in a second strategy relatable to Anthropocene ideas about scale, of ridiculing lineage in favor of an ethics of care that transcends species boundaries. Family, in Twain's stories also involves a differently-scaled temporality that comes through family understood as lineage, and making fun of the latter is one of the primary sources of Twain's humor in both "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale*. This is visible from the outset in both texts, which open with lengthy portrayals of their protagonist-narrator's pedigree. While as Aileen Mavourneen proudly reveals her descendance from a St. Bernard and a collie, claiming that this makes her a "Presbyterian" (Twain 2010 [1903], 165),

Soldier Boy prides himself in being the son of an "all American" mother of "the bluest Blue Grass aristocracy" and a "broncho"-father (Twain 2010 [1906], 197, 198). Through the latter in particular, Twain ridicules concepts of lineage, as Soldier Boy explains that descending from a broncho is "nothing as to recent lineage, but plenty good enough when you go a good way back." Citing a Yale professor who "found skeletons of horses no bigger than a fox, bedded in the rocks" that were "ancestors of my father," Soldier Boy claims that this "makes me part blue grass and part fossil" (198) –a humorous conclusion that is both contributing to Twain's overall strategy of evoking sympathy for his animal narrators (and outrage at their eventual perishing), and another way through which the stories deconstruct our accepted terminologies, units, and processes of making sense of the world, which may be just as myopic as Soldier Boy's (no doubt existing) logic.

Moreover, these attempts of Twain's animal narrators to give themselves an ancestry are meaningful when read more globally as part of Twain's proposal of an ethics of care that transcends species boundaries. The stories convey the idea of a fundamental collectivity that transcends identifiable species boundaries by interlinking and representing them in moments of living together and suffering together. The former moments occur especially at those points where solidarity beyond species boundaries saves lives, for example, when Aileen Mavourneen heroically saves the human baby in "A Dog's Tale" (Twain 2010 [1903], 170-171) or when Cathy in *A Horse's Tale* is defended by Soldier Boy against a pack of wolves (Twain 2010 [1906], 218-219). By contrast, the latter moments can be found in the gruesome endings of the tales, which highlight suffering and dying across species lines, whether in the foreshadowed despair of the returning Gray family's children over the death of Aileen and her puppy (2010 [1903] 174), or, drastically, in Soldier Boy and Cathy's joint perishing in the cruel spectacle of a bullfight (2010 [1906], 227-228). Ultimately, Twain thereby suggests that lineage becomes a matter of secondary importance in comparison to an ethics of care that transcends species boundaries, because in the stories the fates of different species are shown as inevitably entangled. Beyond speaking to Anthropocene questions of scaling by inciting readers to reconsider and become more flexible with respect to a rescaling of human experience through considering non-human animal perspectives, Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism thus also acts as a productive reminder of the irrelevance of a scaling-up through human figures, if we do not simultaneously address questions of collective, trans-species agencies and lives in the presents of the Anthropocene.

4. RETHINKING THE CAESURAE OF SPECIES AND RACE

Another way in which Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism resonates within the Anthropocene discourse is through fundamentally challenging categories of species and race. In this respect, Twain's stories present ideas that correspond with critiques within the Anthropocene discourse that seek to fracture and "replac[e] the rather vague 'anthropos' with the nations and companies, institutions and imaginaries, technologies and ideologies that are the true drivers of the

Anthropocene" (Fressoz 2015, 70). Such critiques of a perceived flattening through the concept of the Anthropocene that regularly lament the lack of a structural critique and the risk of depoliticization take various forms, for example, in models that fragment and multiply the human figure (e.g. Chakrabarty's (2015) distinction between "*homo*" and "*Anthropos*") or in the alternative names prominently given to the proposed geological epoch (capitalocene, plantationocene etc.). A more specific context of Twain's texts as challenging the human as superior category are moreover the racial critiques of the Anthropocene that have emerged over the past years (cf. e.g. Davis et al. 2019; Pulido 2018). Instead of rehearsing the latter, I want to focus here through a close reading on two ways in which Twain's stories speak to the Anthropocene as a racial process by challenging categories of species and race. On one hand, I argue, "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* trouble the boundaries of species and racial categories through their discourse on lineage, on the other hand, they play with narrative templates of slavery and anti-Black violence.

At the heart of Twain's texts lies an attack on what Michel Foucault once described in relation to his influential notion of biopolitics and explaining the emergence of modern forms of racism, as "a way of establishing a biological-type caesura within a population that appears to be a biological domain" (2003, 255). This view of racism as "primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life" (254) pertains to the core of how Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism troubles constructions of species and racial categories through representations of lineage. As laid out, both "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* are humorously engaging questions of lineage in conjunction with Twain's ridiculing of his talking animals' inability to use human language adequately. However, besides being evidence that Twain's anthropomorphism resists anthropocentrism by negating the possibility of cross-species communication, this strategy also offers a powerful critique of the arbitrary and violent human constructions of species and race. Consider, for instance, the following discussion between "Soldier Boy and the Mexican Plug" (chapter VI), which features the story's hero and another horse discussing Shekels, a dog at the fort:

> "I [Soldier Boy] have always regarded him as a doubtful dog, and so has Potter. Potter is the great Dane. Potter says he is no dog, and not even poultry – though I do not go quite so far as that."
> "And I [the Mexican Plug] wouldn't, myself. Poultry is one of those things which no person can get to the bottom of, there is so much of it and such variety. It is just wings, and wings, and wings, till you are weary: turkeys, and geese, and bats, and butterflies, and angels, and grasshoppers, and flying-fish, and – well, there is really no end to the tribe; it gives me the heaves just to think of it. But this one hasn't any wings, has he?"
> "No."
> "Well, then, in my belief he is more likely to be a dog than poultry. I have not heard of poultry that hadn't wings. Wings is the *sign* of poultry; it is what you tell poultry by. Look at the mosquito."
> "What do you reckon he is, then? He must be something."
> "Why, he could be a reptile; anything that hasn't wings is a reptile."
> (Twain 2010 [1906], 213, emphasis in original)

As the conversation takes its course, Twain not only makes fun of his animals' quaint logics, but also, in a more serious underlying critique, challenges the ways in which humans construct and define species and races. Moving on, the dialogue initially appears to gain more humorous facets than seriousness, as the Mexican Plug reveals his knowledge, allegedly gained from overhearing one Professor Cope of the Philadelphia Institute, that "any plantigrade circumflex vertebrate bacterium that hadn't wings and was uncertain was a reptile" (213-214). Thus, the two characters hilariously come to agree that, since Soldier Boy has never heard of "a more uncertainer dog than what this one is" the only possible conclusion can be: "Well, then, he's a reptile. That's settled." (214) However, there is more seriousness if one considers this conversation for the arbitrariness with which the two characters arrive at their agreement about the nature of living people, and the effect this categorization as well as other claimed "lineages" in the stories have. In this respect, Twain also uses his non-human animal narrators to scrutinize and critique human language, methods, and categorizations, as he shows the power effects of the animals' constructions of "biological-type caesurae" that "break into the domain of life" (Foucault 2003, 255, 254). Twain effectively seeks through his animals to demystify the construction of such caesurae, implies the ridiculous and arbitrary genesis of categories, but also draws attention to the power effects and hypocrisies that they enable. Shekels, in this example, upon learning of his alleged reptile-ness from the Mexican Plug, comes to embrace with pride being "a plantigrade circumflex vertebrate bacterium that hasn't any wings and is uncertain" (215), assessing this category not only as "wonderfully grand and elegant," but also as socially relevant, as Potter, the great Dane, will now "be glad to" associate with him (215).

Ultimately, Twain's stories suggest that species/racial categorizations emerge as both arbitrary constructions and with real effects of social power. Categories created through "biological-type caesurae" are simultaneously revealed as ridiculous and as discriminating discourse. The honesty of the animals in both "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* when claiming that they deploy "large words meaning nothing" (Twain 2010 [1903], 165) for power effects becomes also a fundamental critique of processes of speciesism and racism that shape the history of the Anthropocene, as Twain condemns human feelings of superiority through his narrators, who offer an alternative to the human model of handling differences between forms of life. Whereas humans, in the stories, despite their capacity for morality, opt for essentializing their categories to exert absolute power over (and potentially destroy) living beings, Twain's animals, echoing his famous statement that Darwin should have spoken of "the *De*scent of Man from the Higher Animals" (2010 [1896], 117, emphasis in original), are the ones who display the most formidable moral qualities. Soldier Boy formulates this alternative to human hubris most clearly when stating, in response to Shekel's hypocritical humbleness, "We cannot all be reptiles, we cannot all be fossils; we have to take what comes and be thankful it is no worse. It is the true philosophy." (Twain 2010 [1906], 216) Twain's animal narrators thus resonate within the Anthropocene discourse by reminding us of the arbitrariness as well as the effects of biopolitical caesurae, but also by engaging in a "true philosophy" that speaks to human hubris and seeks to introduce modesty.

Yet another way in which Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism speaks to the Anthropocene, and perhaps the way that most explicitly relates to racial dimensions, lies in the stories' deployment of narrative templates of slavery and anti-Black violence. In this respect, the relevance of Twain's stories as Anthropocene critique lies less in their proposing or reminding us of a "true philosophy," and instead in Twain's offering of storytelling models and their potentials (and pitfalls) for strategies today. Both "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* deal with questions of slavery in implicit as well as explicit ways. Aileen Mavourneen is "sold and taken away" from her beloved mother, echoing scenes of family separations in slave narratives, and moves into a "charming home" reminiscent of living in the Big House of an antebellum plantation (Twain 2010 [1903], 167, 168). Here, she refers to the head of the house as "master," is allowed "visiting among the neighbor dogs" (169) to produce offspring, and is physically abused without reason. Similarly, in *A Horse's Tale* (2010 [1906]) the animals recognize their status as enslaved, as references to human "masters" and their knowledge of their status as "property" suggest (cf. 207-209). This becomes especially apparent in Soldier Boy's eventual fate of being sold "twelve times" and "each time it was down a step lower, and each time I got a harder master" (227), before ending up in the deadly bullfight. However, the most striking way in which Twain proposes analogies between violence against non-human animals and against racialized enslaved humans comes with a Spaniard's retelling of his experience of a bullfight to an American. Antonio, an expatriate for 13 years, recalls what he considers a "grand sport" (221) and describes the bullfight as a fascinating spectacle, to which the frontiersman Thorndike responds "Well, it is perfectly grand, Antonio, perfectly beautiful. Burning a nigger don't begin." (225) At this point, Twain goes further than drawing broad analogies related to slavery, as some have noted (cf. e.g. Herzberg 1977-78), offering a more concrete critique of both the bullfight and horrific forms of racial violence in the turn-of-the-century United States.

Although this facet of Twain's sentimental strategy is obviously extremely problematic, recalling how a prominent writer like Twain deployed such analogies can be important from today's perspective as it may enhance thinking through contemporary narrative and environmentalist strategies for the Anthropocene. In other words, it is important to read texts such as "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* to become aware of and to be able to recognize such "old cultural trope" (Fressoz 2021, 297), especially those with problematic implications, such as narratives drawing analogies between violence against Black people and against non-human animals. Within Twain's historical context, it certainly made sense to use this analogy, considering the historical links between the abolitionist movement and animal welfarism in the nineteenth century. At the same time, however, it is also clear that, though Twain's (and other much more recent) theoretical positions suggesting interlinkages between exploiting human and non-human animals are often philosophically convincing, drawing simplistic analogies today can be highly controversial and counterproductive, as, for example, reactions to the 2005 PETA campaign "Are Animals the New Slaves?" have shown (cf. Johnson 2018, 1-7). Ultimately, knowing these strategies and their histories as cultural tropes is

nevertheless important for highlighting the racial histories that have produced the Anthropocene as well as for alerting us to learn from and use new forms of addressing this history through literary, ecocritical, and environmental activism.

5. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, I wish to make three broader propositions as to the potential of Twain's sentimental anthropomorphism in an Anthropocene context. First, it is important to recognize that Twain's stories are cases that highlight how texts written well before the Anthropocene discourse came into being have addressed some of its core concerns and should be considered, especially if we conceptualize the Anthropocene as "primarily aesthetic" (Fressoz 2021, 288). My readings of "A Dog's Tale" and *A Horse's Tale* demonstrate that the stories, openly political in their historical contexts of animal welfare and Darwinian evolutionism, also offer ideas relevant for Anthropocene questions of scale and species, and for racial critiques of the Anthropocene. Second, one should thus stress that Twain's technique of sentimental anthropomorphism should (in part) be considered as part of the repertoire of Anthropocene storytelling and that anthropomorphic strategies deserve to be further explored, especially if taken as gestures that can act as meaningful reminders of the forms of thought and practices that have created our Anthropocene moment. If we are indeed looking for new forms of Anthropocene storytelling, Twain's tales are of relevance as their anthropomorphic form potentially adds to positions ranging, as Erin James (2022) suggests, from those theorists who argue that our "top priority […] should be the pursuit of the right type of narrative" to those who are "critical of narrative's anthropocentrism" (9). Third, I believe that looking at Twain's stories shows the importance of historically identifying and (re-)combining different environmental traditions today. My readings stress the necessity to look for bridges rather than demarcations between different forms of environmental (literary) traditions. If we read the Anthropocene as an aesthetic process that relies on "old cultural tropes" and if we are seeking to keep the Anthropocene from "becoming a new tool of disinhibition" (Fressoz 2021, 297), considering voices such as Twain's and probing their effectiveness for an Anthropocene critique might well be part of our solutions.

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BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM: INTERSPECIES COLLABORATION AND SURVIVAL IN REBECCA YARROS' *EMPYREAN* SERIES[1]

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Abstract

This paper examines Rebecca Yarros' *Empyrean* series, focusing on the human-dragon bond as a posthumanist response to the consequences of the Anthropocene, symbolised in the text by the venins. Through the lens of ecocriticism and critical posthumanism, the article explores the connection between the protagonist, Violet Sorrengail, and her dragon, Tairn, which challenges traditional anthropocentric hierarchies by emphasising interspecies cooperation. The narrative's engagement with themes of mutual dependence, agency, and survival reflects on the broader implications of posthumanist alliances to resist ecological degradation. Hence, this paper aims to contribute to discussions on the environmental crisis, highlighting the need for collaborative, multi-species solutions in the face of the Anthropocene's destructive impact.

Keywords: Dragons, Ecocriticism, Critical Posthumanism, Fantasy Literature, Rebecca Yarros.

MÁS ALLÁ DEL ANTROPOCENTRISMO: COLABORACIÓN INTERESPECIES Y SUPERVIVENCIA EN LA SERIE *EMPYREAN* DE REBECCA YARROS

Resumen

Este artículo examina la serie *Empyrean* de Rebecca Yarros, centrándose en el vínculo humano-dragón como una respuesta posthumanista a las consecuencias del Antropoceno, simbolizadas en el texto por los venins. A través de la lente de la ecocrítica y el posthumanismo crítico, el artículo explora la conexión entre la protagonista, Violet Sorrengail, y su dragón, Tairn, la cual desafía las jerarquías antropocéntricas tradicionales al enfatizar la cooperación interespecies. El compromiso de la narrativa con los temas de dependencia mutua, agencia y supervivencia refleja las implicaciones más amplias de las alianzas posthumanistas para resistir la degradación ecológica. Por lo tanto, este artículo tiene como objetivo contribuir a las discusiones sobre la crisis ambiental, destacando la necesidad de soluciones colaborativas y multi-especies ante el impacto destructivo del Antropoceno.

Palabras clave: dragones; ecocrítica; posthumanismo crítico; literatura fantástica; Rebecca Yarros

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1. INTRODUCTION

Dragons have been among the most enduring and influential mythological creatures in literature, captivating the human imagination across centuries and cultures. Their presence in literary history is not merely incidental; dragons have consistently served as potent symbols, embodying complex ideas and values, probably because, as Margo DeMello explains, "[i]n a worldview there is often, either explicitly or implicitly, a set of assumptions about humanity's relationship with nature and with other animals" (2012, 319). Often depicted as monstrous and fearsome, Western dragons have traditionally been portrayed as adversaries that test human courage and resilience, thereby reinforcing the distinction between the human and the non-human, the "civilized" and the "wild" (Lethbridge 2018, 10). This symbolic function is deeply rooted in European medieval literature, where dragons are frequently associated with vices such as greed and avarice. A prime example is found in *Beowulf,* where the dragon's hoarding of a vast treasure underscores its role as a guardian of wealth, yet simultaneously as a representation of destructive greed (Lethbridge 2018, 10).

In Christian iconography, the dragon takes a distinct moral dimension, often depicted as an embodiment of evil and a direct antagonist to the forces of good. This is particularly evident in the legend of St. George, where the dragon symbolises the chaotic and malevolent forces that threaten both the physical and spiritual realms. St. George's victory over the dragon is not merely a triumph of good over evil but also a reaffirmation of the divine order and the power of faith (Lethbridge 2018, 10). Such depictions have cemented the dragon's role in Western literature and mythology as a formidable symbol of the Other and as a creature that must be confronted and subdued to restore harmony and order.

Despite their ancient origins, dragons have not remained static symbols confined to the past. Instead, they have continually evolved, adapting to the changing cultural landscapes of different eras. In contemporary literature and popular culture, dragons have experienced a remarkable resurgence, reflecting the genre's growing fascination with fantasy and myth. This resurgence is particularly notable in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, where dragons have become central figures in a wide array of fictional narratives. Unlike their medieval counterparts, modern dragons are often portrayed with greater complexity and variability. Some representations maintain strong ties to traditional myths and legends, reinterpreting these elements within new narrative frameworks. Others, however, introduce innovative aspects, drawing on diverse sources of inspiration, including global folklore, contemporary ecological concerns, and evolving notions of identity and

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otherness, as argued by Sandra Unerman in her overview of dragons in the twenty-first century (2002, 94). For instance, Benjamin Garner explains, *The Hobbit* (1937) depicts the dragon Smaug as a more classical figure of greed and destruction, yet even here, the dragon is endowed with a personality and intelligence that complicates its role as a mere antagonist (2015, 26).

The 2010s, in particular, marked a significant moment in the cultural depiction of dragons, as they became prominent figures in various forms of media. TV series like *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019) brought dragons into general audiences' imagination, not merely as mythical creatures but as complex beings with distinct personalities and agency. The dragons in *Game of Thrones* are integral to the narrative's exploration of power, loyalty, and the bonds between humans and non-humans, challenging traditional notions of dominion and control (Sheridan 2016, 27). Similarly, in the video game *The Elder Scrolls v: Skyrim* (2011) as well as in its online version, the *Elder Scrolls Online* (2014), dragons play a crucial role in the game's expansive world, serving as both adversaries and as beings with a rich, layered mythology that players can engage with. Film franchises like *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010-2019) and *The Hobbit* (2012-2014) further illustrate the versatility of the dragon figure in modern storytelling. In *How to Train Your Dragon*, the relationship between humans and dragons is reimagined as one of potential harmony and mutual respect, subverting the traditional narrative of conflict and conquest. This franchise highlights the possibility of interspecies kinship, presenting dragons as sentient beings with their own cultures and emotions (Sheridan 2016, 24). Their evolution from ancient mythological creatures to central figures in twentieth-century and twenty-first-century storytelling underscores their enduring relevance and the richness of their symbolic potential.

The evolving depiction of dragons in contemporary media not only reflects their enduring relevance but also invites deeper analysis of their symbolic roles and ontological significance, as explored in Alejandro Rivero-Vadillo's recent work. Rivero-Vadillo's analysis offers a compelling framework for understanding dragons within European tradition and contemporary narratives, positioning them within a liminal space that intersects three distinct ontologies. This positioning underscores the complexity of dragons as beings that resist simple categorisation, revealing their unique place in the literary and symbolic imagination. Firstly, since they reside in remote, non-human spaces and exhibit behaviours that align with a natural, untamed existence, they embody the ultimate essence of non-human animality. Secondly, dragons possess human-like qualities, such as the ability to speak human languages and exhibit emotions and behaviours that are traditionally associated with humans. Thirdly, dragons are depicted as possessing divine or preternatural attributes that elevate them beyond mere human or animal classification. Their capabilities, such as fire-breathing, flight, and magical properties inherent in their blood or bones, position them as superior beings, both biologically and transcendentally. This aspect highlights their role as entities that transcend human limitations and embody a form of otherness that is simultaneously animalistic, human, and divine (Rivero-Vadillo 2023, 42). Hence, as Rivero-Vadillo argues, this tripartite ontological framework situates dragons as potential incarnations of posthuman subjectivities, embodying

a form of sheer otherness that defies conventional ontological categories. Dragons, in this view, are not merely fantastical creatures but are instead complex symbols that encapsulate the convergence of animalistic, human, and divine attributes. Their symbolic capacities extend beyond those of inanimate objects or machinery, positioning dragons as entities that challenge anthropocentric perspectives and invite reflections on the nature of being and the limits of human understanding (Rivero-Vadillo 2023, 42).

