

Review

The animal turn in fiction: An animal-centric analysis of a dog's purpose and anthill

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Animals have held an important place in written literature for thousands of years; hence animal fiction comes to mean a fictional work where an animal plays an integral part of the story to make it complete. In most works of literature throughout the ages, animals function only in service to humans. They represent their human counterpart symbolically in order to teach lessons or correct human weakness. This tendency of moral didacticism could be exemplified in Aesop's Fables composed around the sixth century. With the Victorian era animals become more central in the human thoughts because of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. During the twentieth century especially in the later part literal and figurative animals become particularly important in gender studies and women's literature. In these works, however, the animals do not reflect the animals in themselves, but they are used to demonstrate some aspect of humanity. All of these texts are not animal-centric, since these texts are not interested in the animals in themselves but as subservient to the human master.

Key words: Fiction, posthumanism, 'animal turn', animals.

INTRODUCTION

"He who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men.

We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals." Immanuel Kant

Over the last two decades the humanities and social sciences have witnessed the birth of the 'animal turn', comparable to the 'linguistic turn', that revolutionized the humanities and the social sciences disciplines from the mid twentieth century onwards (Best, 2009: 9). This tendency has found fertile environment in the post humanist discourse that dominated the intellectual and cultural milieu for the last two decades; hence the

emergence of a body of contemporary novels that are critical to and aware of the constructed boundaries of 'human/animal', 'nature/culture', and 'domestication/wilderness', as well as the emergence of animal studies or human-animal relation studies in various academic fields that provides the framework to critically examine this new category of literary animals.

The emergent discipline of *Human-Animal Studies* (HAS) investigates the recent inclination towards questioning the humanist assumptions upon which much Western philosophical thought has been founded and explores the ways in which this questioning allows us to

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re-conceive the role of animals in philosophical, cultural, and literary history. It also poses queries concerning the ways in which the division between human and animal worlds has been achieved, maintained, and performed throughout history. It, moreover, aims to explore the ways in which animals and the human-animal relationship have been represented in the pre-modern to modernist literature. Recently, critics interested in animal issues tend to theorize a new trend in literary criticism, an animal-centric or animal-standpoint criticism. Such a criticism seeks to examine works of literature from the point of view of how animals are represented.

The present research paper aims to examine W. Bruce Cameron's *A Dog's Purpose*, and Edward Owen's *Anthill* from the point of view of animal-standpoint criticism. The examination demonstrates how animals in recent animal fiction are no longer objectified but are treated as subjects by recognizing their independence, and asserting their agency. The examination will also illustrate how the two writers underline the nonhuman animal's unique otherness. The research will first define Human - Animal Studies as an academic field. Then it will delineate the philosophical premises of burgeoning field, showing its relation to anti-speciesism and posthumanism as critical movements. Finally, it will shed light on the basic tenets of the animal standpoint critical theory which will be manifested in the analysis of the two novels.

The texts chosen testify to the growing interest of both readers and writers in the field of animal studies. *A Dog's purpose* is a New York Times and USA Today bestseller in 2010. Owing to the huge success of the book, it was reprinted in 2011. Cameron wrote a sequel for this book in 2012 entitling it *A Dog's Journey*. E. O. Wilson, the renowned biologist and the two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction, has switched to fiction with his new novel *Anthill* also in the New York Times bestsellers lists. After controversial and ground-breaking books on social insects, biodiversity and human behavior Owen decides to write a novel that translates animals as he conceives them to the majority of the people.