Taking all of the above into account, this article shall focus on Rebecca Yarros' *Empyrean* series, which delves into the complexities of human-dragon relationships, blending elements of fantasy and romance to reflect contemporary fascination with these mythical creatures. Yarros, a bestselling author known for her skilful integration of these genres, has established herself as a prominent voice within the "romantasy" genre. Before venturing into the fantastical realms of the *Empyrean*, Yarros had already built a substantial following through her work in contemporary romance, with over fifteen novels to her name. Her *Flight & Glory* series, among others, showcased her ability to craft emotionally resonant narratives, earning her a loyal readership. However, it was the *Empyrean* series, launched with *Fourth Wing* in 2023, that truly propelled Yarros to new heights of literary fame. This success was notably amplified by the enthusiastic reception from the BookTok community, where readers eagerly shared their passion for the series, helping to cement its popularity among fantasy readers.

Set in the richly imagined fictional kingdom of Navarre, the *Empyrean* series follows the journey of Violet Sorrengail, a young woman thrust into the brutal and demanding world of dragon riders at the Basgiath War College. Central to the series is the exploration of humanimal bonds,[2] of which readers can find three distinct types: dragon-human,[3] gryphon-human, and wyvern-venin. These bonds fall into two clear groups: the collaborative relationships between dragons or gryphons and their human partners, and the destructive alliance between wyverns and venins. Although the gryphons and their fliers are initially portrayed as adversaries, the narrative soon uncovers a deeper truth —the real threat to dragons, gryphons, and human characters comes from the venins, humans who become corrupted after channelling magic directly from the land without the mediation of a dragon or gryphon (Yarros 2023a, 153). These venins, with their artificial dragon-like creatures, the wyverns, wreak havoc on Navarre's borders and beyond, extracting magic and life from the land and therefore killing innocent humans and other species alike. It is worth noting that the *Empyrean* series presents a world that can be understood as existing amidst the Anthropocene, where the consequences of human actions, and particularly the venins', ripple through both natural and magical ecosystems. In

[2] Please note that this article shall use the expression "humanimal bonds" rather than "human-animal bonds" in order to avoid anthropocentric dichotomies and the dangers of marking humans as non-animal, fostering human exceptionalism.

[3] Please note that this article uses the expressions "human/dragon" and "dragon/human" interchangeably to avoid reinforcing any anthropocentric bias.

this context, the gryphon riders, called "fliers," are revealed as defenders who fight against the venins in areas where the protective wards created by dragon-human bonds are not present.

Given these elements, this article argues that the *Empyrean* series explores a posthumanist alliance between humans and dragons as a strategic response to the Anthropocene's environmental destruction, symbolised by the venins. The series demonstrates how mutual dependence and shared power between species can resist the damaging consequences of ecological degradation. By shifting the narrative from human supremacy over nature to one of interspecies cooperation, the *Empyrean* series explores the Anthropocene's destructive impact and suggests that alliances between species may be the only path to survival.

2. VENINS AND THE ANTHROPOCENE: POISONING THE LAND AND LIFE

The venins in the secondary world of Yarros' series pose a common threat to all forms of life, human and otherwise, including the mighty dragons. The name "venin," which, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary means "any of the various toxic substances in snake venom" ("venin"), is already suggestive of their destructive effects on the land and all forms of life. Furthermore, it is important to highlight the symbolic connection between venins and the historical associations of dragons with serpentine traits. As Louise W. Lippincott explains, "ancient dragons were considered [..] as large, exotic snakes" (1981, 2). This connection positions venins as figures embodying some of the most negative attributes that can be ascribed to dragons, almost as their inverted counterparts. The venins' aspect, characterised by the "[d]istended red veins spidering all around bright red eyes," further reinforces their mythical-like and sinister nature. However, the main character eventually learns that they are pretty much real in her world only by the end of the first novel. At one point in the first novel, the main character is asking Tairn, a big black dragon that is primarily featured in the story, about these venins and their wyverns, to which he reacts by stating that they are poisonous "abominations" (Yarros 2023a, 437).

The connection between the venin characters in Yarros' series and poison can be related to the issue of the Anthropocene and its poisonous and deadly effects on all forms of life. The Anthropocene, is a geological epoch in which there has been a significant shift in the relationship between humans and the global environment. In this context, the human species has become a decisive and direct actor in the ongoing climate crisis (Steffen et al. 2011, 843). Moreover, originally proposed as a geological era, has deeply affected current studies related to the environment and nonhuman. Flore Coulouma, for instance, explains the connection between ecocide and the Anthropocene, commenting that the collapse of human societies in the past hundred thousand years has resulted "either from genocide or ecocide, the destruction of their natural habitats" (2020, 160). Hence, in Yarros' text, we find that the venin-turned humans and their destructive consequences on the land and

all forms of life can echo extra-textual humans who, in the Anthropocene, poison their own habitat.

Donna Haraway takes Steffen et al.'s rather general definition of the Anthropocene further, and elaborates on the Anthropocene as a pivotal moment defined by "the destruction of places and times of refuge for people and other critters" (Haraway 2015, 160). Because of this, Haraway argues that the Anthropocene should be made as short as possible, and proposes to move on to the Chthulucene, an epoch that aims to blur boundaries and that includes "the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus" (2015, 160) In other words, the Chthulucene is the epoch resulting from the rejection of anthropocentric attitudes, including the exploitation of the more-than-human without ethical consequences. As Braidotti succinctly summarises, "in advanced capitalism, animals are disposable bodies traded in a global market of posthuman exploitation" (Braidotti 2009, 530). In the case of Yarros' text, we find that the venins do not only poison the land they extract magic and power from but also any kind of organic life on it, specifically that life showing some sort of link with the territory, effectively turning anything that is non-venin into a disposable body and creating a deeply dangerous situation for the planet and its the inhabitants of the planet, including human and dragon characters, which resonates with the consequences of the Anthropocene.

Moreover, venins are presented as the actual villains of the series not only because, unlike other humans, they do not need any non-human animal to channel the magic that emanates from the land, but also because of the consequences of channelling such magic without the interference of another species. As the text first explains "[t]he venin 'suck the land dry of magic'" (Yarros 2023a, 318). This blatant exploitation of the land in a way in which the venins do not use any other species as an intermediary could echo Plumwood's critique on how anthropocentrism often provides an instrumentalist view of nature, treating it as lacking autonomy and agency, thus justifying its exploitation and the human mastery over nature (Plumwood 1993, 106).

It is also worth noting that the consequences of this channelling, and by extension mastery, of the magic and nature in the series are deadly, as graphically described as it takes place during a battle against venins and wyverns:

> The wave of death pushes forward from the venin, flowing outward and catching up with the fleeing civilian in the middle of the road. He falls, then screams soundlessly, curling in on himself as his body becomes nothing but a husk of a shell […]. The venin has even more power now. (Yarros 2023a, 442)

Unlike dragon and gryphon riders, who obtain their magic through the animal they ride and who actually choose the human who will be able to channel magic, venins directly extract magic from the land, which seems to be the source of magic in this universe (Yarros 2023a, 153). The environmentalist critique of the deadly consequences of the uncheckered exploitation of natural "resources," which eventually make the exploited areas poisonous to humans and other animals (Coulouma 2020, 167), is reinforced in Yarros by the fact that magic is in the land. Coincidentally, magic is here connected to life and, whereas dragons and gryphons

channelling of magic towards their human riders does not result in the death of the land or the life standing on it, venins extract magic and life from the biosphere. Hence, the venins, who extract magic from the land, exploiting nature directly without a dragon or gryphon, can be seen as echoes of the anthropocentric practices that have led to our current geological period and its pernicious effects.

Furthermore, the wyverns are also presented as victims to their masters, the corrupted humans known as venins. To begin with, "venin created [the wyverns] to compete with dragons and instead of channelling *from* them, channel power *into* them" (Yarros 2023a, 433) (emphasis in original). Moreover, these animals are instrumentalised to allow these humans to fly and attack from the air, as well as to survey large areas of land (Yarros 2023b, 566), being then emblematic of a more anthropocentric and utilitarian approach to interspecies relationships. As Plumwood explains, under anthropocentrism, humans often objectify the more-than-human, reducing anything deemed "as close to nature than to reason" as the Other, an object that can be used and disposed of by the human Self. The venins create wyverns as instruments of power rather than partners, objects to be instrumentalised and exploited by their masters, as Val Plumwood argues slaves are (1993, 137).

Furthermore, these wyverns are completely dependent on their creators. This is evident when, in the course of a battle against venins and their multiple wyverns, the protagonist kills one venin, with lethal consequences for the wyverns:

> *"They're falling,"* Tairn says, and I jerk my gaze from my side to see three wyvern tumble from the sky and crash to the earth.
> Riderless wyvern.
> Created by venin.
> And they all died because I killed one venin. (Yarros 2023a, 457)

The death of several wyverns upon the death of their creator exposes a tactical vulnerability and highlights the fundamental difference in comparison to the human-dragon bond. This creation and control paradigm reflects an anthropocentric view where non-human entities are reduced to mere tools for human ends who are wholly dependent on their owners. As the only agent in the partnership (Plumwood 2002, 105), once the master dies, the slave is denied any kind of agency, and therefore dies, too. Given that the venins created the wyverns "to compete with dragons" (Yarros 2023a, 433), wyverns can be used to illustrate the consequences of the venins' anthropocentrism, further providing an environmental critique of capitalistic modes of exploitation nature, which is here seen as property.

It is in this context, that this article approaches the analysed text from a critical posthumanist perspective,[4] which seeks a rejection of anthropocentric

[4] It is worth noting that this article adopts the perspective of critical posthumanism as understood by Rosi Braidotti to analyse Yarros' novels, emphasiszing its relevance in the study of human/other-than-human forms of life, both biological and technological. Specifically, this discussion focuses on how critical posthumanism can be applied to examine humanimal relations within the narrative.

hierarchies and a focus on the concept of *zoe* — which is the "dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself" that includes human and more-than-human life (Braidotti 2013, 60) — as elucidated by Francesca Ferrando (2020, 156). In contrast, *bios* refers exclusively to human life, excluding any other forms (Braidotti 2008, 180). In short, as Braidotti argues, in traditional Western thought, "[b]ios is almost holy, whereas zoe is certainly gritty" (Braidotti 2008, 177). Critical posthumanism, as understood by Braidotti, challenges this association in Western philosophy that confines bios to the human realm and assigns zoe to other forms of life. Given that Braidotti contends that posthumanist ethics are post-anthropocentric and zoe-centred (2013: 194), to follow posthumanist ethics implies the dismantlement of hierarchical dichotomies and the subsequent oppression of the Other.

3. DRAGONS AS AUTONOMOUS AGENTS: RESISTING ANTHROPOCENTRIC CONTROL

In Yarros' *Empyrean* series, the traditional dragon-slayer trope, in which a male hero triumphs over a dragon to prove his courage and rescue a helpless figure, is notably subverted. This trope typically symbolises the triumph of human civilisation and masculine heroism over a monstrous, chaotic force (Sheridan 2016, 19). However, rather than positioning Violet Sorrengail, the protagonist, as a slayer of dragons, the series reframes her role as a protector, challenging the inherent human/nonhuman power dynamics. During the pivotal Threshing event,[5] Violet overhears her rival, Jack Barlowe, plotting to kill a young, defenceless female dragon that cannot even breathe fire yet. Her decision to intervene and protect the dragon from this unjust attack marks a fundamental departure from the narrative dominant until the twentieth century, where dragons are merely adversaries to be conquered. As Violet states, the dragon is "going to die just because it's smaller, weaker than the other dragons" (Yarros 2023a, 162), which highlights her empathy and sense of justice. This act not only subverts the dragon-slayer narrative but also inverts the traditional role of the knight, as it is now a female one who saves the dragon, a symbol of both vulnerability and strength. The emphasis on protection over conquest arguably redefines the relationship between humans and dragons, portraying the latter as beings worthy of respect and care rather than as enemies to be vanquished.

Moreover, the human character's act of empathy challenges the anthropocentric expected human-dragon relationship of the dragon-slayer trope. Her actions echo the concept of the "sympathetic imagination," as discussed by Brenda Deen Schildgen, which the academic draws from J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* (1999). Coetzee's notion allows humans to connect more deeply with

[5] The Threshing is the moment in the series when humans walk in front of the willing to bond dragons, sometimes chosen by a dragon, sometimes killed by a dragon, and sometimes simply ignored (Yarros 2023a, 43).

non-human entities by imagining their emotions and experiences, despite the limits of this capacity (Schildgen 2005, 323). That is to say, although the sympathetic imagination can have its limitations (Attridge 2019, 39), it also remains a powerful tool for understanding members of other species (Carretero-González 2021, 851). Thus, the series shifts the focus from domination to empathy, allowing for a potentially deeper engagement with other species, materially real and otherwise.

It is important to note, however, that Violet is far from being the perfect knight. Despite her strong moral stance, she is physically unable to overcome all of her attackers. After knocking one of them unconscious, forcing Jack to flee (Yarros 2023a, 165), her broken arm and leg prevent her from stopping the final attacker. At this critical juncture, Tairn, a massive black dragon, arrives and kills the remaining humans by breathing fire (Yarros 2023a, 166). This moment deepens the subversion of the dragon-slayer trope, as it is not only Violet who saves the dragon but also the dragon who ultimately saves her. This reversal of the conventional human-dragon relationship further challenges the traditional narrative in a two-fold manner.

However, the reversal of the dragon-slayer trope also raises the question of agency and of whether dragons are eventually turned into slaves for humans, in a traditional case of master-slave dynamic, particularly as wyverns are indeed constructed as slaves. Generally speaking, agency can be defined as "an intentional exertion of power, involving more than merely action or reaction. With agency comes choice and responsibility because it is rooted in free will" (Scott 2009, 46). This concept is especially pertinent in fictional representations of non-human species, as McFarland and Hediger argue, where intentional decision-making and accountability beyond mere reaction are key issues (2009, 1). Likewise, Plumwood criticises systems that limit agency to human-like consciousness, arguing that such frameworks foster exploitative models of control, turning the nonhuman Other into slaves (2006, 118). In the *Empyrean* series, dragons demonstrate deliberate action and resist being reduced to mere tools, contrasting sharply with the depiction of wyverns as passive entities entirely controlled by their creators.

In Yarros' *Empyrean* series, the autonomy of dragons is first suggested by their self-naming practice, which challenges the potential dangers of naming other species. While it is true that a name provides a member of a species with individuality (Charles 2014, 717), naming otherised entities can also be used as a means to control them, William J. Adams, for instance, explains that "colonialism promoted the naming and classification of both people and places, as well as nature, in each case with the aim of control" (2004, 24). Similarly, Haraway argues that naming often serves as a means to reduce animals to mere tools or extensions of human desires (Haraway 2008, 220). However, in Yarros' narrative, dragons assert their identities independent of human influence, as illustrated when Violet bonds with the black dragon Tairneanach (also referred to as Tairn). The dragon introduces himself with a full declaration of his name and lineage:

> *"My name is Tairneanach, son of Murtcuideam and Fiaclanfuil, descended from the cunning Dubhmadinn line."* He stands to his full height, bringing me eye level with the canopy of trees around the clearing, and I squeeze a little tighter with my

thighs. "*But I'm not going to assume that you'll be able to remember that once we reach the field, so Tairn will do until I inevitably have to remind you.*" (Yarros 2023a, 169)

This moment is pivotal, as it underscores that dragons in Yarros' series are not merely passive entities under human control, nor are they reduced to the status of pets who are given names by their human counterparts. By illustrating that dragons name themselves and so, resist human-imposed labels, the text paves the way for a non-anthropocentric relationship, one where dragons are potentially recognised as autonomous beings rather than merely instruments of human will; their degree of independence aligns with posthumanist ideals of non-anthropocentrism and of decentring the human figure (Braidotti 2016, 22). Such transformation is a crucial element in establishing a non-anthropocentric bond that honours the complexity and autonomy of dragons in the *Empyrean* series.

Yarros' text eloquently underscores its dragons' autonomy through their power to choose their human companions, which is central to the narrative throughout the series. As the character of Professor Kaori points out, humans have no control over these choices: "'[n]othing about who dragons choose is up to humans,' Kaori assures me. 'We only like to maintain the illusion that we're in control'" (Yarros 2023a, 180). This illusion of control resonates with academic critiques of anthropocentrism, such as Sarah McFarland's assertion that denying other species' agency reinforces "the human supremacist *illusion*" (McFarland 2018, 95). This claim disrupts human dominance, positioning dragons as primary decision-makers, thus dismantling anthropocentric views of superiority.

In the unique case of two dragons bonding with one human, the series further highlights dragon agency. Despite the frantic attempts of human authorities to undo the bond —depicted by their "screaming at each other" (Yarros 2023a, 178) and the protagonist's childhood friend, Dain, severely warning her that the human generals "are going to make you choose" (Yarros 2023a, 183)— the dragons' decisions are final and outside human control; as Professor Kaori's confirms, "'[I'm] [n]ot sure why they're fighting about it, though. The decision won't be up to them'" (Yarros 2023a, 180). This moment further reinforces the idea that human authority is here subordinate to the dragons' will, as it is finally begrudgingly accepted by the humans who are fighting about the issue, with their representative stating that:

> "While tradition has shown us that there is one rider for every dragon, there has never been a case of two dragons selecting the same rider, and therefore there is no dragon law against it," he declares. "While we riders may not feel as though it is… equitable" —his tone implies that he's one of them— "dragons make their own laws." (Yarros 2023a, 188)

Through these narrative choices, Yarros' text criticises anthropocentrism by exposing the illusion of human control over dragons. The series demonstrates that humanity's perceived dominance over nature is fundamentally flawed, as seen in the dragons' clear autonomy and independent decision-making. A sharp contrast is drawn with the venin-wyvern relationship, where the wyverns are depicted as

lacking any agency. They are portrayed as mere extensions of their creator's will, existing solely to follow commands and, ultimately, dying when their creator dies, like broken puppets (Yarros 2023a, 457). This contrast between dragons and wyverns highlights a critique of hierarchical power structures, suggesting a more nuanced understanding of interspecies relationships, where agency is distributed among all beings rather than concentrated in human control.

Moreover, it is important to highlight that the venins who create and control these wyverns are humans who decided to channel directly from the source, the land, and so they became corrupted; as the venin-turned character of Jack Barlowe states, "I made [my choice] the second I saw her […] bond the most powerful dragon available at Threshing. Why should *they* determine our potential when we're capable of reaching for fate all on our own?" with "they" referring to dragons (Yarros 2023b, 787; emphasis in original). Hence, Yarros' text presents dragons as autonomous beings with significant agency. Far from being instruments of human —or venin— will, the dragons in the *Empyrean* are active participants in shaping their relationships with humans, which is not accepted by the venins.

4. MUTUAL DEPENDENCY AND SHARED SURVIVAL: DRAGONS AND HUMANS AS ALLIES

It is important to note that one of the consequences of the human-dragon bond is that the human characters gain a telepathic link with their dragons, a connection initiated and controlled by the dragons themselves. This telepathic capacity, which is selectively granted to the humans that dragons choose to bond with, reveals the dragons' autonomy. They maintain a complex telepathic network, allowing them to communicate selectively among themselves. As Tairn explains, "[d]ragons only sense each other mind-to-mind when we allow it. As long as they stay downwind, the others will know they're here but won't be able to identify how many or who has come" (Yarros 2023b, 740). This control over their telepathic communication highlights that the bond originates from their agency, not from human influence.

Once formed, the telepathic connection between humans and dragons is central to their interdependent relationship. This concept is not new, having been explored in works like Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonflight* and its sequels, where dragons and humans share telepathic links that enhance mutual survival (Unerman 2002, 97) and, more recently, i n Christopher Paolini's *Inheritance Cycle* (2003-2011). However, Yarros' portrayal diverges by focusing on the influence of this bond on identity and power dynamics. Unlike McCaffrey's genetically engineered dragons, who are created to serve human needs, Yarros' dragons seem to retain greater autonomy, with a land of their own and their capacity to disobey human commands, as they only follow the ruling of their own, the Empyrean (Yarros 2023a, 182). Hence, we can observe a post-anthropocentric view where dragons and humans exist as equal partners in a shared network of communication. The bond in *Empyrean* thus foregrounds the dragons' independence in shaping the terms of their relationship with humans.

It is in the context of the Anthropocene, which turns all *zoe* into vulnerable subjects, that Rosi Braidotti advises to "cultivate one's empowerment and to affirm one's interconnections to others in their complexity" and form posthumanist[6] alliances (2009, 531). In line with Braidotti's ideas, Donna Haraway proposes "Make Kin Not Babies!" (Haraway 2015, 161). Hence, despite the differences in their approach to dismantling anthropocentrism, both Braidotti and Haraway defend the need to change this anthropocentric view and focus on the zoe, which, I argue, could be the case in Yarros' series, as the venins kill nonhumans and humans alike, and so all forms of life, all *zoe,* is threatened. In this regard, I argue, the series explores the possibility of a posthumanist kind of alliance between dragon and human characters in order to resist the pernicious effects of the corrupted humans, the venins, on land and animal characters.

In this sense, the telepathic connection between dragons and their riders extends beyond mere communication of thoughts. As Violet learns, while she can shield her mind from the dragon's influence, a complete separation is not possible (Yarros 2023a, 267). Tairn's assertion, "I am continuously with you" (Yarros 2023b, 384), underscores the depth of this connection. The dragon is capable of accessing Violet's sensory experiences, as demonstrated when Tairn perceives an assassination attempt through her eyes (Yarros 2023a, 219). This immersive awareness not only deepens their bond but also highlights the complexity of their shared existence, where both entities experience a form of co-embodiment.

Through this bond, Yarros' narrative challenges the hyperseparation between species that is central to anthropocentric discourses. In Val Plumwood's words, "[t]he further and more radically we separate ourselves from nature in order to justify its domination, the more we lose the ability to respond to it in ethical and communicative terms" (2002, 2). The telepathic bond in the series dissolves these separations, fostering an integrated relationship between humans and dragons built on empathy and shared agency. This empathy, first exhibited when Violet saved the young dragon, is deepened by the telepathic link. Moreover, it is crucial to recognise that the human-dragon bond does not simply invert the traditional master-slave dynamic seen in the venin-wyvern relationship. Inverting the roles without challenging the structure of oppression would only perpetuate the system of dominance (Meaney 2006, 253). While dragons rely on humans for protection in certain circumstances —particularly when safeguarding their eggs —their dependence is mutual. Humans also require the strength and abilities of dragons for survival, especially in the perilous world of the *Empyrean* series.

The series explicitly underscores that dragons bond with humans not out of subjugation like the wyverns, who are never allowed to accept or reject the bond in the two first novels of the series, but out of necessity for assistance in protecting

6 Critical Posthumanism here is understood as a post-anthropocentric and zoe-centred philosophy in which the human(ist) subject ceases to be the focus of study and the human/non-human hierarchy is rejected (Braidotti 2013, 194).

their breeding grounds —vulnerable areas where their eggs are safeguarded until hatching. These breeding grounds are located within the human kingdom of Navarre. Violet Sorrengail, the protagonist, reflects early in the narrative and before she learns of the existence of venins beyond popular stories and myths, "[i]f they didn't need us puny humans to develop signet abilities from bonding and weave the protective wards they power around Navarre, I'm pretty sure they'd eat us all and be done. But they like protecting the Vale —the valley behind Basgiath the dragons call home— from merciless gryphons and we like living, so here we are in the most unlikely partnerships" (Yarros 2023a, 53).

As the protagonist's understanding of the situation deepens, she learns that the gryphons are not the actual enemy. Instead, the primary threat comes from the venins and their wyverns. The kingdom deliberately concealed the wards' limitations from its citizens, leaving the rest of the world unprotected and reliant on gryphons and their "fliers" for defence. When Violet questions why her people refuse to aid those beyond the wards, Xaden, the protagonist's love interest, reveals the grim truth: "[b]ecause the only thing that kills venins is the very thing powering our wards" (Yarros 2023a, 424). In other words, if they help those beyond the wards, they also endanger their own security.

Furthermore, the series reveals that this ethical dilemma extends to the dragons as well. As Tairn tells Violet when discussing the matter, "[t]he Empyrean remains divided on whether or not we should get involved" (Yarros 2023b, 95). This statement reveals the crucial role humans play in supporting the dragons because of their signet abilities, even as the dragons retain ultimate control over the bonding process and over whether to help those beyond the wards or not. Moreover, the protagonist and her group challenge both human and dragon characters who prioritise the protection of their own species within the confines of the wards. Their rebellion leads to the destruction of the place where humans are trained to become riders to protect the wards, all while remaining unaware of the existence of venins and wyverns (Yarros 2023b, 745). By opposing this exclusionary stance, they may exemplify a zoe-respecting attitude —one that values and defends all forms of life, regardless of species or geographical boundaries.

Furthermore, the interdependency between humans and dragons is emphasised through the deadly consequences of this bond. As the series states early on "[o]nce bonded, riders can't live without their dragons, but most dragons can live just fine after us. It's why they choose carefully, so they're not humiliated by picking a coward, not that a dragon would ever admit to making a mistake" (Yarros 2023a, 53). In short, "[a] dragon without its rider is a tragedy. A rider without their dragon is dead" (Yarros 2023a, 13). This bond is existential, as seen when Violet's friend Liam dies shortly after his dragon, Deigh, is killed in battle. Right after the dragon dies, we read: "Liam's raw scream shatters my heart, and Tairn flares his wings, banking hard to keep us from the same gruesome fate" (Yarros 2023a, 450). Even though he is uninjured, since his dragon has just died, he will follow him in death in minutes. This portrayal underscores a mutual dependency where the human's survival is directly tied to the dragon's. Likewise, by marking the human's life as

dependent on the nonhuman's, this situation would challenge human exceptionalism, with human life no longer being above other forms of life.

While this mutual dependency could be interpreted as an instrumental relationship, where dragons leverage humans to protect their vulnerable eggs and humans rely on dragons for survival, the balance of power is more complex. Violet grapples with the paradox of dragons bonding with human riders despite the risks it poses to their young and the fact that dragons are more powerful than humans:

> "I still don't understand why the Empyrean would ever agree to let dragons bond human riders, knowing they'd have to guard their own young not only against gryphon fliers but the very humans they're supposed to trust."

> "It's a delicate balance," Tairn replies, banking left to follow the geography. "The First Six riders were desperate to save their people when they approached the dens over six hundred years ago. Those dragons formed the first Empyrean and bonded humans only to protect their hatching grounds from venin, who were the bigger threat. We don't exactly have opposable thumbs for weaving wards or runes. Neither species has ever been entirely truthful, both using the other for their own reasons and nothing more." (Yarros 2023b, 50)

This dialogue encapsulates the essence of the human-dragon alliance: rather than a naïve "friendship," we find an alliance born out of necessity, where both species leverage their unique strengths to survive. Humans needed the dragons' power and the magic they could channel through them, while dragons required humans' dexterity in weaving wards and runes, which were crucial in protecting against the venin, a common enemy. These runes, as potent as the magic humans channel through dragons, are vital for the survival of both species (Yarros 2023b, 617). Hence, the human-dragon bond embodies what Donna Haraway refers to as "messy relating," where power is not centralised but distributed in a complex web of interconnections in which "the partners do not precede their relating; all that is, is the fruit of becoming with" (2008, 17). In other words, they are not defined by their isolated power but by the interconnectedness and the symbiotic relationships they cultivate. This relational dynamic reflects the broader idea of posthumanist alliances, which challenge the anthropocentric model of domination over nature and propose a more cooperative, multi-species approach to survival. By embracing this model, the series suggests that such alliances may be the most effective way to resist the deadly consequences of the Anthropocene, represented within the narrative by the venins.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Rebecca Yarros' *Empyrean* series reconfigures traditional human-non-human relationships through its depiction of bonds between humans and dragons, offering a profound critique of anthropocentrism. Whereas in classical literature

and mythology, dragons have typically been portrayed as monstrous adversaries, reinforcing a binary distinction between the human and non-human, Yarros' text subverts this dynamic by presenting dragons as sentient, autonomous beings who form reciprocal bonds with humans, challenging established hierarchical systems of control. This critique of anthropocentrism aligns with contemporary ecocritical and posthumanist thought, particularly the work of theorists like Val Plumwood and Donna Haraway, who argue for a rethinking of human-animal relationships based on empathy, shared agency, and mutual respect.

At the heart of *Empyrean* is the telepathic bond between Violet Sorrengail and her dragon, Tairn. This bond exemplifies a dynamic of interdependence, where neither species dominates the other, directly opposing traditional anthropocentric perspectives. Instead of reducing dragons to mere tools for human use, Yarros portrays them as active participants in their relationships with humans, reshaping the narrative surrounding these mythical creatures.

The series also criticises anthropocentrism through the characterisation of the venins and their dragon-like creatures, the wyverns, who embody a destructive and exploitative relationship with nature. By extracting magic directly from the land, the venins illustrate the environmental devastation associated with the Anthropocene. Their approach starkly contrasts with the symbiotic bonds between dragons and humans, highlighting the consequences of treating nature as a resource devoid of agency.

Thus, Yarros' text explores a non-anthropocentric alliance between humans and dragons as a strategic response to the environmental destruction associated with the Anthropocene, exemplified by the venins. Through the intricate portrayal of telepathic bonds, the series reveals how mutual dependence and shared power between species can effectively combat the damaging consequences of ecological degradation. By shifting the narrative from a framework of human supremacy to one that emphasises interspecies cooperation, the *Empyrean* series not only highlights the destructive impact of the Anthropocene but also posits that such alliances are essential for survival. Hence, Yarros' narrative serves as a poignant reminder of the necessity for collaboration across species boundaries in the face of ecological crises, advocating for a future where empathy and shared agency pave the way toward a more sustainable coexistence.

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PIONEERING ANIMAL JUSTICE: EMAREL FRESHEL AND THE MILLENNIUM GUILD (1865-1948)*

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Abstract

In the first half of twentieth-century North America, Emarel Freshel founded and directed the Millennium Guild, an organization which embraced opposition to every single form of cruelty to animals: a strong stance against vivisection for moral reasons, rejection of the promotion of humane slaughtering of animals as a way to prevent cruelty, vegetarianism as the only consistent way to defend animals, and opposition to zoos, to furs, to the use of animals in films, or any other form of animal exploitation, be it financial or to satisfy our desires and whims. Although she is best known for her vegetarian recipe book *The Golden Rule Cookbook. 600 recipes for meatless dishes* published in 1907 as Maude Russell Lorraine Sharpe, where she advanced the position regarding vegetarianism that she would later advocate, her defense of animals covered every aspect of cruelty. Emarel Freshel's defense of justice for animals paved the way for future abolitionists.

Keywords: Emarel Freshel, Maude Russell Lorraine Sharpe, Millennium Guild, Antivivisection, Women and Animal Protection, Vegetarianism, Alternatives to Furs

PIONERA DE LA JUSTICIA ANIMAL:
EMAREL FRESHEL Y EL MILLENNIUM GUILD (1865-1948)

Resumen

En la Norteamérica de la primera mitad del siglo xx, Emarel Freshel fundó y dirigió el Millennium Guild, una organización que se opuso a todas las formas de crueldad contra los animales: oposición total a la vivisección por razones morales, rechazo al sacrificio humanitario de animales como manera de prevenir la crueldad, defensa del vegetarianismo como única manera coherente de defender a los animales y oposición a los zoos, a las pieles, al empleo de animales en el cine y a cualquier otra forma de explotación animal, fuera esta económica o para satisfacer nuestros deseos y caprichos. Aunque se la conoce principalmente por el libro de recetas *The Golden Rule Cookbook. 600 recipes for meatless dishes*, que publicó en 1907 con el nombre Maud Russell Lorraine Sharpe, en el que adelantó la postura sobre el vegetarianismo que posteriormente defendería, su defensa de los animales abarcó todos los aspectos de la crueldad hacia los animales. La defensa de la justicia para los animales que hizo Emarel despejó el camino para las abolicionistas del futuro.

Palabras clave: Emarel Freshel, Maude Russell Lorraine Sharpe, Millennium Guild, antivivisección, mujeres y protección animal, vegetarianismo, alternativas a las pieles.

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1. INTRODUCTION

> They say that when the tide is coming in, it pauses always and remains stationary between every seventh wave, waiting for the next, and unable to rise any higher till it comes to carry it on…The seventh waves of humanity are men and women who, by the impulse of some action which comes naturally to them but which is new to the race, gather strength to come up to the last halting place of the tide and to carry it on with them ever so far beyond. (Sarah Grand quoted in Freshel 1933, 6)

Women who defended animals in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries have been homogenized as wealthy antivivisectionist ladies who only cared about dogs and horses while wearing feathers and eating meat. Although this is true for some cases, there were women pioneers who did oppose every form of cruelty. In her 1887 article "Le Droit des Animaux", French vegetarian and antivivisectionist Marie Huot regretted that the law treated animals as objects and properties and not as individuals or sentient beings (Huot 1887, 47); in England, Anna Kingsford, decided to study medicine in Paris to prove that women could become doctors, that the study of medicine was possible without performing any vivisection, and to defend vegetarianism from a scientific point of view with her thesis *L'Alimentation Végétale de l'Homme* (1880), published in English as *The Perfect Way in Diet* a year later.

The general lack of information on women's activism and ideas about animal protection and even on their take on animal justice has led current activists to ignore what these women pioneers did and to think that women did not take leading roles defending animals. However, there are some noteworthy examples that contradict the argument that women were always subjected to men's directions and decisions. Emarel Freshel and her Millennium Guild is one of them. She founded, directed and managed her own organization against every form of cruelty, even against humane slaughter, and required its members to act accordingly and not consent or participate in any form of cruelty to animals.

2. ANTIVIVISECTION, WOMEN AND ANIMAL PROTECTION SOCIETIES

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the birth of the antivivisection movement in England. In 1874, Irish philosopher and writer Frances Power Cobbe published two antivivisection pamphlets: *Need of a Bill* and *Reasons for Interference* (Victoria Street Society 1891, 1) demanding regulation of vivisection, a position she initially held but changed after the *Cruelty to Animals Act* of 1875, which regulated the practice in England. This regulation of experiments on animals had only led to consolidating and exponentially increasing the number of experiments performed

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* To our beloved dog Perry, who used to sit by my side while I wrote.

(French, [1975] 2019, 392). From the beginning, antivivisection was a gendered fight, with women holding the strongest opposition against experiments on animals for moral and scientific reasons. Many men joined its ranks: George Bernard Shaw, Alfred Russell Wallace, John Ruskin, Henry S. Salt or Tomas Hardy, although women were a majority in the movement.

Women who were members of traditional animal protection societies during the last quarter of the nineteenth century disagreed with the positions these societies took on vivisection. There were Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in England: The Royal SPCA; in the United States, the American SPCA; the Massachusetts SPCA and the Pennsylvania SPCA; in France, *La Société Protectrice des Animaux*. These societies were not abolitionists, they were opposed to animal suffering, but not to vivisection itself, although some of their members did oppose vivisection. As a result, women in different countries decided to found their own antivivisection societies to fight for the complete abolition of experiments on animals. In Britain, Frances Power Cobbe founded the Victoria Street Society in 1876 and later, in 1898, the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection. In France, Marie Huot was a member of the *Société Protectrice des Animaux,* but then founded her own *Ligue Populaire contre la Vivisection* in 1883, with Victor Hugo as its honorary president (Demeulanaere-Douyère 2021,3), to take a stronger stand against vivisection. Huot exemplifies that it was not only wealthy women who fought for animals (Traïni 2017,129). Caroline Earle White followed Cobbe's advice (Earle White 1913, 28) to focus all her efforts in fighting vivisectional experiments, and founded the American Antivivisection Society in 1883.

In North America, when Emarel Freshel founded the Millennium Guild in 1912, the different coexistent societies had a fragmented perspective of animal cruelty, and, as such, they focused on certain forms of exploitation. None of them had an abolitionist standpoint of animal defence. Traditional animal protection societies were denouncing cruelty to cattle in transport and teaching children and adults compassion towards animals. This compassion, however, did not always involve giving up meat nor opposing every single form of cruelty; for them, the sentiment of compassion and mercy to animals was compatible with killing them for food, as long as it was in a humane way, or, during experiments, as long as animals were anesthetized. Nevertheless, Emarel Freshel believed there was not one single form of cruelty we could not live without. To her, animal exploitation was perfectly avoidable and she decided to found an organization in accordance with that ideal.

3. EMAREL FRESHEL: PERSONAL LIFE

Emarel Freshel was born Maud Russella Lorraine Carpenter in 1865. Her father, Russell Carpenter was a captain in the Civil War (*Vita,* Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955) and died when she was a teenager. Her mother, Emma L. Bower, remarried (Walcroft 2006) to D. Harry Hammer, a member of the bar of Illinois who became a judge (Flinn 1893, 184). Emarel married Ernest Sharpe but got divorced in 1908. According to her great niece Linda Walcroft, her family was so

ashamed of her being a divorcee that her mother stopped talking to Emarel and reported that her husband had died and Emarel had become a widow (2006). This did not prevent Emarel from marrying again in 1917. As in many other aspects of her life, in marrying Curtis P. Freshel, who happened to be almost twenty years younger than her, Emarel Freshel proved to be a woman of character who did not care for conventionalisms: A free spirit who did not follow the usual path women were expected to take, Freshel did not wait for men to grant her a public space and she was not afraid of speaking in public on behalf of animals.

4. THE MILLENNIUM GUILD (1912)

In 1912, Emarel founded The Millennium Guild at her house in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. The first meeting was attended by twelve people who wanted to serve God by reminding everyone that there is a Universal Kinship that should permeate our lives and actions towards every sentient being (Freshel 1933, 179). The Millennium opposed every single form of animal cruelty, and it was "the first American animal protection society to include vegetarianism as a core principle" (Unti 2015, 188). It required its members to become vegetarians; they had to "prove by their practice" (Millennium Guild, n.d. *The Millennium Guild*), to fulfil the objectives of the group which were:

> to promote by precept and example, a just consideration of the rights of all races, human and subhuman, and to teach that foremost among the unnecessary evils of the world and one which underlies most of the other evils is the mutilation and slaughter of our fellow creatures for food and other selfish ends. (Millennium Guild, n.d. *Millennium Guild*)

Emarel took the name for the Guild from the Bible: Isaiah 11: 6-9, which presents the Millennium as a future reign of Christ where humans and animals alike will live in harmony, not destroying or hurting each other. The singularity of the Millennium Guild was not only that it was founded by a woman and that it opposed every single form of cruelty, but also that she was and remained its president until her death in 1948, and that the members of its council were mainly women, and they were all vegetarians. For instance, in the 40s Editha Button was the Guild's vice-president, writer Ethel Fairmont Beebe was its director, and Blanche E. Clark its secretary (Report of recording secretary 1944, Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955). Moreover, the Guild's aim was to provide justice to animals through kindness and love. Unlike other protection societies, kindness was not the goal but the means to achieve the Guild's end: justice. Subscribing Emarel's creed that "justice involves love and if we learn to be just, we won't have to talk so much about being merciful" (Freshel 1926b, 154), every Millennium Guild pamphlet had the sentence "If we learn to be just, we don't have to be kind" printed at the top as a reminder.

At first, Emarel organized addresses at her Chestnut Hill home, and, when she moved to New York, the annual meetings of the Guild took place at her Central

Park home, where she also hosted new addresses. In 1920, she invited Robert Logan, President of the American Antivivisection Society to Chestnut Hill to speak on "Man and the Animals" (*The Starry Cross* 1920, 100-105); in 1923 Miss Holbrook gave a talk on "Vegetarianism as an Ideal in Various Religions" (Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955). Writer J. Howard Moore also spoke at Freshel's home in Massachusetts (Unti 2015, 190). In 1940, for the Annual Meeting of the Guild at her New York home she invited naturist and theosophist Jacques de Marquette to read extracts from his award-winning essay "Vegetarianism and World Peace" (Emarel Freshel, letter to members of the Millennium Guild, 1940, Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955). For De Marquette, "peace was not only the absence of war, it also meant establishing harmonious relationships with other individuals, other classes and other nations" (2014, 77-78) this included becoming a vegetarian as the best way to attain world peace (De Marquette 2014, 74). Emarel's string of thought went the same way, for she was a pacifist who believed that cruelty to animals was the basis of war. If one could be cruel to an innocent, defenseless animal, one could easily be cruel to anyone. At the time of De Marquette's reading the world was immersed in World War II.