Human-Animal Studies (HAS)

HAS is one of the newest scholarly disciplines, emerging only in the last twenty years in the academia. In this recently recognized field of study animals and human-animal relationships are examined from various perspectives. DeMello (2012: 5-7) emphasizes the fact that HAS is not studying animals per se, but rather it studies the interactions between humans and other animals, wherever and whenever they are found. That is why she believes it is different from ethology, comparative psychology, zoology, primatology or the various animal behavior disciplines. She stresses that

Human-Animal Studies (HAS)_and the related field Critical Animal Studies (CAS) are the only scholarly disciplines to take seriously and place prominently the relationships between humans and non-human animals whether real or virtual. Like women's studies and African American studies which rose alongside feminism and the civil rights movement, HAS have risen parallel to the animal protection movement. Taking momentum from animal rights and environmentalist movements, human animal relations have become the subject of attention within various discourses as anthropology, history, gender studies, cultural studies and literary criticism. DeMello points out that the field is not only multidisciplinary but interdisciplinary as well:

That is it is a field of study that crosses disciplinary boundaries and is itself composed of several disciplines. In other words HAS scholars are drawn from a wide variety of disciplines (interdisciplinary) and HAS research uses data, theories and scholarships from a variety of disciplines (multidisciplinary). (2012: 7).

Works from the various fields have crystalized into the emergent field Animal Studies_or sometimes Human-Animal Studies.

Some critics believe that the term "animal studies" is a misnomer "for the field is not about nonhuman animals in isolation from human animals rather about human-nonhuman animal relation" (Best 2009: 10). Best's quotation emphasizes a basic assumption in HAS, that is that its practitioners consider humans as animals amongst other animals. The assumption is well-founded in philosophy: this discipline witnessed the birth of the field in the ethical concerns of philosopher Peter Singer, who argued for animal liberation and animal rights in his book *Animal Liberation*. In this book, Singer urges people to expand their range of moral concerns to include animals. He underlines the fact that humans should stop discriminating against animals simply because animals are not member of the human species. Singer sees animals as having inherent value or value in themselves, not merely means to human ends. Philosophy thus raised the questions of the valuing and the revaluing of non-human animals, then harder social sciences provided empirical data identifying benefits gained by humans as a result of their exploitation of animals and in response to these developments the more interpretive social sciences and humanities delved into issues concerning the question of the animal (Shapiro and DeMello, 2010: 310-11).

In an interview in *Topia: A Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, cultural theorist Cary Wolfe argues that, in spite of the considerable amount of work being done over the last twenty years in the fields of ecology, animal behavior cognition and ethology and in spite of new social

movements concerned with animal rights and welfare, “cultural studies and critical theory have really, really lagged behind developments in the broader society in dealing with the ‘question of the animal’” (Wolfe, 2003 b: 40). In fact, HAS scholars, as Shapiro and DeMello underlines, recognize the lack of scholarly attention given to non-human animals and to the relationships between humans and non-humans, especially in the light of the pervasiveness of animal representations, symbols, and stories as well as the actual presence of animals in human societies and cultures (2010: 307). Therefore there is a wide consensus among the authors and scholars working in the field that ‘the question of the animal’ should be seen as one of the central issues in contemporary critical discourse.

In attempting to bring animals and animal issues into the full range of academic disciplines, HAS scholars interrogate two recurring and structural issues that control much of the work being done in the field: the first concerns the being of animals, and the other concerns human-animal distinction. At the core of the first issue is the tension between animal as constructed and animal ‘as such’ (Shapiro, 2008). A considerable amount of work has been done deconstructing animals by means of uncovering the ideological, linguistic and historical layers that contribute to contemporary attitudes towards, and treatment of, animals (Shapiro and DeMello, 2010: 307-08). This view is based on an anthropocentric perspective of animals as “we” humans construct them in our image and for our purposes. In fact, there are some theorists who consider that there is no animal as-such: the animal is a social construction (Wolfe, 2010). Related to this issue is the question posed by many theorists whether there is actually one essence connecting all animals. In fact Derrida shows how the very phrase “the animal” commonly used to mean all animals is incorrect, since it denies the manifest proliferation of differences that exists in animal lives (2008: 31). HAS theorists regard this tendency as an attempt to establish homogeneities among what appear to be different forms of animal life “much like the critique of essentialism in feminism, queer theory and race studies.” (Castricano, 2008: 13).