The Guild published thousands of pamphlets with extracts from texts on animal cruelty by humanitarians like David Lee Wharton, where he advises fellow humanitarians not to apologize before making a remark about animals (Millennium Guild n.d. *Whose Guinea Pig?)*, or Katharine Lee Bates's poem on *The Cost of Furs* (Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955). Some pamphlets gave advice on practical questions regarding fur or vegetarianism (Ethel Fairmont Beebe Papers); others dealt with Christianity and mercy towards animals, stressing the implications of the Christian faith that Millennium members wanted to extend to animals (Millennium Guild, n.d. *Peace on Earth, Good Will to All;* Millennium Guild, n.d. *A True Service*); on humane education, promoting the teaching of kindness to animals in children (Millennium Guild, n.d. *World Peace through Kindness*); on the similarities between meat-eating and vivisection (Millennium Guild, n.d. *Antivivisection and Meat-eating*) and on antivivisection, using explicit descriptions of the violence committed against animals in laboratories (Millennium Guild, n.d. *Whose Guinea Pig?*).

The Millennium Guild was founded under the conviction that "Man is most just to Himself and nearer the possibility of fulfilling a high destiny when he exercises his 'dominion' under the inspiration of the ideal voiced in what Christians name 'The Golden Rule'" (Freshel 1933, 181) or "do unto others as you would that they should do unto you." Emarel Freshel believed in God and she believed Christians who ate meat and were cruel to animals acted against God's will. To her, mercy was the foundation of divine love, although she promoted justice and not only mercy, because through classic animal protection societies, kindness and love had been proven inefficient to prevent animal cruelty. To Emarel, justice was the true expression of kindness.

The Golden Rule was mentioned in other humanitarian books such as J. Howard Moore's *Universal Kinship,* where he saw the Golden Rule as the way humanity should behave towards animals (Moore [1906]1992). In his book *Every Living Creature,* Waldo Trine states that "no one can be a Christian man or woman until he applied the Golden Rule to animals as well as humans" (Trine [1900]1917,

63-64). Trine adopted vegetarianism from "the standpoint of love […] to be a better channel of Divine Love to the World" (Trine [1900]1917, 41-42). Many animal activists saw Divine Love as the reason to be kind to animals and to every living being, as the source of all that is good in the world. Emarel and the Millennium Guild members interpreted the Bible in a way that was compassionate to animals (Millennium Guild, n.d. *The Motif of the Bible*).

Emarel Freshel led the fight by precept and example, which was the motto of the Millennium. She did not want to fall into the category of those animal protectionists who told everyone what not to do while they were accomplices of other forms of cruelty. Concentrating on individual changes, Emarel focused on the adoption of vegetarianism as the best way to defend animals. She wanted a paradigm shift in the way humans relate to animals. To this intent, she gave addresses at international animal protection and antivivisection congresses: in Washington, 1913 and Philadelphia, 1926; she published two books: one on vegetarianism, *The Golden Rule Cookbook. 600 recipes for meatless dishes* (1907) and another on antivivisection, *Selections from Three Essays by Richard Wagner with Comment of such Importance to the Moral Progress of Humanity that it Constitutes an Issue in Ethics and Religion* (1933). She based her activism on planting seeds, aware that it is difficult to convince anyone who is not somehow ready or willing to be convinced. Some people were predisposed to being sensitive to animals, others were not. In a pamphlet, she wrote "we cannot Make others believe as we do, NOR SHOULD WE DESIRE TO DO SO, but to give them an opportunity to share our best beliefs is a sacred duty" (Millennium Guild, n.d. *On Influence*).

As the President of the Millennium, Freshel was a very well-known and respected activist for animals, collaborating with other organizations, such as the American Antivivisection Society and the Massachusetts Society for The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which she had been a member of until she founded the Guild, and inviting famous humanitarian women from other organizations of her time to give talks. On October 31st, 1926, Lizzy Lind af Hageby and Nina, Duchess of Hamilton and Brandon, of the Animal Defence and Antivivisection Society (London), another organization founded, presided and managed by women, gave an address for Millennium Guild members titled *Humanitarianism, the World's Greatest Need* (Bureau International Humanitaire Zoophile 1936, 163). Significantly, the Millennium was one of the 1400 animal protection societies represented in a deputation to the League of Nations organized by the Geneva International Humanitarian Bureau of Lind af Hageby and Nina Duchess of Hamilton and Brandon, in order to demand protection of animals in wars, and to include Humanitarian Education, the teaching of children the need for justice and consideration to all fellow creatures, as a way to attain world peace (Bureau International Humanitaire Zoophile 1936, 58).

In 1924 Sydney H. Coleman published a book titled *Humane Society Leaders in America* and, for some inexplicable reason, left Emarel out of it. In a review of the book in *The Starry Cross* magazine, Robert R. Logan noted "Mrs. M.R.L. Freshel, the energetic and able president of the Millenium Guild, the only entirely consistent humane organization, is not mentioned at all" (Logan 1924, 165). During her time,

Figure 1. Emarel Freshel. Courtesy of The George A. Smathers Libraries. U of Florida.

as we have seen, she was a much-respected woman and very well considered by other animal protection and antivivisection societies for her views and activities against animal cruelty. Any account of the history of the Animal Protection Movement in the United States that leaves her out is incomplete.

5. VEGETARIANISM

Emarel Freshel saw vegetarianism as a moral imperative for anyone who wanted justice for animals. She did not regard meat as a necessity and believed that no well-informed person could believe humans need meat to live a healthy life (Millennium Guild, n.d. *As to humane Slaughter*). However, she had not always been a vegetarian. Like many other antivivisectionists, Freshel had not thought about the hypocrisy of opposing one form of cruelty while consenting others. Bernard Unti (2015, 188) and Karen and Michael Iacobbo (2004, 148) have told the story on how Emarel decided to become a vegetarian, a story that can also be found in the Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955. While at the Parliament of Religion in Chicago 1893, as a prominent member of the Christian Science Church, she was impressed

by the Buddhist missionary Anagarika Dharmapala's explanation that "his religion was against preying upon animals in any form" (*Vita,* Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955). Later, she encountered other notorious vegetarians like Count Leo Tolstoy or George Bernard Shaw, read *Every Living Creature* by Ralph Waldo Trine (*Vita*, n.d., Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955; Iacobbo & Iacobbo, 2004,148), and the need for consistency when fighting against animal cruelty became even clearer. Accordingly, she became a vegetarian for the rest of her life. Every member of Emarel's household was a vegetarian, including her husband Curtis and her dog "Sister" who never ate meat and loved pulses. As a strict vegetarian, Emarel not only refused to eat meat, but she did not use candles made from animal sources, wore leather shoes, or furs (Emarel Sharpe, Letter to the Editors of *The Vegetarian Magazine* 1910, 104). She confessed, however, that, once she became a vegetarian, it took her a year to stop wearing furs (Freshel 1926a, 106).

Later in her life, Emarel told her friend Agnes Ryan that she did not drink milk simply because it was not meant for humans (Emarel Freshel, Letter to Agnes Ryan April 27, 1943, Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955). Apparently, she had become a vegan before the term was coined:

> I have "with malice aforethought" tried not to preach the abolition of dairy products, from the belief that the best way to do this was to get people to stop flesh eating, and THEN the other would follow as soon as people began to think about it all. Also I did not cut out eggs(not made for food) from the reason that it would interfere with people willing to START by making them think that meat, milk and eggs were TOO much to do at once, and if one gets too far ahead of the crowd they lose sight of us and do not even BEGIN to try to follow. (Emarel Freshel Letter to Agnes Ryan April 27,1943, Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955)

Emarel was aware that there was a very strong campaign on the benefits and advantages of milk, but she was against its consumption (Emarel Freshel, Letter to Agnes Ryan April 27, 1943 Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955). Her take on vegetarianism was very advanced, since she spoke of the suffering of fish while being gutted alive (Millennium Guild, n.d. *As to Humane Slaughter*). Emarel believed that every living creature loved life and had the will to live, even fish, hence humans had no right to take their lives for any reason.

In fact, she saw meat eating as another form of vivisection, which she called vivisection for food. During the Animal Protection and Antivivisection Congress of 1926, she gave two addresses: "What price Furs?" on October 19th and "Where Duty and Pleasure Meet for Humanitarians" on the 20th (Proceedings of the International Antivivisection and Animal Protection Congress in Philadelphia 1926). Emarel explained how, on previous years, she had been criticized for trying to speak on vegetarianism and the use of furs in antivivisection congresses, whereas for her, those were three forms of vivisection: vivisection for food, vivisection for furs and vivisectional experiments (Freshel 1926b, 150). To illustrate why she called meat eating vivisection for food, Emarel explained that the process of caponizing a Vermont chicken involved tearing out its organs (Freshel 1926b, 154). Emarel

regretted that many humanitarians supported humane ways of slaughter, arguing that the "humane" argument only provided excuses for those who wished to continue wearing furs (from humanely trapped animals), and eating meat (from humanely killed animals) (Freshel 1926b, 151-152). Due to her vegetarian culinary talent, during the Congress she arranged the hotel menus and the final vegetarian banquet.

6. THE GOLDEN RULE COOKBOOK

Emarel Freshel published *The Golden Rule Cookbook* as Maud Russell Lorraine Sharpe in 1907, before founding the Millennium Guild, adding an introduction that is a manifesto against animal cruelty and meat eating. To Freshel, "Thou Shall not Kill" had a very clear meaning, which included animals. She had it carved in her dining-room fireplace (Letter to the editors of *The Vegetarian Magazine* 1910, 104; Cronin 2018, 174), a picture of which is included in the book. Regarding meat consumption, she rejected the argument of humane slaughter of animals — which, as said above, she believed "acted as a conscience-soother for meat eaters" (Millennium Guild, n.d. *As to Humane Slaughter*)— because there is no humane way to kill. She believed animal advocates should be promoting vegetarianism and not alternative ways of killing animals. It was not only the killing that made animals suffer, but the whole process of being raised, cows separated from their calves, being transported in awful conditions, in crammed trains or boats with no food or water, nor space to rest made them suffer, too. Humane slaughtering was nothing compared to the suffering animals underwent during their whole lives. She compared it to anesthetics in vivisection, considering both "humbugs that lull the conscience" (Millennium Guild n.d. *As to Humane Slaughter*).

The Golden Rule Cookbook was not just a recipe book, it aimed at changing the reader's view regarding meat-eating. She aimed at vegetarians and asked them to be consistent and to extend their view and stop contributing to other forms of cruelty (Sharpe 1907). For instance, to her it was incompatible to be a vegetarian while wearing furs or feathers, and, although she openly states her opposition to using meaty names for vegetable dishes (Sharpe 1907, 11; Unti 2015, 190), Emarel includes lots of recipes requiring the use of butter, milk and cheese, as she considered that it would be easier to go step by step than to ask people to give everything up at once (Emarel Freshel, letter to Agnes Ryan, n.d. Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955). She also inserted quotes by different humanitarians like Ruskin or her friend Bernard Shaw, and poets like Katherine Tynan Hinkson, on humans' duty to respect animals, or animals as the humblest of God's creatures (Freshel 1907, 43, 195). The book was intended to "remind many of the Love they owe to every living creature" (Sharpe 1907, 5) and indeed, it "made a sensation among non-flesh eaters" (Journal of Zoophily 1909, 6) and was praised as "being unique in its individual way" (*The Vegetarian Magazine* 1910, 108). Due to the book's success, Emarel became famous among humanitarians for her consistency.

7. ANTIVIVISECTION

In the animal protection movement, vivisection has always been a problematic and divisive subject among those animal protectionists who believed in the usefulness of vivisection and aimed only at preventing animal suffering during the experiments, and abolitionists, who believed that the only way to prevent suffering was by banning experiments on animals. Abolitionists believed that legislating a cruel practice crystalizes it, making it socially acceptable by normalizing violence committed against animals so long as it was for scientific purposes. They argued that the suffering of animals does not only occur during experiments: in Emarel's time, animals were sold to laboratories, but many of them were also snatched from their owners or taken from the streets (Freshel 1933, 135, 107; Lind af Hageby & Schartau 1904, 200). They were put in small cages while they waited to be experimented on, not being able to go out, nor receiving any love or caring attention. Then, the experiment could be performed with or without anesthetics. Many experiments required animals to wait with open wounds or illnesses that had been inoculated in them, which meant that they also suffered for a long time after the vivisection was performed on them. Once the experiment was finished, animals could either be destroyed or put through another experiment, just as it happens nowadays. In her opposition to vivisection, Freshel took the abolitionist stand.

As previously stated, Emarel believed vivisection was not only experimenting on animals for scientific purposes, but also slaughtering them for food. Since it was a different manifestation of the same form of violence against animals, the logical conclusion would be to oppose all forms of vivisection and all forms of cruelty and violence to animals. She believed, as many antivivisectionists did, that there could be no morally valid benefit if it came from torturing living helpless beings. If animal cruelty was wrong, it was wrong under any circumstance, no matter its purpose. Animal protection legislation punished those who deliberately hurt animals, unless it was for scientific purposes. Vivisectors argued that their main objective was to reduce the pain in the world, but as antivivisectionist Edward Maitland, who was a very close friend of Anna Kingsford put it, "The friends of science are reduced to the humiliating confession that it can only shift the seat of the suffering that is in the world, not lessen the sum; and that it can only shift it from the stronger to the weaker, and this on the condition of increasing its volume and intensity" (1896, 84).

Vivisectors saw experiments on animals as the only way to advance scientific medical knowledge. They argued that the benefit animal experimentation rendered humans made it morally right: they had to kill animals to save humans. If antivivisectionists did not support vivisection, they were acting against the interest of humanity and against humans; therefore, they were frequently accused of prioritizing animals over humans. Frances Power Cobbe herself wrote that "Many good people suppose me […] to worship Dogs and Cats while ready to consign the human race generally to destruction" (Power Cobbe 1894, 241). This, however, was not the only accusation made against them; "sentimental, hysteric, fanatics" (Lind af Hageby 1904, 18); "lunatics, fools, faddists" (Lind af Hageby 1940, 9); and ignorants in science, were some of the names assigned to animal protectionists. This last accusation

had been leveled against them since the birth of the antivivisection movement, even though there were doctors and other scientists who opposed vivisection on scientific grounds, such as Maurice Beddow Bayly (1887-1961), Albert Leffingwell (1845-1916), and antivivisectionist doctor Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910), the first woman to appear in the British Medical Register in 1859, who advised future women students of medicine not to vivisect animals because it was morally and scientifically wrong to do so (Blackwell 1891,7).

However, in 1909 American doctors took accusations one step further and deemed antivivisectionist women as mentally ill: Charles Dana used the term "zoophilpsycosis" to refer to those who felt an abnormal love towards animals (Beers 2006, 129). He was not the only one: W. Keen M.D. of the American Medical Association wrote a pamphlet in defense of research about *The Harmful Effects of Antivivisection on Character* (1912). The gendered nature of the fight against animal protectionism was still evident in the first half of the twentieth century. Doctors were not used to having their authority questioned, especially not by women, and they feared losing their influence to a group of animal lovers. Imposing science as the only parameter of truth left medicine no room for dissenting groups, whether they were scientists or lay people.

There were some attempts at changing legislation by antivivisectionist groups such as the American Antivivisection Society; most of them failed but a few succeeded, and the Illinois Humane Education law of June 14, 1909, prohibited experimenting and dissecting living animals for demonstration or teaching purposes (Schultz 1924, 304). However, Emarel and the Millennium Guild did not press for legislation changes regarding vivisection or any other form of animal cruelty because she believed in individual daily changes, such as adopting a vegetarian diet and refusing to use any animal products. She argued from a moral standpoint aimed at changing people's opinions using ethical arguments and providing information about experimentation, fur trapping methods and slaughter conditions; she wanted to inspire people, to provide an example so that individuals could see the decisive role they played in animal cruelty.

8. SELECTIONS FROM THREE ESSAYS BY RICHARD WAGNER WITH A COMMENT OF SUCH IMPORTANCE TO THE MORAL PROGRESS OF HUMANITY THAT IT CONSTITUTES AN ISSUE IN ETHICS AND RELIGION (1933)

In 1933 Emarel Freshel published her book *Selections from Three Essays by Richard Wagner with a Comment of Such Importance to the Moral Progress of Humanity that it Constitutes an Issue in Ethics and Religion*, using Wagner's name as camouflage to introduce the controversial issue of antivivisection (Freshel 1946, 2. Ethel Fairmont Beebe Papers). She had met Cosima Wagner (Iaccobo & Iaccobo 2004, 148) in Bayreuth where she found out that composer Richard Wagner was an antivivisectionist (*Vita*. Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955) and that his essays were in accord with the goals of the Millennium (Freshel 1933, 179). Accordingly, she conceived of the *Selections* as a book to be presented to every society in defence of

animals (Freshel 1933, 181). In the book, Freshel gave arguments against vivisection in three forms: using extracts from Wagner's essays, quoting famous people on antivivisection and animal cruelty, and giving an account of the types of experiments that she had found throughout the years in newspapers and reports. She made a point of the fact that it was not only cranks and lunatics who fought vivisection, but also writers, philosophers, scientists, members of the aristocracy, and even royalty. The experiments were so cruel that she did not even have to exaggerate them, plain facts were eloquent enough for readers to grasp the degree of suffering, cruelty and injustice that experimenters inflicted upon animals. Providing scientific facts against vivisection was a recurrent resource of antivivisectionists: Frances Power Cobbe had done so with her pamphlet *Light in Dark Places* (1883) where she used illustrations from a physiology book to argue against this practice. This type of information helped antivivisectionists shed some light on what animals really went through during experiments. In *The Shambles of Science* Lizzy Lind af Hageby and Leisa K. Schartau used their own experience having witnessed experiments to denounce that animals were awake when experiments were being practiced on them (Lind af Hageby & Schartau 1904).

In *Selections from Three Essays,* Emarel exposed that the benefit of humanity was not the only reason for performing experiments on animals, since they were also being performed to test weapons such as poison gas, which meant that animals were being killed to find effective methods of killing humans. With different extracts from newspapers and quoting Nina Douglas Hamilton, Duchess of Hamilton and Brandon, the book mentions the Porton Chemical Warfare Experimental Station where the poison gas experiments had been performed on animals in England in the 1920's (Freshel 1933, 133). At Porton, 2100 animals had been used in three years, comprising dogs, cats, horses, rabbits and guinea pigs (Millennium Guild, n.d. *A True Service*). Experiments on thousands of animals were also performed to test atomic bombs (Ryder 1983, 60). From the beginning, antivivisectionists believed that if experiments on animals were permitted, it was only a matter of time that experiments would be performed on other living beings considered inferior by experimenters. In fact, the Porton Station was also used to test poison gas on humans; indeed, Indian and British soldiers were subjected to experiments involving poison gasses from 1916 to 1989 (Evans 2007). Whereas vivisectors presented experiments as a matter of choosing between animals or humans, antivivisectionists proved that experiments were being carried out on both (Freshel 1933, 141-143). Obviously, to vivisectors some lives did matter more than others, although it was not as simple a choice as they tried to present it.

Of the many people Emarel sent *Selections* to, there was only one alleged vegetarian who openly criticized it: writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who wrote to Emarel that she felt "the book takes an unfair advantage of those who do not wish to know about antivivisection" (Perkins Gilman quoted at Freshel, letter to Agnes Ryan n.d., Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955). Emarel responded that perhaps Charlotte Perkins Gilman herself, having included her "Cattle Train" poem in a book of poems on pretty things, where it was not expected, had "spoiled the steaks of those who did not want to know about meat" (Freshel, letter to Agnes Ryan n.d., Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955).