The second query occupying HAS scholars is human-animal distinctions. There are two main ways of thinking about humans and other animals. The first emphasizes the continuity between humans and animals following Darwin’s lead. Some also contend that the way humans understand and experience themselves as humans is connected to ideas about animals:

Many of the concepts, disposition, sensibilities that comprise human nature rely upon perceived differences and similarities between ourselves and other animals: distinction between nature and culture, reason and instinct, mind and body; commonly invoked traits such as humaneness, inhumanity, beastliness,

compassion, sentiment. (Armstrong and Simmons 2007: 18).

The second emphasizes the discontinuities between humans and other animals, constructing a binary opposition between humans and all other species supported by the Western philosophic tradition. Best argues that, whereas postmodernists succeeded in deconstructing the numerous binary oppositions humans have created throughout Western history, they took apart everything but the Berlin Wall dividing human from non-human animals (2009: 12). Underlying these queries by HAS theorists are two basic critiques: the critique of the discourse of speciesism, and the critique of humanism as a philosophical and critical movement long dominating Western thought.

Philosophical Premises of Human-Animal Studies

The ideology of speciesism plays a crucial role in erecting the boundaries that divide the animal kingdom from humanity. The term ‘speciesism’ was first used in the 1970’s to describe discrimination against nonhuman animals. Psychologist Richard Ryder, in his essay ‘Experiments on Animals’, (1971), was the first to use the term. Ryder comes back to the term in his book *The Victims of Science* (1975). To him, ‘speciesism’ stands for a human behavior, which constitutes discrimination against animals. He uses the term, he writes, “to describe the widespread discrimination that is practiced by man against other species.” Speciesism, he elaborates, “overlook[s] or underestimate[s] the similarities between the discriminator and those discriminated against and both forms of prejudice show a selfish disregard for the interests of others, and for their sufferings” (1975: 16).

Since then, many others have proposed their own definitions of speciesism. Some have defined it as a discrimination against all nonhuman animals, or a discrimination based on species membership alone. Peter Singer roughly follows Ryder in his characterization of speciesism –except that Singer focuses on attitudes instead of behavior. Speciesism, he writes, “is an ‘attitude of bias toward the interests of members of one’s own specie and against those of members of other species’” (1975: 7). Cultural theorist Cary Wolfe believes that speciesism involves systematic discrimination against another based solely on a generic characteristic, in this case species. He maintains that “current critical practice for all its innovation and progressive ethical and political agendas takes for granted and reproduces a rather traditional version of...the discourse of species- a discourse that in turn reproduces the institution of speciesism” (2003a:2).

In *The Victims of Science* Ryder draws a parallel between speciesism and racism “as two forms of

prejudice that are based upon appearances— if the other individual looks different then he is rated as being beyond the moral pale” (1075: 16). In the same vein HAS theorists compare speciesism with racism to underline the human tendency to accept unreflectively contemporary moral standards. They see that the critiques of racism, sexism and classism that have changed the humanities and social sciences have also historically withheld the question of ethical treatment from nonhuman animals (Castricano, 2008: 13). This is because of a disavowal that has, Wolfe argues, served only to reproduce speciesism as an “institution” that “requires...the sacrifice of the animal and the animalistic” to “maintain that fantasy figure called ‘the human’”(2003a:6). Consequently, HAS theorists call for forms of speciesism be given the same critical attention that has been employed against sexism, racism, feminism and queer theory.

Related to the concept of speciesism is that of anthropocentrism. It should be denoted that these two words are not synonyms. Oscar Horta defines anthropocentrism as the “disadvantageous treatment or consideration of those who are not members (or who are not considered members) of the human species” (Horta, 2010: 260). Anthropocentrism denotes, in general, the view that considers humans as central, only their interests as valuable, and that if non-human entities have value it is because humans assign it to them. Both speciesism and anthropocentrism repress the question of non-human subjectivity, taking for granted that the subject is always human by reducing the animal to irrational unthinking other who stands apart from rational thinking human subjects. The question of non-human subjectivity is central to the critique of humanism, which is at the heart of human-animal studies.