9. FURS AND FEATHERS

All members of the Millenium Guild pledged themselves not to use "furs, feathers from slain birds, marabout, kid, leather, tortoise shell and ivory" (Freshel 1926a, 107). Unlike other anti-fur activists, Freshel actually believed that furs were beautiful, but their beauty did not make it right to have animals killed for them (Freshel 1926a, 108). In all her addresses on furs, she provided detailed accounts on the painful deaths fur trapping methods inflicted on animals. Moreover, she argued that some real furs were "cheap in cash but not in suffering" (Freshel letter to Agnes Ryan, February 3, 1945. Agnes Ryan papers, 1904-1955) because she could not understand the killing of animals for pure vanity when there already existed cruelty-free alternatives. However, in Emarel's time, alternatives to furs were difficult to find and people did not know how or where to buy them. Since she believed that women who wore furs did it because they ignored the process to obtain them (Freshel 1926a,106), her activism against furs was aimed at them. She promoted fake furs by making and wearing her own fake fur coats and by writing letters to humanitarian magazines, where she explained women how to make their own fabric coats (Freshel letter to the Starry Cross, February 1921, 29) and how to ask for fur fabrics at the stores (Freshel letter to the Starry Cross, February 1921, 27; Freshel 1926a,110). In addition, she always took examples of fake fur materials made of rayon silk or wood fiber whenever she went to a Congress, to prove that fake furs looked just as elegant and were even warmer than real furs.

10. OTHER FORMS OF CRUELTY

Emarel also worked against caged animals and zoos. Regarding these animals and the people who love them she wrote: "Love is an often-misapplied word. People have been known to say they 'love a beefsteak'. This same quality of love is for the caged creature" (Millennium Guild n.d. *Zoological Gardens*). Again, she understood and explained the implications of the life of a caged animal, she condemned the cruelty of it all: the capturing of the animal, the fear experienced during transportation and their imprisonment for life, "depriving the creatures of the freedom God gave them" (Millennium Guild n.d. *Zoological Gardens*).

Aware of new forms of cruelty that were only starting to develop, Emarel also expressed her opposition to animals in films because of the training of show animals and the broadcasting of cruelty that would otherwise be seen by much smaller audiences (Freshel 1923, 57).

11. LAST YEARS

Towards the end of her life Emarel Freshel was pessimistic towards the cause of animals. She believed "progress was paralyzed by comparison to forty years before" (Freshel 1946, 1. Ethel Fairmont Beebe Papers), and things had changed

for the worse for animals. More furs were being used not only as coats but also in different fashion accessories; vivisection had expanded and was unstoppable, science had managed to convince the public that vivisection was a necessity and a benefit for humankind, even when it had been proven that the object of many experiments was exterminating human lives (Freshel 1946. Ethel Fairmont Beebe Papers). She regretted how the antivivisection movement had lost its strength and that the fur question was no longer addressed in the newspapers (Freshel 1946, 2, 5. Ethel Fairmont Beebe Papers). She also saw the rise of meat and milk consumption and of every form of cruelty despite all her life's work.

Notwithstanding the fact that Freshel no longer believed it was her full responsibility to make people change, and that she no longer felt her work as being essential to anybody's choosing the right path towards animals, she still believed those who were meant to take it, would take it no matter what (Freshel 1946, 20. Ethel Fairmont Beebe Papers). This did not mean she gave up; it just meant that she no longer felt it as an obligation; she was doing it for herself and to show others how it could be done. Emarel wrote she would not do it again, seeing that despite all her work animals were in a worse situation than before (Freshel 1946, 20. Ethel Fairmont Beebe Papers), with the passing of the years she understood life and our place in the world differently. She was aware of the positive influence she had been on many people, still it had not been enough; but it did not affect her negatively because everything was as it was meant to be. It was not her responsibility, since one can only be responsible of one's own actions. Regardless of her impression, many people did share her views and many of us still share them today. She concluded that it was better "to follow Jesus's advice and hold our precious jewel ALOFT, KNOWING that those who can bear its light will come near, and share its helpfulness and beauty" (Freshel 1946, 21. Ethel Fairmont Beebe Papers).

Emarel Freshel died on January 3rd, 1948, at the age of 82 (Obituary, Ethel Fairmont Beebe Papers). She was a revolutionary activist for taking the abolitionist stand for animals, and for believing that love was incompatible with cruelty and the killing of animals in any form, including humane slaughter. She deserves a prominent place as a pioneer in the history of the animal protection movement not only for her advanced views on animal justice, but also to remind current women activists that they belong to a genealogy of women who defended animals using the same arguments we use today to fight for animal justice.

In 1931, in a letter to Emarel, Agnes Ryan wrote "I am sure the influence of the Guild and your talks reach far, far into the future" (Agnes Ryan Papers, 1904-1955) and she was right. For here we are, more than ninety years later, remembering and honoring Emarel's influential life and her remarkable work for animals.

Sometimes the seventh wave takes years to reach its farthest point, but sooner or later it rises the tide.

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Figure 1. Emarel Freshel Portrait. MS Group 115, Box 5, Folder 9. The Ethel Fairmont Beebe Papers, Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries. U of Florida.

"BLACK FISH, BLACK FISH, WHAT DO YOU SEE?": LOOKING AT THE FACES OF ORCAS IN ANIMAL ADVOCACY DOCUMENTARY FILM*

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Abstract

Animal advocacy documentaries have, in the last decades, established themselves as an identifiable subgenre of their own with strategic conventions such as featuring the gaze of the nonhuman animal "looking back" for moral shock and ethical purposes. This article examines the problematic gaze and face of a particular species, the orca, with regards to such convention, and sets out to analyze how Gabriela Cowperthwaite's *Blackfish* (2013) and William Neal's *Long Gone Wild* (2019) deal with the representation of orca faces, gazes, and bodies within their wider structural dichotomy of captivity and wilderness. To do so, the article first explores representations of orcas in fictional films and how they are connected to the wider context of the marine park industry. It then turns to the issue of facial representation and the image of interspecies bonding in the documentaries, and points out the editing strategies that determine the central role of the films' interviewees as guides in the meaning-making process of orca faces and bodies.

Keywords: Orcas, Documentary Film, Nonhuman Animal Gaze, Face, Animal Ethics, Captivity

"PEZ NEGRO, PEZ NEGRO, ¿QUÉ VES AHÍ?" MIRANDO A LOS ROSTROS DE LAS ORCAS EN DOCUMENTALES EN DEFENSA DE LOS ANIMALES

Resumen

En las últimas décadas, el documental animalista se ha erigido como un subgénero propio en el que se ponen en práctica una serie de convenciones técnicas destinadas a causar un impacto moral y empatía en el espectador. Entre ellas, destaca la representación de la devolución de la mirada por parte del animal no humano. El presente artículo examina la problemática de la mirada y del rostro inherente a la representación de una especie como la orca. Para ello, se analiza cómo los documentales *Blackfish* (2013), dirigido por Gabriela Cowperthwaite, y *Long Gone Wild* (2019), dirigido por William Neal, inciden en el modo de plasmación cinematográfica de los rostros, miradas y cuerpos de orcas, amparados por una dicotomía estructural oscilante entre el cautiverio y la vida silvestre. Con este fin, el artículo atiende, en primer lugar, a la representación de orcas en el cine de ficción y a sus conexiones con el desarrollo de la industria de acuarios. En segundo lugar, se analiza cómo el rostro y el nexo interespecie son representados en los documentales anteriormente citados, señalando los métodos de edición mediante los cuales los humanos entrevistados adquieren un papel fundamental en la atribución de significado a los rostros y cuerpos de las orcas.

Palabras clave: orcas, cine documental, mirada del animal no-humano, rostro, ética animal, cautividad

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The film industry, ranging from Hollywood productions to activist and wildlife documentaries, has had a pivotal role in shifting public attitudes about orcas (*Orcinus orca*) in the last decades. As highly intelligent apex predators endowed with complex emotional and social capacities (Marino 2014; Strager 2023), historically, orcas have inspired dread and fear. In the 1960s, with the commencement of what would soon become the multi-billion-dollar industry of marine wildlife shows with orcas, public sympathies towards them began to shift from their reputation as monsters and pests to that of "pets." The lucrativeness of performing orcas–whether in films or in circus-type shows held at aquaria— led not only to massive wildlife capture (and marine parks' sidestepping of certain laws and prohibitions regarding American waters by having the whales captured in other oceanic territories), but also to negligent corporate behaviors that ultimately cost the lives of three trainers. As a response to such corporate schemes and to the perceived subjection of orcas to systematic physical and emotional cruelty and abuse that takes a toll on their health, documentarians took on the subject of cetacean captivity to change the dominant narrative disseminated by the entertainment industry.

This article focuses on the use of facial shots of orcas in animal advocacy films, namely in Gabriela Cowperthwaite's celebrated game-changer, *Blackfish* (2013), and in William Neal's follow-up, *Long Gone Wild* (2019). The initial part of the title is meant as a reference to the 1967 children's book classic, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*, written by Bill Martin Jr. and illustrated by Eric Carle, to emphasize the role of nonhuman animals as the objects of gaze but also as subjects doing the looking. The book's structural shaping around the reciprocity of the gaze, coupled with the sense of repetitiveness and presentation of humans' visual encounter with nonhuman others, reflects some of the motifs that will be discussed in this article. In the first section, I introduce how a selection of fiction and nonfiction films have influenced public perceptions of orcas and how the genre of such productions has had an impact on the wider cultural practice of orca exploitation in the marine park industry. In the second section, I analyze the strategies employed by Cowperthwaite and Neal in the representation of orca faces, with particular attention to how they are framed as part of the montage, how they speak to the captive/wild dichotomy that polarizes the debate, and how they contribute to the persuasiveness of their ethical message. I argue that despite the laudable and inspiring purpose of the films, such types of images can nonetheless be problematic given the artificiality of the editing that surrounds them, which directs the manner that the whales are purported to "look back" by relying on the rhetorical effect of the interviewees' faces and voiceovers.

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1. AN OVERVIEW OF ORCAS IN FILM

The unfortunate nomenclature of the species (said to derive from Orcus, the Roman god of the underworld and the dead) and of its other commonly used name (killer whale) sheds some light as to orcas' history as recipients of human scorn and the objects of awe and terror. Traces of such human contemptuousness are recorded all the way back to Roman historian Pliny the Elder, whose descriptions of orcas as monsters were refreshened by Linnaeus' taxonomizing and subsequent reports of sailors, fishermen and explorers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century that created unflattering portrayals of them and their habits of pack-hunting (Leiren-Young 2016; Strager 2023). Western images of orcas as teeth-bearing, ruthless hunters were sewn into the cultural fabric of a massive whaling industry primarily interested in baleen species. Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) and its subsequent film adaptations, although revolving around a white Sperm whale, happily played into the collective imagination of the ocean depths as a bestiary of ferocious leviathans. "The killer whale is well designed for a career of destruction and mayhem," Cook and Wisner wrote. "Its jaws are large, powerful, and armed with strong teeth... These mighty jaws and their terrible teeth are a kind of animated chopping machine which can tear great chunks from a giant sea animal and bite a large fish in half" (1963, 20). When not depicted as fiends, orcas were often regarded by human communities with whom they shared the seas, such as in the Lofoten Islands, as "robbers and thieves, pests, or menaces that should simply be wiped out" (Strager 2023, 14).

The mid-1960s represented a change in paradigm, in great part due to the film *Namu, the Killer Whale* (Benedek 1966), which told the story of an orca who grieves the loss of his partner, killed by local fishermen, and in the process befriends a marine biologist and changes the community's perception of his species. The film starred Namu, the first captive orca to survive beyond three months in captivity, who was bought and exhibited by entrepreneur Ted Griffin in his Seattle Marine Aquarium. Griffin attempted to provide Namu with a mate, who was soon resold to the recently founded SeaWorld San Diego–and thus began the branding of the "Shamu" stage name for the park's subsequent growing collection of (celebrity) orcas (Desmond 1999, 217-250; Huggan 2018, 58-64). The fact that Namu only survived for little more than a year in captivity did little to deter public demand for the exhibition of more killer whales. The International Marine Mammal Project reported in January 2024 that at least 166 orcas had been captured from the wild to be kept in captivity, and that today there are estimates of at least 54 orcas being held in marine parks across the world, with the United States and China leading the numbers (Ellis 2024).

Orcas' grief at the loss of their partners was also to become the motive behind the 1977 film *Orca*, directed by Michael Anderson and starring Richard Harris and Charlotte Rampling. Rather than a family film, however, *Orca* was an attempt on the part of Italian producer Dino de Laurentiis to capitalize on the success of the first instalment of *Jaws* (1975), and so delivered to audiences an action-packed revenge plot that again tapped into the monstrousness of killer whales. As opposed to Spielberg's depiction of great white sharks, however, Anderson's orca bull is triggered into

monstrousness by the misdeeds of Captain Nolan, played by Harris, who emerges as a Frankenstein figure of sorts by "creating" a creature whose vengefulness clouds his sentience, up until his "maker" meets his demise at the end of a chase that takes them to arctic waters. To convey the uncanny connection between the orca and Nolan, the film resorts to significant shots of the characters looking into each others' faces, emphasized by the use of zooms, point-of-view shots from the water surface, and close-ups of the whale's eye. The orca eye is difficult to discern in medium-to-long shots due to his black skin and proportions, but conspicuously "human" when focused up close due to the almond shape and what the film attempts to convey as tears (in contrast to the beady pitch blackness of Spielberg's unblinking great white). *Orca*'s "swelling Ennio Morricone soundtrack" (Verevis 2013, 274), compelling and poignant, also marked a stark contrast with *Jaws*' landmark simple, yet "pulsating, foreboding theme" (Schatz 1993, 18) by John Williams, exemplifying how the characterization of ocean predators could be taken to great lengths by musical score.

In 1993, *Free Willy*, directed by Simon Wincer, swerved orcas back to the family film genre, delivering an anti-captivity children's film classic where an orphan befriends a killer whale held at a local aquarium and sets out to free him–a gesture that marks the child's acceptance of his own foster family. The film relied on a heavy Disneyfication of orcas that was part of a larger network of common patterns in family films where nonhuman animals are "telepathically" connected with children or young adults, sublimated by visuals of interspecies contact through the act of touching and petting (Alonso-Recarte and Ramos-Gay 2022, 413-14). Despite the film's critical success and its impact on whale-watching tourism (Wearing, Buchmann, and Jobberns 2011), the irony was not lost on movie-goers who criticized the anti-captivity message at the expense of Keiko, the starring orca that had been captured in Icelandic waters as an infant. The Free Willy-Keiko Foundation's efforts to reintroduce Keiko in the wild were ambivalently interpreted by critics, some of whom regarded the 20-million-dollar initiative as an act of irresponsibility and a failure (Bossart 2007, 547)–as Keiko, up until his death in 2003, approached, but never became integrated, in wild orca pods— and some of whom regarded it as a success (given that Keiko lived the last of his years in good health and in a much more stimulating, natural environment). *Free Willy* and the plight to save Keiko contributed to the "rehabilitation" of killer whales in popular imagination away from the image of them as monsters, where "reconstructed whales [were] no longer resources to be harvested or even species to be saved, but rather individuals to be appreciated and respected" (Lawrence and Nelson 2004, 698). Genuine public interest in the wellbeing of Keiko, who would not be featured in subsequent installments of the franchise, fueled the skepticism toward the manufactured narratives of thriving captured orcas and cetaceans that conformed the signature storytelling of the marine park industry–a business that animal activists had been targeting for years.

It was not until the death of seasoned SeaWorld trainer Dawn Brancheau on February 24, 2010, however, that the debate on captive cetaceans (and killer whales in particular) took a more serious turn. Brancheau was killed in SeaWorld Orlando by a male orca named Tilikum, who had also been captured near Iceland as a calf and

who had previously been involved in the comparatively less publicized deaths of two other people: Keltie Byrne, a trainer at Sealand of the Pacific, in British Columbia, and Daniel Dukes, a possibly demented vagrant who was found dead in Tilikum's pool (the factual circumstances as to his passing remain inconclusive). What led Tilikum to drown and maim Brancheau also remains the subject of speculation; whether an act of play or frustration, the killing evinced the ultimate unknowability and unpredictability of wild nonhuman animal species manufactured into pet-like personae for ticket sales. Aside from Brancheau and Byrne, another trainer had also been violently killed by a SeaWorld-bred orca in Loro Parque, Spain, in 2009 ("Una orca del Loro Parque" 2009; Montero 2010), and a trainer at SeaWorld San Diego had nearly drowned in 2006 when being repeatedly pulled underwater by one of the whales ("Caught on Tape" 2012). Brancheau's tragic death reignited heated debates about the ethics of orca captivity, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) pushed hard for the revising of regulations and working conditions to keep trainers from swimming with killer whales.

But the greatest backlash against SeaWorld and the cetacean captivity-entertainment industry came with Gabriela Cowperthwaite's acclaimed documentary *Blackfish* (2013), a film that traced the history of Tilikum and built its narrative around the confessions and introspections of repentant former trainers, whose experience at SeaWorld rendered them with the sufficient authority to make their accusations against the corporate giant believable. It did not help that SeaWorld refused to participate in the film either, as the oppressor's decision to disengage itself from media coverage is hardly read in a neutral note in activist discourses. *Blackfish* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2013 and received critical acclaim. It was then distributed by CNN, Magnolia Pictures and Dogwoof, and became part of the Netflix catalogue in several territories, reaching widespread viewership and initiating the first stage of SeaWorld's downwards spiraling into public ignominy and financial disaster. The so-called "*Blackfish* effect," which can be quantifiably measured by million-dollar losses in revenue, compromised SeaWorld's credibility for stakeholders and visitors, and has become a frequent subject of scholarly study on how legitimacy crises are (mis)managed with PR responses, corporate restructuring, repackaging of products and the (mis)use of "education" as an ethical selling point in the animal entertainment industry (Chattoo 2016; White 2017; Woods 2018; Parsons and Rose 2018; Javanaud, Sanghani, and Young 2018; Waller and Iluzada 2020; Massey and Randriamarohaja 2019; Boissat, Thomas-Walters, and Veríssimo 2021).

Although *Blackfish*'s leading character of victim-turned-perpetrator (in a far less anthropomorphic light than Anderson's vengeful creature) allows for a more convincing focalization from a nonhuman animal perspective (and formalistically blends advocacy with conventions of true crime and the environmental and wildlife film genres), Cowperthwaite is careful about making full assumptions about Tilikum's headspace at the time of Brancheau's death, though speculations from trainers and scientists are put forth. Tilikum is also represented as part of a larger number of victims traumatically removed from their mothers (orca experts report that in the wild offspring remain with their mothers for the rest of their lives), sold back and forth for profit, forced to live in a small concrete tank with practically

no stimulation, made to perform for food and tossed into unnatural cohabitation with other whales who may belong to a different culture or ecotype. As journalist Jane Velez-Mitchell points out in a CNN clip included in the documentary, "If you were in a bathtub for twenty-five years, don't you think you'd get a little irritated, aggravated, maybe a little psychotic?" (Cowperthwaite 2013, 09:20-09:27).

Bill Neal's *Long Gone Wild* (2019) recapitulates on the same themes as *Blackfish* and resorts to a number of talking-head experts that had already appeared in Cowperthwaite's film (among them, former trainers Carol Ray and Jeff Ventre, and world-renowned neuroscientist and president of the Whale Sanctuary Project, Dr. Lori Marino). These figures do not address the camera directly (as typical talking heads would have it) in either film, but are instead presumably engaged in conversation with an off-camera interviewer whose verbal input is edited out. In addition, *Long Gone Wild* also welcomes a host of other authorities—including authors, scientists, and dolphin trainer-turned-activist Ric O'Barry, well known for his participation in Louie Psihoyos's acclaimed documentary, *The Cove* (2009)—and takes the conversation in new directions, including the growing market of wildlife trafficking and marine-park building in China, the argument about legal personhood, and the hopeful promise of whale sanctuaries as a place in which to retire performing cetaceans. Neither *Blackfish* nor *Long Gone Wild* rely on a narrator (though informational text is occasionally supplied) but follow instead the "string-of-interviews" (Nichols 1983) technique to give order and coherence to the abundance of images that range from archival footage to recordings of orcas in the wild and in captivity, SeaWorld propaganda, and still photographs, among other material.

The selection of films described above is limited to a number of representative productions that both influenced and reflected American attitudes towards killer whales from the 1960s up until the present day, but by no means are they the sole filmic resonances of orca representations. Wildlife films and programming, along with other fictional films (such as the three remaining *Free Willy* instalments) and documentaries such as *The Whale* (Chisholm and Parfit 2011), a Canadian production, have also participated in the continuing shifts in public perceptions of orcas. The dangerous exposure of trainers to captive killer whales would also be depicted in Jacques Audiard's fictional film *De rouille et d'os* (2012), a Franco-Belgian production, as part of the story's exploration of bodily and emotional trauma. Furthermore, the extent to which genre determines representation must be taken into consideration. *Namu, the Killer Whale* and *Free Willy* reproduced the requisites of the family film genre, including a reaffirmation of the nuclear, hegemonic (human) family. *Orca*, in the meantime, rode the fashionable wave of the revenge-of-nature genre that "(re)integrat[ed] human beings into the food chain, thereby questioning human exceptionalism," but that at the same time featured "human relationships that overshadow ecological questions" (Fuchs 2018, 178). As suggested earlier, genre determines the types of shots employed in the representation of the orca character. In the case of family films, shots showing physical contact between the human protagonist and the whale play into the lucrative image of the orca as a companion species—an idealization that marine parks capitalize on. In the revenge-of-nature genre, montages of the gaze exchanged between man and "monster" ambivalently

emphasize the antagonism and the communal interspecies recognition between the characters.

Blackfish and *Long Gone Wild*, meanwhile, not only belong to the documentary genre, which enjoyed renewed interest from the public at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Rich 2006; Smaill 2016, 2), and which itself entails a long epistemological debate as to the nature of stories' claims to truth and authenticity (Chapman 2009, 48-71; Aufderheide 2007), but they are furthermore part of a corpus of non-fiction productions aiming at animal activism and/or advocacy. This subgenre, which may loosely be defined as films that expose human abuse of nonhuman animals through industrial, ecocidal and cultural practices and traditions, has targeted sectors involving nonhuman animal exploitation and consumption since the 1980s, when People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and other animal rights organizations began producing and distributing their own videos (Finsen and Finsen 1994; Phelps 2007, 237-40, 265-70). These first videos greatly relied on material acquired in undercover investigations, which solidified the use of low-quality footage recorded with hidden handheld cameras as a signature authenticator of truth (Freeman and Tulloch 2013, 114). While these types of visuals continue to be instrumental in generating the type of "moral shock" necessary to inspire action (Jasper and Poulsen 1995; Jasper 2018), animal advocacy documentaries have also expanded their rhetorical repertoire, ranging from so-called "omnibus films" (Finn 2023, 75-88) that saturate viewers with nonstop images of animal suffering at a grand (even global) scale, to the use of humor, a greater reliance on verbal argumentation and reasoning, quasi-poetic constructions of the lives of singled-out nonhuman individuals, the involvement of celebrities, "filmmaker as protagonist" (Nichols 1991, 71) approaches employed in dramatic or thriller-type schemas, and the semiotics of the greater narrative of the Anthropocene, among other possibilities. Common to these diverse forms of storytelling is the attempt to instill empathy in the viewer by converting the exploited nonhuman animal object into a subject, and a quite common technique to do so is by focusing on the nonhuman animal face and their gaze "looking back." How this can be accomplished through cinematography and editing will depend on the filmmaker's own stylistics and strategic approaches. In this study, one pertinent question to ask is precisely how these indexes are put to use in the case of species with little phylogenetic resemblance to humans.

2. "THE FACE" OF CAPTIVITY

Nonhuman animal gazes and face-to-face encounters with humans have been the subject of philosophers ranging from Levinas (1988, 169; 1997, 151-53) to the playful variations explored by Derrida in his classic *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008). The documentary format, nonetheless, demands that we address the *framing* of the encounter, that is, the technological layering of representation that narrativizes an image as part of the fabric of the larger story being told. Here, formalistic choices regarding the moving or the still image (type of shot, angle,

chromatism, resolution, duration, sound accompaniment, motion, etc.) form an index that is part of the compositional logic of the film.

Blackfish and *Long Gone Wild* present several shots of orca faces, usually engaging contact with a trainer or looking at the spectator on the other side of the glass. One such shot in *Blackfish* shows for instance the upper back and head of a man in a wetsuit looking from behind the glass at a huge orca facing him and nodding her head, only inches away. The orca sticks out her tongue, and it is inferred, by way of editing and the superimposition of the voiceover of former trainer John Jett, that meaningful contact is taking place. "When you look into their eyes, you know somebody is home. Somebody is looking back. You form a very personal relationship with your animal," Jett notes (Cowperthwaite 2013, 05:19-05:28). This type of deixis takes place in *Long Gone Wild* as well. Towards the end of the film, when the interviewees' discourse revolves around the theme of children as the hope for a more ethical future for orcas, a still shot (courtesy of Wolfgang Kaehler) of a little girl, hands on glass and looking at the face of an orca on the other side is zoomed back, thus creating a more inclusive visual that shifts from the centeredness of the child into a fuller view of the orca and the face-to-face encounter. Incidentally, this is the shot used in the promotion of the film.

Discussions about the complex and developed brain of killer whales (and thus, of their highly evolved emotional and social capabilities) are connected with the meaningfulness of eyes in *Long Gone Wild*. Ex-trainer Carol Ray recalls how,

> When I looked into the eyes of the whales that I was working with, especially the ones that I was working with the most and I was most connected to, I saw a friendship. I saw, 'Hey cool, something to do, somebody to interact with.' I saw intelligence, I saw, 'What do you want me to do next?' I saw, 'How can I make you happy?' I saw all those things. (Neal 2019, 54:06-54:30)

These intimacies are superimposed on a series of stills that show the trainer in physical contact with an orca, with two of such showing the trainer leaning on the muzzle and then on the lower jaw of an orca sticking her head out of the water. Ray's intervention is followed-up by Jeff Ventre's similar impressions: "I mean, they're looking back. They're tracking you. They're watching everything that you do, and you definitely know somebody's home" (Neal 2019, 54:32-54:41). Ventre's words accompany slow-motion footage of a whale's head as she slides on the pool platform towards the trainer, who celebrates her arrival by kissing her.

In these cases, the image of the exchange of gazes is far removed from the type of montage delivered by Anderson in *Orca*. Yet despite their intention to advocate for the whales, they remain problematic at different levels. Firstly, images showing trainers' physical contact with the whales echo those popularized by the *Free Willy* franchise and the family film genre, in which interspecies encounter involves the submission of a wild nonhuman animal into pet-like status–the exact same degradation and form of manufacturing that the documentaries, as grand narratives, otherwise seek to deconstruct and denounce. Secondly, the conclusive remarks and supportive visuals of there being someone "home" suggest that such

intelligence and sentience are stimulated, measured and rendered visible by virtue of the interspecies bond with humans. And yet, the films at other times contradict the simplicity and naturalization of the trainers' belief in there being "someone home" by presenting orca minds as spaces of speculation and ultimate unknowability of the subjects as individuals and as a species. This is pointed out by Sperb (2016) in his criticism of *Blackfish*'s irresoluteness at the borders of sentimentalism and the awareness of narrative limitations. As Ray remarks in another instance in *Blackfish*, "At the time, I think I could have convinced myself that the relationships were built on something stronger than the fact that I am giving them fish. You know, I like to think that. But I don't know that that's the truth" (Cowperthwaite 2013, 34:52-35:08)–this time accompanied by footage of an orca having fish tossed into her mouth. As Sperb mentions regarding such quote, "[Ray] punctuates with a nervous, tentative laugh which in turn betrays the larger uncertainty about human relationships with animals which permeates the entire movie" (2016, 208).

Burt argues that film makes "a different type of contact" out of the exchange of looks between nonhumans and humans where "the look need not necessarily communicate anything as such but sets in play a chain of effects that reflects at the very least some form of shared understanding of context between human and animal" (2002, 40). Nonetheless, as he continues to point out, film also excites a tension in the representation of this interspecies gaze: on the one hand, it "often depicts the reinforcement of the bonds between human and animal," but, on the other, "it also multiplies the different ways of seeing the animal, which is a mode of fragmentation too" (Burt 2002, 40). *Blackfish* and *Long Gone Wild* seek, on the one hand, to reinforce the idea of interspecies bonding through the packaging of images of faces and gazes under the auspice of interviewees' voiceovers, as exemplified above. The documentaries thus frame images of captive whales' faces, superimposing themselves over the frame of captivity itself. As Berger notes, zoos epitomize the disappearance of animals in modernity, where "the fact that they can observe us has lost all significance" (2009 [1980], 27) and where they are made "marginal" (34) and appear "lethargic and dull" (33). Berger infers visitors' likely question to be "Why are these animals less than I believed?" (33). Marine parks, at a crossroads between the zoo and the circus, design shows around cetaceans and pinnipeds by resorting to movement, thus averting audience disappointment by focusing on the dynamism of motion. I will return to the issue of movement shortly; for now, suffice to point out that marine parks' illusion of thriving nonhuman animals in captivity is nurtured by a type of image of interspecies physical and visual encounter that the films themselves partly fall prey to as well, and that the only thing that polarizes the advocate discourse from the pro-captive position, in these cases, is the interviewees' insight, testimonies and facial expressions of their own—not the face of the whale in itself. It is through the interviewees that the orcas become, in the films, what we believe them to be.

The films' packaging of repentant interviewees with orca victims must, however, appear properly informed by scientific data. There is a tacit understanding–reinforced by the neuroscientific input supplied by authorities such as Dr. Lori Marino— that orcas have the potential to have a theory of mind, that is, that they

have a notion (a hypothesis) regarding what another individual may be thinking or feeling. As Marino points out in *Blackfish*, they have a part of the brain extended into the limbic system:

> The safest inference would be [that] these are animals that have highly elaborated emotional lives. It's becoming clear that dolphins and whales have a sense of self, a sense of social bonding that they've taken to another level—much stronger, much more complex than in other mammals, including humans. . . . Everything about them is social. Everything. It's been suggested that their whole sense of self is distributed among individuals in their group. (Cowperthwaite 2013, 25:46-26:26)

By virtue of the documentaries' emphasis on images of orca-human physical and visual contact, with a primary focus on the face, the type of scientific evidence and theorizing that Marino brings to the table can reinforce the idea that the social bond and distribution of the sense of self can also breach the species divide and form a connection with humans. Here, the belief that the films are indulging in anthropomorphism can clash with the opposite claim: that to refuse to acknowledge the possibility of interspecies bonds constitutes an affirmative act of anthropodenial, that is, the "*a priori* rejection of shared characteristics between humans and animals when in fact they may exist" (de Waal 1999, 258). The documentaries' ethical take on this seems evident: orcas are in so many ways so much like humans that it is cruel and not in their best interest to keep them in captivity and condition them to a life of misery.

On the other hand and in all fairness, the films also "fragment" (to get back to Burt's terminology) the ways of looking at the nonhuman other by resorting to less problematic images. Significantly, such images tend to be of orca individuals and pods *in the wild*, where facial close-ups and whale-human contact are relinquished in favor of full-body shots (if recorded with underwater cameras) or partial views from the surface (through indexes such as dorsal fins, blowholes or heads spy-hopping). Movement here is important and strategically put to use: versus images of captive whales' repetitive, circular swimming in barren tanks and stagnant behaviors such as "logging" (floating quietly and still on the surface), and versus the frequent use of still photography for the representation of captivity, the films surrender footage of orcas in motion. These are not movements that connote the automation of circus performers or stereotypies; wild orca footage reflects pulse, vibrancy, dynamism, vitality, harmony with the environment–in other words, a thriving life. Such images inspire what Martha Nussbaum refers to as "wonder," which is "especially connected to our awareness of movement and sentience. We see and hear these creatures moving and doing all these things, and we imagine that something is going on inside; it's not sheer random motion, but directed somehow by an inner awareness, by a someone" (2022, 11). Wonder rejoices in the imaginative act, and in a way celebrates ultimate unknowability. What this type of sympathetic imagination supplies is an ethical means "to cross the species barrier—if we press ourselves, if we require of our imagination something more than common routine" (Nussbaum 2006, 355). The types of projections inherent to sympathetic imagination and wonder can render

evident the differences between ways of experiencing subjectivity and, perhaps more importantly, lead to moral judgments that can strengthen humans' appreciation and respect for others' dignity. Potentially, sympathetic imagination, in Nussbaum's framework, can envision nonhuman animal others as subjects of justice (Martinić 2022, 229). How scientific discourse can effectively function alongside the possibility of wonder and sympathetic imagination (as opposed to emerging as an inhibiting force) is of relevance. For instance, the mysteries of orca cognition are emphasized by Marino in *Long Gone Wild* as follows: "The kind of a mind that an orca brain produces is a mind that is sophisticated and complex beyond our comprehension. A mind that integrates feelings and emotions with thought. A mind that integrates vision and hearing in ways that we don't understand" (Neal 2019, 53:44-54:06). In this sense, the films echo the types of images that "[speak] to the limits of ethology, indicating that full knowledge of the natural world has not been achieved by science" (Smaill 2016, 120). To counter such limits and avoid a "dead end," however, they openly invite viewers to behold and to imagine what it is that we "don't understand" and lies "beyond our comprehension."

Less scientifically grounded discourses likewise gravitate around the sense of awe and wonder in the films. One such segment in *Blackfish* features OSHA expert witness Dave Duffus invoking the magnificence of orcas:

> The first nation's people and the old fishermen from the coast, they call them blackfish. They're an animal that possesses great spiritual power and they're not to be meddled with. I've spent a lot of time around killer whales, and they're always in charge. I never get out of the boat. I never mess with them. The speed and the power is quite amazing. . . . Even after seeing them thousands of times, you see them and you still [gasp] wake up. (Cowperthwaite 2013, 27:22-28:21)

Duffus's words are paired with inspirational musical accompaniment and images of a pod of wild orcas coming to the surface for air, creating a sublime landscape of black dorsal fins. The segment simultaneously features Duffus as talking head and as wild-orca observant from a boat, and the continuity between shots of the orcas and him aboard suggests that those are the visuals that he can admire from his position. Again, the extent to which these are neither close-ups of orca faces nor shots of their full bodies is revealing: considering the mystifying effect of voiceover-plus-moving image, the landscape of dorsal fins is incredibly "humanizing" insofar as it sublimates what the naked eye, unmediated by the technology of underwater cameras (and as if naturalizing and de-problematizing the technological format of the documentary itself) can realistically spot from our distanced, terrestrial environment. In contrast to the representation of the orca-human bond through visuals of interspecies contact, these segments suggest that it is in such wonder, allegorized by humans' ultimate inability to visually contain the totality of the "other" (and thus, symbolically, to control and subdue her), where the authentic relationship between humans and killer whales stands. And as such, the images represent the respectful, ethical way of looking at them. In this sense, *Blackfish* moves somewhat closer to the implications that Malamud identifies in the documentaries *The Lord*

God Bird (2008), directed by George Butler, and *Silent Roar: Searching for the Snow Leopard* (2007), directed by Hugh Miles and Mitchell Kelly, where "we *do not* see the animals [the ivory-billed woodpecker and the snow leopard, respectively] we have come to see . . . [W]e are not meant to see this animal. Its world is mutually exclusive with our own" (2012, 87). Fragmentation occurs the moment when difference is foregrounded, precluding the nonhuman animal's "looking back" at the human precisely because they are not meant to lead anthropocentric lives, though they do suffer the consequences of anthropocentrism, both in captivity and in the wild. The ethical stance behind these implications is delivered: however similar orcas may be to humans, they are still, to a great extent, incomprehensible to us, and they remain creatures about whom we wonder and imagine. Their "whaleness," on which their welfare and their wellbeing rest, must be respected.

Faces of orcas in *Blackfish* and *Long Gone Wild*, therefore, cannot be managed in the same way that many faces of other nonhuman victims are typically represented in animal advocacy documentaries where pain and suffering is rendered explicit in order to shove the viewer into moral shock. In her study of documentaries against the food industry, Vezovnik (2024) resorts to multimodal approaches by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) in order to categorize the types of images of nonhuman victims that are prevalent. She thus distinguishes between two modes of communicative function: there are "offer" images, in which "the animals do not look directly at the camera. . . . The viewer is offered the image of the suffering animal as information about the animal's condition." The images "give the viewer time for contemplation and emotionalization" (Vezovnik 2024, 428). Secondly, there are "demand" images, where "the animals look the viewers directly in the eye . . . prompting [the audience] to take action by establishing an imagined relationship with [them]" (Vezovnik 2024, 429). "Demand" images, I argue, can have different desired effects depending on the species: the closer the species to the human (whether in physiognomic or domestic terms), the more likely the emotional connection. Great apes and monkeys, companion species, farmed nonhuman mammals, fur-bearing mammals, etc.—all these stand a better chance of effecting proper "demand" than birds, fish, reptiles or insects. And even within the mammalian class, differences are appreciable (most viewers would likely regard the gaze of a chimpanzee or dog as more soulful than that of a mouse). In the animal advocacy documentary subgenre, filmmakers go to great lengths to build a case for individuals and species whose environment, physiognomy and bodies are alien to human form. For instance, the accolades and critical success of Ehrlich and Reed's *My Octopus Teacher* (2020) suggest that, carefully strategized, film can circumvent the initial sense of interspecies "foreignness" and weave and repair the connections between the human gazer and, of all creatures, an octopus. The octopus' bulging eyes, paired with the magnificence of her movement, become integral to the syntax of the film, and reaffirm its wider message of empathy, respect and physical and spiritual harmony with the environment.

I would argue that part of the reason why *Blackfish* and *Long Gone Wild* struggle with their construction of traditional images of animal advocacy in which the suffering nonhuman victim "looks back" is that human viewers are irreparably limited when it comes to interpreting orca faces. Cetaceans can present

a particularly interesting case study for filmic representation of visual exchange firstly because of the aquatic environment they inhabit and secondly because of the lack of physiognomic resemblance with humans and their "lack [of] clear facial expression" (Marino 2014, 22-23). Perhaps this is why one would more commonly talk about a whale's head, as opposed to her face. For all of humans' admiration of the sublimeness of orca bodies and movement, *Blackfish* and *Long Gone Wild* go to show that the sense of alienness when looking at their face cannot be overcome solely through image, and so it must find in the interviewees' voiceovers and in their human countenances and facial expressions (given the constant, interruptive cutting back and forth to shots of talking heads) the support system needed to sustain the interpretative apparatus. It is not just a matter of the blackness of the skin and the visual magnetism of their white patches (called eyespots) that make orcas' eyes difficult to make out, but also their position. Even though orcas may have been upgraded to the category of charismatic megafauna–that is, they are large creatures that "have compelling features and interpretations to make them newsworthy" (Maynard 2018, 186-87)— their eye position affects the effectiveness of "demand" images. Nonhuman animals and predators with forward-facing eyes more easily lend themselves to anthropomorphism (Smith et al. 2012) and, therefore, to the deictic significance of a connection between themselves and the humans into whose eyes they look. But orca eyes are positioned on the sides of the head (monocular vision), providing them with excellent panoramic vision that serves a purpose in their natural environment. They cannot reproduce the type of "looking back" that we may identify in other species and typify into an identifiable strategy for advocacy, where pain, sorrow and vulnerability are discernible. The filmmakers are well aware of this, and creatively work around it. It is significant, for instance, that the posters and much of the promotional material of *Blackfish* use frontal, face-to-face shots of an orca (presumably Tilikum) who is conspicuously large relative to the size of the frame of the image. Here the viewer's intuition of the tensions or unsettlement proposed by the film is not so much derived from the orca eyes as it is from the alienness of his facing the viewer and the claustrophobic frame where he is contained. These are strains that the film promises to explain, and it does so through its active representation of orca bodies in communion with human interpretation.

Adding to the discussion of identifiability is humans' general inability to distinguish between individuals of the same species. We may rather easily tell the difference between individual dogs of the same breed, for example, because, with the evolution of domestication, we have developed the visual tools to appreciate such differences, but this is not necessarily the case with wild nonhuman species, especially when repetitive patterns of chromatism (say the hallmark black and white of all orcas), on which we would otherwise rely on for the identification of individuals, strengthens the illusion of homogeneity. Derek Bousé's well-known study of wildlife films' use of the facial close-up shot to create a "false sense of intimacy" with wild nonhuman animals thus articulates the timely question: "A facial close-up can be used to isolate a single animal, to individualize it and to establish a separate identity for it (as the basis of storytelling). But *can* a close-up of an animal's face identify it as an individual, given that animals of the same species often seem indistinguishable

in appearance?" (2003, 126). Sole images of orca faces in *Blackfish* and *Long Gone Wild* seem to suggest that the answer is no, and that therefore the plight for their wellbeing must be woven into the verbal input and facial support of the interviewees, or fabricated around the representation of them as creatures of wonder in the wild.

3. CONCLUSION

Like many other nonhuman animal species who have been sucked by the gravitational pull of consumerist culture and popular media, the image and reputation of orcas have been greatly influenced by their representation in film, which has symbiotically capitalized on and nurtured the marine-park industry of captive and performing cetaceans. Film has explored the representability of orcas and turned them into proxies that satisfy humans' exploration of nature, such as monsters or pets, by drawing on genre conventions and the rhetorical possibilities behind images of interspecies contact. The particularities of the animal advocacy documentary subgenre, however, evince the inherent tensions of representability itself, as in dealing with a species whose facial features are so singular, conventional means of representing the interspecies exchange of the gaze so as to inspire care and compassion seem insufficient, if not impossible. *Blackfish* and *Long Gone Wild* set the apparatus of nonfiction film to work to deliver orcas from the abusive anthropocentrism that they are subjected to by the entertainment industry, but, somewhat paradoxically, this cannot be done without the human face and word to add meaning to the orca face. The many countenances of the interviewees featured in both films and their array of communicative facial expressions and oratorial skills allow viewers to look at images of captive whales in a new light. However, the films' argumentative emphasis on orca subjectivity when paired with images of the whales engaged in visual and/or physical contact with humans should be questioned precisely because these images acquire meaning in the context of the story by virtue of the interviewees' visual and aural presence. Without the voiceovers and a meaningful, communicative understanding of the orcas' faces, the same images could just as easily be used to represent whales flourishing in captivity. The documentaries' dichotomous separation between captive and wild leads to forms of representation of wild orcas where the face becomes decentered; the implication perhaps being that in decentering the face from the image, a point is being made with regards to the actual relevance of human interaction in the everyday lives of thriving wild pods. Although undoubtedly affected by the Anthropocene, cetaceans are meant to live in a world in which humans are marginal elements to their existence. As such, the centrality of the face is replaced by movement and by full or partial body shots.

The films cannot help exercising representation and resorting to the facets of representability, for such is the very flesh of which they are made as narratives. One of their greatest merits is to acknowledge the limits of science and human insight into orca minds, and in these crevices we may also consider the image-as-representation as hopelessly limited as well. But representation can also reveal itself

as a portal that allows us to look at them in wonder and prompt our sympathetic imagination. This begins by letting *them* look where they were meant to look, and it should not be us.

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MISCELLANY / MISCELÁNEA

OF NATIONAL DIGNITY: THE ETHICS OF CARE IN JIM WOOTEN'S *WE ARE ALL THE SAME* (2005)

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Abstract

South Africa's battle with HIV/AIDS placed the country at the epicentre of the epidemic as the largest case study within the world. *We Are All the Same* (2005), a memoir on the life of infected child Nkosi Johnson, puts the spotlight on the interface between Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialism and the pressing need to challenge discriminatory attitudes in Post-Apartheid South Africa. In this paper I view the role of memoirs as mediators in conflict resolution, thereby giving people both the role of witness and access to realities of children living with HIV/AIDS. Thus, memoirs operate not only as stand-ins of national issues such as the preservation of constitutional rights or dignity in care but also as repositories of public knowledge that are accessible to others. My analysis will illustrate the themes of the ethics of care and national dignity in the face of the HIV/AIDS epidemic within Wooten's memoir to speak out about the violations of children's rights in the areas of health and education.

Keywords: AIDS Denialism, Post-Apartheid South Africa, Witness, Ethics of Care, National Dignity

SOBRE LA DIGNIDAD NACIONAL: LA ÉTICA DEL CUIDADO EN WE ARE ALL THE SAME (2005) DE JIM WOOTEN

Resumen

La lucha contra el virus del VIH/SIDA situó a Sudáfrica en el epicentro de la epidemia, lo que lo convierte en el mayor estudio monográfico del mundo. *We Are All the Same* (2005), una memoria sobre el caso del niño Nkosi Johnson, pone el foco en la intersección entre el negacionismo de Thabo Mbeki y la necesidad de hacer frente a las actitudes discriminatorias en la Sudáfrica del Post-Apartheid. En el presente artículo, otorgo a las memorias el rol de mediadoras en la resolución de conflictos, lo que permite al público lector ejercer, a su vez, el papel de testigos, accediendo así a las realidades de niños y niñas que conviven con el VIH/SIDA. De esta forma, las memorias no sólo actúan como repositorios de cuestiones nacionales, sino también como depósitos de conocimiento público y accesible en un momento histórico clave en el que el tejido social de Sudáfrica continúa inmerso en un proceso de renovación profunda. Mi análisis pone de manifiesto la importancia de la ética del cuidado y la dignidad nacional en el contexto de la epidemia del VIH/SIDA desde la perspectiva de Wooten. Asimismo, en mi análisis abordo las violaciones de los derechos de Nkosi Johnson en relación a la salud y la educación.

Palabras Clave: Negacionismo del SIDA, Sudáfrica del Post-Apartheid, testigo, ética del cuidado, dignidad nacional

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the early stages of Post-Apartheid South Africa, the nation grappled with demands for social justice and the pressing need to address the threats posed by the rapid spread of HIV and AIDS. The epidemic has significantly influenced the transformation of South Africa's social protection and healthcare systems. HIV and AIDS remain as one of the leading causes of death in South Africa, with the number of victims still alarmingly high. Amid this crisis, South African children have become the unseen, innocent victims. The absence of measures to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV when these were available has left a profound impact in the form of orphans and unattended children. The growing number of AIDS orphans highlights the urgent need for institutional action to prevent the side effect of the virus.

Jim Wooten, a senior correspondent with ABC news, explores this evolving socio-political landscape in *We Are All the Same* (2005), the story of "a black child who never grew up and a white woman who never gave up" (Wooten 2005, viii). Wooten chronicles the life of Nkosi Johnson, a Zulu child with born from an HIV-positive woman, Daphne, and who eventually developed full-blown AIDS. Despite his courageous fight, Nkosi succumbed to the disease at age 12. However, his legacy endures, symbolizing the era when HIV and AIDS care in South Africa was being established from scratch. In the absence of Daphne, Nkosi was cared for by Gail Johnson, a white South African of Jewish descent, who herself was adopted by a middle-class white family. Gail, facing a personal crisis, found fulfilment in her mission to support Nkosi, embodying the spirit of the new South Africa. Together they broke down barriers of fear, intolerance, and social exclusion. Their efforts exemplified high standards of active citizenship and human rights advocacy in South Africa.

Wooten was deeply moved by Nkosi and Gails's story, feeling a strong connection to them and to Africa. Nkosi and Gail's struggle with AIDS humanized the grim statistics of South Africa's HIV prevalence among children. Statistics continue to shock the world despite efforts to combat the epidemic. Wooten's narrative emphasizes the historical, political, and emotional aspects of Nkosi's life, highlighting the dignity and ethical contributions of Nkosi and Gail. Their story also paved the way for others to claim their right to life-saving antiretrovirals, requiring courage to break the silence and anonymity. Wooten also delves into the social context of the story, using the transformation of Johannesburg as a symbol of the deteriorating human relations and economic decline exacerbated by the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Johannesburg, once South Africa's financial and cultural hub, became one of the most dangerous cities, plagued by crime and rampant violence, including a high rate of sexual assaults, driven by the false belief that intercourse with a virgin could cure HIV.

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Nearly two decades after *We Are All the Same* was published, South Africa continues to be the world capital HIV and AIDS, despite some improvements such as the universal treatment policy. Johannesburg's economy still struggles, and for that purpose the regeneration of the social fabric is essential. South Africa needs renewal to address the on-going threats of HIV and AIDS to recover from a deeply ingrained culture of violence. In this powerful memoir, Wooten, Gail and Nkosi's journey through the intricacies of a community in crisis underscores the importance of building an inclusive community as a critical goal.

This article employs the theoretical frameworks of narrative medicine and life writing to address the challenges of care, as attested in Wooten's memoir. The article also deals with societal attitudes and stigma associated with the virus by exploring the embarrassment that large segments of South African society experience when confronted with AIDS denialism. Thus, Wooten presents an unflinching portrayal of Nkosi's untimely death, showcasing how illness memoirs could be instrumental in facing turning points in life. Wooten has crafted a sincere memoir, which reminds the readership the times we find ourselves in require us to reconsider the priorities we bring to scholarship. In this sense, life writing and humanities-based inquiry give voice to the unpleasant aspects of becoming sick and vulnerable. It is at this point when the ethics of care come into play. In the context of the memoir, readers soon learn that dealing with HIV/AIDS in the context of denialism delivers Gail, as a family carer, to the limits of human action due to the absence of national care policies that safeguard human dignity. In this regard, it is pertinent to consider Joan Tronto's work, who argues that "[c]are requires not only nurturing relationships, but also the physical and mental work of taking care of, cleaning up after, and maintaining bodies" (2013, 2). In my analysis of the memoir I apply care ethics to advocate for the construction of nurturing relationships between the state and those in need of protection.

2. REPRESENTING HIV AND AIDS IN MEMOIR WRITING

In *At Risk: Writing on and over the Edge of South Africa,* Sarah Nuttall locates South African post-apartheid life narratives within the new era of South African writing (2007, 9). Among the various cultural specifics and concerns of this era are the different crises of HIV and AIDS, namely the affective, the social, and political. The focus on HIV and AIDS in scholarly debates (Barnett and Whiteside 2002; Black 2019; Doubt 2015; Feldman 2008; Mottiar and Lodge 2018; Nattrass 2007) reflects new directions in South African studies, where social, cultural and political dimensions are reassessed. This shift in thematic elements aims to illustrate the various concerns of previously invisible subjects, making them less vulnerable to the lingering impacts of the past, the anxieties of the present, and the uncertainties of the future. The focus of writers and thinkers on HIV and AIDS underscores the importance of staying true to the progressive roadmap envisioned in the South African constitution. In this changing context, life narratives play a crucial role in monitoring adherence to the constitution and the political accord of the transition

period. In their role as advocates, memoirists and people living with HIV and AIDS advance and participate in the transformation process initiated in the 1990s, offering valuable insights into the implementation of post-apartheid policies.

Marked by an idealized transition, one of the major challenges for post-apartheid South Africa was whether it could handle the various demands emerging from the testimonies of people living with HIV and AIDS. Life writing scholar Gillian Whitlock notes that the truth of this new age, reflected in life narratives, is based on "peoples's perception, stories, myths, and memories" (2015, 76). This view reveals the essential role of life writing in contemporary South Africa, forming a shared narrative between people living with HIV and AIDS and those ethically bound to assist them. The act of writing out their experiences emphasizes the need for people living with HIV and/or AIDS to accelerate their return to normalcy. Narrative medicine scholar Rita Charon notes that sickness "propels a person toward self-knowledge and clarifying of life goals and values" (2006, 177). Wooten's recounting of Nkosi's struggle with full-blown AIDS foregrounds the generative force of this powerful and moving memoir, emphasizing Nkosi's desire, and that of those living with the virus, to become part of an extended web of human relations. Nkosi's testimony, mediated by Wooten, is part of the legacy of South Africa's recent social history, reflecting a shift in the focus of scholarly debates in the democratic age.

South African scholars Nancy Jacobs and Andrew Bank emphasize the importance of the accounts of this new age by highlighting the vibrancy of this genre, which they note "hold[s] a high historical and sociological significance" (2019, 165). They suggest that the public's attraction to this genre stems from a desire "to read life stories that could not be told during the apartheid years" (2019, 166), precisely when the HIV and AIDS crisis originated in stony silence. After enduring prolonged tension, social breakdown and diminished hope during apartheid, South Africans seem to be eager to connect with one another. Life narratives provide a window of opportunity to forge links with stories of individuals erased from national history. Gillian Whitlock describes this type of life narratives as a form of "soft weapon [that] can personalize and humanize categories of people whose experiences are frequently unseen and unheard [as they] trigger conversations and interactions across cultures" (2007, 3). Wooten's memoir on the life of Nkosi fosters cross-cultural encounters, advocates for social and health justice, and promotes human rights. In her bid to humanize Nkosi, Gail tries to enrol Nkosi in a nursery school, as the child lives confined, alone, and more importantly, deprived of his civic and civil rights. Wooten thus recalls the experience:

> Gail understood that the fear of AIDS victims was a fear based on widespread ignorance of the disease, the same fear that resulted in the daily punishment and social rejection of its victims in South Africa, in all its many ethnic communities. Because she thought Nkosi needed some regular contact with other children, and given the fact almost no other mothers would bring their children to play with him or welcome him into their homes, she decided to enroll him in a neighborhood nursery school and kindergarten. Because she did not try to hide his condition from those who ran the little school, she was told in no uncertain terms that Nkosi was not welcome. Gail was repulsed by their attitude. (2005, 119)

Gail's attempt to offer Nkosi the life of a typical child evinces the need to further develop the progressive agenda of post-apartheid South Africa, underscoring discriminatory attitudes of teachers and parents towards Nkosi's schooling. Furthermore, the narrative allows South Africans to access the emotional world of deprived and marginalized individuals, thereby fostering sympathy and understanding through the lens of Gail, a woman among the "few people [in South Africa] who would offer [people living with HIV and AIDS] gentle care and companionship and comfort" (Wooten 2005, 103).

Scholar Sara Ahmed (2004) elaborates on the role of shared emotions in building individual and collective identities. The exploration of these concepts is an essential feature in *We Are All the Same* for redefining South Africa's national identity and its sense of responsibility toward others. In line with this, life writing scholar Paul John Eakin points out those life narratives "enlarge our understanding of human identity formation [because life narratives] ground our human identities in our experience of our bodies" (1999, 1). Wooten's approach in the memoir gives prominence to Nkosi's decline of bodily functions and inner self, showcasing Nkosi is dominated by emotions with the potential to create unique, plural, and unified experiences of selfhood and nationhood. Sara Ahmed emphasizes that emotions align individuals and social groups with the nation, particularly through understanding experiences of pain and suffering. She argues that emotions involve attachments that connect individuals to certain realities and transform others into objects of feeling (2004, 11). And yet the overarching question is how to ensure HIV-positive people, particularly children who are targeted, find shelter in society. Nkosi's life story in early stages was filled with inconsistent care, frequent violence and threats from neighbors. The reality that both Nkosi and Daphne lived with the virus not only made them outcasts but also forced them to leave the place they once called home. As Wooten describes it:

> Daphne had become anxious about the increasing level of hostility toward her and the boy from some of their new neighbors in the little squatters' camp, many of whom seemed to subscribe to the same notions about AIDS as had her former employer and her former landlady. Even Ruth, her own mother, seemed less and less interested in keeping the family together. She and the neighbors were frightened of the mysterious disease and those who were infected with it. Some of the neighbors had made veiled threats. Others were not so subtle. One day Daphne found a menacing note left under a stone in the dirt in front of their shanty. It said simply *Leave!*
> When she read it, she made a radical decision. (2005, 98)

This question involves examining the state's role in society, particularly when it comes to safeguarding the rights of infants, and the perception of South Africans about the effectiveness of institutions. Life writing, therefore, plays a role in fostering a seamless society by connecting individuals and communities through a shared sense of belonging, sameness, and emotions.

Building on the original argument by Jacobs and Bank, alongside Ahmed's concept of shared emotions, it is essential to highlight how Jacobs and Bank identify

a perceived sense of betrayal among ordinary South Africans. This feeling of betrayal, which can also be extrapolated to those living with HIV and AIDS, appears to drive the surge of publications highlighting the discontent of patients and their strained relationship with the state. Wooten's memoir, along with similar narratives, serves as a reflection of social unrest and disillusionment with the aspirational mood created by post-apartheid policies, as evidenced in the narrative. The struggle for Nkosi's schooling is a key element of this revolution and holds significant importance, particularly for other parents in similar situations, as it encourages them to advocate for restoring the dignity of people living with HIV and AIDS. As a journalist, Wooten played a role in bringing Nkosi's schooling into the media spotlight, elevating it to the level of a national issue:

> New editorials appeared in the local papers almost daily, most of them favoring Nkosi's admission, asking the city government to step in or, in lieu of that, urging the national government to act […] Gail was on television regularly, defending Nkosi's admission –and he was on television, too. "All I want is to go to school," he said again and again in his soft soprano. "All the other children go to school, and I want to be just like all the other children. I don't want to be alone." (2005, 139)

This unrest, which is fuelled by a sense of state insolvency and national ridicule coming from popular support to Nkosi's schooling, resonates with Ahmed's observation that betrayal is an emotion that unites people, as seen when readers learn about the experiences of people with HIV and AIDS in South Africa. Grasping the depth of this betrayal helps explain the growing interest in such personal narratives. Readers can connect with the accounts of people with HIV and AIDS regarding the country's health policies, where Mbeki's controversial position on HIV and AIDS denied sufferers adequate access to life-saving drugs. This sense of betrayal seems tied to the incomplete coming into effect of South African politics in the new era. The coverage of Nkosi's schooling prompted readers to turn to the personal accounts of other citizens to truly evaluate the progress of democracy and civil rights in South Africa–two ideals that were somehow secure with the drafting of the constitution, when, in reality, apartheid simply evolved into a different system of privileges. Jacobs and Bank capture this sentiment as follows: "The interest of this recent reading public might be about groping towards re-imagining political possibilities in the light of a depressing spiral of revelations about corruption, failing social services and ultimately state capture (2019, 166). Life writing serves as a form of social commentary, propelling individuals toward the clarifying their values and goals. It encourages change, contributing to the ongoing effort to regenerate the nation's social fabric. A key objective of locally produced HIV and AIDS life narratives in South Africa is to connect and integrate marginalized social groups. According to Gillian Whitlock, life narratives foster compassion, mobilize shame, and inspire social justice (2015, 168). This perspective creates spaces for dialogue and humanizes those distant from the conflicts presented.

Until the early 21st century, when the booming of memoirs exploring South Africa's past gained ground, as is the case of Edwin Cameron's *Witness to AIDS* (2005), Liz McGregor's *Khabzela* (2005) or Jonny Steinberg's *Three Letter Plague*

(2008), to name a few, the lives of HIV-positive people were rarely documented in South African literature. Due to the widespread ignorance of the virus, HIV and AIDS testimonies were often shared orally and privately, in intimate settings. This trend shifted, making stories available to a broader audience. Trauma studies scholars Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992) celebrate the emergence of the witness through shared life narratives. Similarly, Roger Kurtz (2018) argues that trauma is a central concept for understanding how individuals, nations, and cultures fit into global networks. South African AIDS life writing can be understood within this framework, particularly following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. South Africa provides a national, non-Western focal point for exploring a global issue as is HIV and AIDS, highlighting disparities in the treatment of the disease. This disparity demands, as Cathy Caruth notes, "a new mode of reading and listening" (1996, 9). The figure of the witness thus becomes crucial, anchoring the expression of trauma in life writing as a step towards change. Michael Rothberg (2019) refers to the witness as the implicated subject within thriving communities. The term emphasizes the multiplier effect of these life narratives' call and echo. In this regard, Felman and Laub note:

> The specific task of the literary testimony is, in other words, to open up in that belated witness, which the reader now historically becomes, the imaginative capability of perceiving history–what is happening to others– *in one's own body,* with the power of sight (of insight) usually afforded only by one's own immediate physical involvement. (1992, 108, emphasis in the original)

A pedagogical approach is thus highlighted in contemporary life writing. Felman and Laub's call for involvement is a way to come to terms with South Africa's traumatic past, allowing readers to delve into the ideological marginalized segments of the population. This element underscores the educational power of life writing and also reveals the complexities of the country's historiographic accounts of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

Educating readers on the limits of South Africa's welfare state through the shared testimonies of people with HIV and AIDS seems crucial. Wooten's mediation generates an appropriate response to the illness experience narrated in the story of Nkosi, particularly at a time when "everyday almost 10,000 *new* infections were occurring [and] 70,000 African babies were being born HIV-positive every year" (2005, 133, emphasis in the original). Life writing scholars Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker point out that in "the era of the witness" (2010, 1), moving the audience is essential to testimonies. Thus, mobilizing moving testimonies becomes essential to advancing civil rights in post-conflict societies as South Africa. Sarkar and Walker elaborate on the aspects of moving testimonies as follows:

> [T]he faces and voices that emanate from closer or distant locations; the sounds and images that animate ubiquitous screens; the archives we establish and the histories we resuscitate. These are the new assemblages that compel us to bear witness, move us to anger or tears, and possibly mobilize us to action for social justice. (2010, 5)

The scholars emphasize a key aspect of life narratives: the networks of solidarity that emerge when hidden testimonies see light, leaving a recorded legacy of their struggle. HIV and AIDS testimonies also reveal the many registers of the self, highlighting the significance of this literary genre and its role in addressing issues of national category, as is the case of Nkosi's story. Forms of life writing contribute to the construction of memory, and the act of witnessing confirms these narratives have permeated contemporary South African culture with force.

Representing HIV and AIDS in memoir writing foregrounds the connection between dignity, at large, and the enforcement of care ethics, particularly when the lives of vulnerable people are at a stake. Wooten's memoir showcases a nation that desires to prioritize care ethics in its bid to uphold national dignity. As will be discussed, however, South Africans stumble upon Mbeki's AIDS denialism. National health policies regarding HIV and AIDS were not informed by care ethics, underscoring lack of ethical leadership in decision-making processes that could promote a culture of care and dignity within the nation.

3. DIGNITY AND CARE ETHICS

Personal narratives of illness provide a unique tapestry for the exploration of the workings of care services. These narratives often serve as a vessel for the communication of issues concerning health policies, thereby reflecting indicators of national dignity and care ethics. National dignity often refers to the collective sense of pride and honor that citizens hold for their country, encompassing the ethical standards that contribute to the nation's identity through the deployment of the dignitarian approach (Gilabert 2018; Gilabert 2023). This approach, which emphasizes the importance of policies and practices that grant the dignity of all individuals, dominates the narrative in Wooten's bid to enter both a national and a global discussion on HIV and AIDS, offering visibility to the world's largest case. In this context, it is important to consider a key thematic element in the narrative, which is that of national dignity. The latter is an umbrella term encompassing a series of elements referring to the collective pride that nationals hold in their values and achievements as a society. The concept of national dignity is thus straightforward related to how South Africa is perceived not only by nationals but also by the international community in its management of the HIV and AIDS crisis.

In *We Are All the Same*, national dignity centers around the idea of collective pride and honor. These two core elements, which are breached by Mbeki's embracement of AIDS denialism, depend on the preservation of human rights, equitable treatment of all citizens, and the enforcement of the principles of justice and social welfare, offering an opportunity to erase the legacy of apartheid. Thus, care ethics occupies a central position, illuminating the stance of Gail's fighting against social and health injustices. Likewise, as care ethics scholar Virginia Held points out, care also involves a sense of connectedness (2006, 29-30). Care ethics scholar Isabel Alonso (2023) also pushes in that direction, inviting readers to

create both networks and literatures of care. Wooten's memoir, which is imbued with human rights witnessing and meaning-making processes, supports a vision of connectedness with others. By focusing on the particularities of children living with HIV and AIDS, Wooten's memoir addresses the needs of vulnerable children in a context-sensitive manner and explores the arch of care ethics, creating a framework that values the well-being of individuals, mutual respect in relationships, and both empathy and sympathy. In this regard, care ethics scholar Tula Brannelly identifies four key ethical elements, that are supposed to set the principles of the integrity of care and that are embedded in the arch of care ethics, namely attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness (2006, 200-1).

Care ethics scholar Maurice Hamington notes the importance of care ethics "to rethink the nature and purpose of politics" (2015, 1). In Nkosi's life narrative, Wooten appeals to the state's responsiveness to children living with HIV and AIDS, clashing with the political leanings of Mbeki regarding HIV and AIDS. Nkosi's story challenges South Africa's social and solidarity networks by testing whether or not the foundational policy of inclusiveness is being effectively implemented. According to care ethics scholar Selma Sevenhuijsen, the ethics of care must see moral and social justice issues with "attentiveness, responsibility, responsiveness and the commitment to see issues from differing perspectives" (1998, 83). Following this, when it comes to defining the role of political institutions, a caring approach must respond to the pressing needs of the most vulnerable members of society, even if AIDS denialism impedes showing agreement with the claims with which the media coverage of Nkosi's case was presented by Gail and, later, Wooten. Given the significance of Nkosi's schooling for civic coexistence, issues involving HIV-positive children navigating legal gaps achieved the category of major concern, as attested in the memoir:

> Finally, acknowledging the enormous pressure for someone in authority to deal with the situation, the national government stepped in. In late February, just in time for the new semester, the South African Parliament, in session in Cape Town, enacted an antibias statute that made it illegal to keep HIV-positive children like Nkosi out of public schools. (2005, 140)

The outcome of these discussions fulfilled Mandela's promise to build equality after the end of apartheid, when he declared that "never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will experience the oppression of one by the other" (qtd in Etuk 2008, 154). This achievement redefined the boundaries of the HIV and AIDS community in South Africa, enabling Nkosi to feel a sense of belonging and to form friendships with other children. Following Gail and Nkosi's public advocacy, Nkosi's reward was the opportunity and equity he had long deserved.

Although the national government's response provided shelter for Nkosi, Mbeki's AIDS denialism persisted. Mbeki subscribes to the belief in a powerful, covert apparatus attempting to commit genocide against Black people. A pivotal – and particularly transgressive– moment in Nkosi's memoir occurs when Nkosi is invited as a keynote speaker at the international AIDS conference in Durban, with

Mbeki in the audience. Mbeki also recognizes the numerous dangers that lie ahead due to the spread of the virus:

> "For too long we have closed our eyes as a nation, hoping the truth was not so real. For many years we have allowed the HIV virus to spread…and now we face the danger that half of our youth will not reach adulthood. Their education will be wasted. The economy will shrink. There will be a large number of sick people whom the healthy will not be able to maintain. Our dreams as people will be shattered." No one in the government had nailed it any better than that. (Mbeki qtd in Wooten 2005, 188-89)

From Mbeki's viewpoint, any effective strategy to combat HIV and AIDS had to begin with addressing abject poverty and hunger, while also challenging the causes of HIV and AIDS as defined by Western science–a point of contention that complicated Mbeki's relationship with the scientific community. In this context, HIV and AIDS activists hoped that the speech of an HIV-positive child at the conference might have persuaded Mbeki to reconsider his stance. However, the reality was that Mbeki's personal beliefs –similar to Mandela's but driven by different motivations– were creating a stifling atmosphere in the country. Particularly, this was the case when two drugs, AZT and nevirapine, were offered in large quantities to South Africa at no cost to reduce the risk of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. And yet, Mbeki declined the offer, which infuriated ordinary South Africans:

> Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Nobel Laureate, was shocked. "The government's stand on nevirapine," he thundered, "has made South Africa the laughing stock of the world." Mandela, the former president, said nothing […] AZT was already available at several private clinics and hospitals in the country, but the government issued a national ban on its use by prohibiting them from prescribing it for HIV-positive patients, including pregnant women, in public medical facilities. The reason given? AZT was untested and dangerous. (2005, 190-91)

At the conference, Mbeki's and Nkosi's positions are starkly opposed. Nkosi delivers a political speech advocating for sameness. His words eclipse Mbeki's controversial address, urging the scientific community to tolerate and respect his theory of conspiracy and genocidal misconduct (2005, 203). In contrast, Nkosi presents a clear and straightforward message that resonates deeply with the audience, reflecting his personal understanding of the disease. His words, shaped by his familiar environment, blend love, self-confidence, and autonomy. Nkosi's narrative of HIV and AIDS reveals that he is acutely aware of its impact both within and beyond his household. His speech demonstrates a strong resistance to isolation and ostracism as he continuously negotiates and internalizes society's values and belief systems regarding the disease, which often seek to exclude those affected. Nkosi calls for the ongoing renewal of the social covenant established in post-1994 South Africa, advocating for the centrality of national dignity and care ethics. His speech, unusual for a child of his age but clearly marked by suffering, also indicates his awareness of the dangers in his daily life. In his worldview, interactions with others are not seen

as risks but as opportunities for care and affection. Nkosi's words reflect the social deconstruction of HIV and AIDS in his day-to-day, striking a balance between generosity and a forward-looking attitude in his bid to urge Mbeki to abandon misguided AIDS policies. The entire discourse centers on two major themes: dignity and care. Thus spoke Nkosi:

> "We are all the same."
> *Smile.*
> "We are not different from one another."
> *Smile.*
> "We all belong to one family."
> *Smile.*
> "We love and we laugh, we hurt and we cry, we live and we die."
> "Care for us and accept us. We are all human beings. We are normal. We have hands. We have feet. We can walk, we can talk–and we have needs just like everyone else. Don't be afraid of us."
> "We are all the same." (2005, 205-06, emphasis in the original)

A plea for both reconstruction and reconciliation is also a defining feature of the speech, shaped by the loss of his mother and how it impacted on him, which in turn influenced his stance. Nkosi's testimony exposes the absurdity of denialism, implying that questioning the existence of the virus slowly consuming him is not only a denial of reality but a retreat from political responsibility. The AIDS conference in Durban marked one of the last Nkosi's public appearances before his death. Yet, the resonance of his words reflects Gail's vision for the future, serving as a powerful motivation to honor the dignity of the victims of the HIV and AIDS crisis in South Africa.

As seen in this section, national dignity and care ethics are bound together. In the memoir, purveyors of national dignity and care ethics develop the notion of respect and value for others in the context of caregiving, developing the sense of worth of that individuals like Nkosi or Gail, who never gave up in their attempt to show responsiveness to the needs of others, promoted on a local, national and international level. The narrative is thus an example of both building a legacy and a network of solidarity that transcends the implication of national institutions, which often lag behind grassroots movements.

4. CONCLUSIONS

We Are All the Same is a profoundly human narrative that is thought-provoking and allows participants, in this case Gail and Nkosi, to speak of their struggle without any limitation. The memoir thus underscores the importance of forging bonds based on shared values and actions. The construction of these bonds validates and captures the essence of diverse perspectives from the marginalized in their bid to claim for national dignity. Such solidarity manifests within and between various social movements and organizations dedicated to upholding the dignity

of people living with HIV and AIDS. Building networks of solidarity emphasizes the essential cooperation needed to recognize and celebrate the social and political advancement of the HIV and AIDS community in South Africa. This community was ignored by mainstream public opinion and ostracized by the upper echelons of Mbeki's administration, viewing people with HIV and AIDS as an economic burden.

Creating an alternative to protect vulnerable human assets, as is the case of HIV-positive children, requires addressing social, economic and political change by mobilizing community responses to face the challenges posed by HIV and AIDS in the southern tip of Africa. So far, as previously discussed, the ethics of care comprise various relational dimensions. The memoir gives prominence to the aspects that define human relationships not only in the context of caregiving but on the whole. Thus, *We Are All the Same* is a powerful testimony that illustrates the interconnections, responsibilities and dependencies that stem from the relationship between the state and the communities and individuals that give meaning to the state through the creation, strengthening and enforcement of a web of mutual obligations called the welfare state, and that is most laudable. May Nkosi and Gail's story be of benefit for it restores the dignity of the disenfranchised in the face of disease.

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REVIEW / RESEÑA

Review of *We Loved It All: A Memory of Life* by Lydia Millet (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2024, pp. 272 ISBN: 978-1-324-10525-1)

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Species extinctions, as well as mass species extinctions, might be thought of as some of the most normal phenomena in the history of life on Earth. 99.9 percent of species that formerly inhabited the planet have gone extinct, and mass extinction events have occurred at least five times throughout evolutionary history. In her newly published work of non-fiction, *We Loved It All* (2024), American novelist Lydia Millet reminds readers that while the current age is a period of mass extinction, all indications suggest that these are not "normal times" (5). At the present moment, humans are the first ever species to deliberately cause a mass dying of other species. Amidst this anthropogenic ecocide, extinction is something we humans reflect on, produce books and films about, and even build academic fields around.[1] In view of this profound awareness of extinction, as well as the recognition that our own species survival hinges on the continued existence of other species, it is unsettlingly *unnormal*–or in Elizabeth Kolbert's words "unnatural"[2]– that we are not directing all our collective efforts towards warding off the sixth mass extinction.

With the publication of *We Loved It All*, Millet makes her first entry into non-fiction. Since the early 2000s, Millet has penned over a dozen works of fiction, many of which coalesce around a thematic interest in the environment, climate change, and non-human animals. Her stylistic technique often combines dark topics with lyrical prose, sly wit, and ironic undertones. The more recent works, especially, mediate a sense of the complex, paradoxical, and sometimes uneasy stance that humans hold towards non-human species. *We Loved It All* extends Millet's exploration of this topic through a non-fictional mode. The book, as signalled by its cover, is marketed as an anti-memoir. For while the narrative presents readers with the author's personal memories and experiences, it is ultimately not Millet's own life that takes centre stage. At the core of the book, instead, is the story of anthropogenic extinction and related meditations on what modern society has done to the human-nonhuman relationship. The diversity of the nonhuman realm is the "all" referenced by the book's title, yet one might be inclined to read the titular "love" as ironic, given the many examples Millet provides of the brutality with which our species has historically treated other species.

The book is divided into three biblically-entitled main sections ("When the Perfect Comes," "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory," and "Ring the Bells"). Each section contains ten chapters that encompass sub-sections of varying lengths –some are merely short vignettes– about loosely interconnected topics. The thematic scope of the book is vast. Millet jumps between subjects like a pollinator buzzing between flowering plants. The topics addressed range from ex-boyfriends, to Topsy the elephant, colonialism, angelfish, and the author's time spent working as a copyeditor for adult magazines. Frequently touching on her life as a mother and her daytime job as a writer and editor for The Center for Biological Diversity, Millet connects the personal and quotidian to the grand scale of evolution and the planet. The book draws on an eclectic array of thinkers, myths, works of literature, and pop-cultural

[1] Extinction studies has established itself as an academic subfield at the interface of ecocriticism and animal studies over the past decade, with leading scholars such as Ursula Heise and Dolly Jørgensen exploring the ways in which species extinction is culturally understood, mediated, and narrated.

[2] Kolbert's book *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014) was influential in popularizing the idea of an ongoing mass extinction event fuelled by human activity.

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references, demonstrating Millet's skills as a researcher.

If the book may be said to put forward any main argument, it is this: modern society has fundamentally broken the human-nonhuman bond and continues to undermine possibilities for multispecies coexistence. While humans were once surrounded by nonhuman animals and lived in close communion with them, we are now left isolated, alone, and cut off from the natural world.[3] The culmination of this development is the extinction crisis, and the nonhuman animals, too, in their rapidly decreasing numbers, experience species *aloneness* (Millet 2024, 101). At several points throughout the narrative, Millet casts market logic, extractivism, and the commercialization of nature as the prime drivers of ongoing mass extinction. These forces extend to nonhumans not only through habitat loss and ecocide, but also through their labour and forced participation in the capitalist economy. One particularly striking example Millet provides of this exploitation is the tale of so-called pit ponies that were used in coal mines and kept underground for the duration of their lives. Through references to her own daughter and son, Millet further explores how the movement from community with nonhumans to estrangement from them is mirrored in the process of growing up: children lose interest in the natural world as they reach adolescence, particularly in the age of screens and digital media. The separation of humans from the natural world is also articulated by foundational narratives in Western culture, such as the Eden myth, which is retold in the opening chapter, setting the thematic tone for the rest of the book.

While the book covers a sweeping array of topics, its style remains lyrical, precise, and meditative. A key aspect of Millet's style is her use of a self-reflexive lens, something that is made apparent in the author's discussions of issues related to writing. She reflects, for example, on the decline in literary reading and on the importance of humour in writing fiction. The author also shares her thoughts about the difficulty of writing about animal multitudes (or the multitudinous dying that is mass extinction), while also criticizing how Western literature tendentially perpetuates individualism in its obsession with the self and the lone hero. Yet, although Millet self-reflexively puts forward such critiques, she seems to partly fall prey to some of the dilemmas she addresses. Millet's own self is strongly present throughout the book, and while the author's presence in the text makes for a personal and relatable narrative, it arguably calls to mind individualistic and navel-gazing currents of autofiction. Of course, part of Millet's point in her exploration of selfhood is that she is made up just as much of childhood pets, the birds in her backyard, and the javelina she once ran over with her car, as any notion of an autonomous and self-contained self. And perhaps what Millet wishes to convey is that all of our selves are implicated in the sixth extinction. But the sense of individualism very much undergirds the text, in tension –perhaps– with its projected ideal of enmeshment with the nonhuman.

Another point to note about style is the book's tendency towards what might be thought of as a form of mythologization of nonhuman species. Habitually throughout the text, nonhumans are referred to in terms such as "the beasts," "the others," and "the vanished ones." The use of this mythologizing terminology might be one of the main difficulties with the book. One wonders whether the reference to nonhuman nature through phrases like "the beasts and the green" (Millet 2024, 248) does not have the effect of evoking an even greater distance between humans and "the others." Millet may be attempting to underline just how separated we have become from our fellow lifeforms – to illustrate how they now appear to us as one homogenous group of creatures usually subsumed under the term "animal" (Derrida 2008, 48). And while Millet also recounts stories about separate species and individuals, the risk with the use of expressions like "the vanished

3 The central ideas of Millet's book resonate strongly with John Berger's reflections in his essay "Why Look at Animals?": as Berger notes, writing in 1977, "[i]n the last two centuries, animals have gradually disappeared. Today we live without them" (2009, 21).

ones" is that the extinction crisis becomes rendered as something vague and ahistorical. Although Millet remains cognizant of animals as "brand ambassadors" and spokespersons "working in sales" (Millet 2024, 11), one might claim that to a certain extent the book participates in the same mechanisms that capitalist modernity utilizes to obscure material animal suffering and exploitation by reproducing animals as spectral and timeless signifiers of market life.[4]

A critical reading of *We Loved It All* should therefore probe the diversity and plurality of "the others" that the book refers to. A related dilemma is the question of who the "we" of Millet's book –including its title– alludes to. Millet deploys the universalizing "we" and "our" at many points in the text, particularly in its more lyrical passages. Consider, for example, the following extract:

Before we had the tools for swift travel and recording, and for the wide dissemination of visual and auditory documents, we knew only the beasts and trees and plants that happened to live near us. Those who existed far away were little more than rumours, relayed in rare, hard-to-read manuscripts and fireside tables … Today we can see and hear multitudes. No volume could contain them all: the internet of animals is an endless archive … We're among the first generation to be able to know, not only by reporting but by the evidence of our eyes and ears, the awesome variety of the living –the multiplicity of its forms (2024, 238).

Here, and in similar passages, the book reads as a Western-centric narrative, which homogenizes distinct cultures and obscures for example Indigenous experiences of nonhuman nature. The fact that many cultures live in close proximity with nonhuman species is not something that the book addresses to any great extent.

These issues aside, *We Loved It All* has many praiseworthy qualities that make the book a valuable contribution to species extinction literature. As extinction studies scholars such as Ursula Heise and Deborah Bird Rose have demonstrated, extinction narratives usually take the form of elegiac, tragic, or epic texts that feature charismatic megafauna and culturally valued species at risk (Heise 2016; Rose, van Dooren, & Chrulew 2017). In this context, Millet's book might be read as a novel and inspiring take on the extinction narrative. The intermixing of personal anecdotes, poetic meditations, and scientific facts, is executed in a compelling way, and the loosely structured stories about myriad different species and individual animals make for a structurally intriguing narrative.

But while the book offers a fresh take on the extinction narrative, it also signals some unresolved tensions in writing about species loss and endangerment. As mentioned above, Millet devotes narrative space to reflecting on the decline in literary reading, and yet she also calls attention to –through her own use of non-fiction, notably– the role that fictional stories can play in catalysing political action and meaningful change. By inspiring such tangible action, fiction can counter the paralyzed witnessing, the "climate nihilism (Kornbluh 2021, 771), and the "sleepwalk to extinction" (Monbiot 2003) that characterizes the current devastation of ecosystems around the world. At the same time, it is precisely their participation in acts of witnessing that make extinction texts such as *We Loved It All* so powerful. The impression readers will be left with upon completion of Millet's book is that the text's testimony of the sixth extinction takes the form not of an inert cabinet of species and specimens, but reads, rather, as a mosaic of lively and engaging stories about the nonhuman realm. Suitable for both general and academic audiences, this book is a moving and forceful piece that does a great deal of work in *un-normalizing* both anthropogenic extinctions and human domination of other animals.

4 This "spectral traffic" of animal signs in post-industrial capitalism is analyzed at length by Nicole Shukin in her work *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (2009).

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