Ihab Hassan once stated that “Humanism may be coming to an end as humanism transforms itself into something one must helplessly call posthumanism” (Hassan, 1977: 247). Posthumanism is a difficult term to define, since “it generates different and even irreconcilable definitions” (Wolfe, 2010: 12). Taken in the most literal way, the word can have two alternative meanings: “after humanism” or “after human beings.” The former is at the core of the human-animal studies. It refers to the end of humanism as an intellectual movement that has dominated Western thought since the Renaissance, giving supremacy to human qualities, in particular rationality, in searching for truth and morality in support of human interests. The introduction of Neil Badmington’s entry on posthumanism in the *Routledge Companion to Literature and Science* provides a succinct account of the human(ism) that posthumanist scholars wish to rebel against:

the human being occupies a natural and eternal place at the very centre of things, where it is distinguished absolutely from machines, animals, and other inhuman

entities; where it shares with all other human beings a unique essence; where it is the origin of meaning and the sovereign subject of history; In the humanist account, human beings are exceptional, autonomous and set above the world that lies at their feet. (2011: 374).

Badmington concludes his entry by saying that what unites posthumanist scholars is the view that “anthropocentrism, with its assured insistence upon human exceptionalism, is no longer an adequate or convincing account of the way of the world” (2011: 381).

In *What is Posthumanism* Wolfe provides a definition of the term that, though lengthy, is very important:

Posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication on technical, medical, informatics and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms, a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon. (2010: 16-17).

In other words, the impression of human domination and autonomy is proving impossible to sustain.

In *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti writes that

[P]osthumanism is the historical moment that marks the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism and traces a different discursive framework, looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives. The starting point for me is the anti-humanist death of Wo/Man which marks the decline of some of the fundamental premises of the Enlightenment, namely the progress of mankind through a self-regulatory and teleological ordained use of reason and of secular scientific rationality allegedly aimed at the perfectibility of ‘Man’. The posthumanist perspective rests on the assumption of the historical decline of Humanism but goes further in exploring alternatives, without sinking into the rhetoric of the crisis of man. It works instead towards elaborating alternative ways of conceptualizing the human subject (Braidotti, 2013: 37).

Two key players dethrone the Wo/Man, namely technology and nonhuman animals.

Boria Sax contends that technology is not so much a means to human dominance as the area of most intense integration between human activity and the physical world (2010: 86). Computers and telecommunications testify to that as humans are becoming less and less capable of surviving without mechanical assistance. There is also another kind of technology that is less visible but may have a long-term impact namely

technologies like robotics, prosthetics, machine intelligence, nanotechnology and genetic manipulation that are advancing by the day. Sax argues that these new inventions that may seem dramatically to expand human power also undermine human autonomy (2010: 86). As a result, posthumanists are realizing that “our sense of our superiority over other animals and our unique status in the world” is being undermined if not challenged by “the very technologies we are now seeking to create” (Pepperell, 2003: 2).

Besides new technologies and inventions recent developments in cognitive science, ethology and other fields make it hard to take it for granted that the theoretical and political question of the subject is automatically coterminous with the species distinction between *Homo sapiens* and everything else (Wolfe, 2003:1). Donna Haraway expresses the same sentiment in her influential *Cyborg Manifesto*:

By the late twentieth century in the United States scientific culture, the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached. The last beachheads of uniqueness have been polluted, if not turned into amusement parks- language, tool use, social behavior, mental events. Nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal. (Haraway, 1991: 601).

Twelve years later Haraway published another manifesto: *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), in which she literally turns to companion –species since “by the end of the millennium cyborgs could no longer do the work of a proper herding dog to gather up the threads needed for critical inquiry” (Haraway, 2003: 4). So she abandons arguments connected to hybrids of organic and mechanical matter and turns to dogs instead.

What should be emphasized, however, is that posthumanism “need not...be construed as anti-human” (Hayles, 1999: 54). Haraway describes this perspective as “not-humanism in which species of all sorts are in question” (2003:164) and from which an ethics and politics committed to the flourishing of significant otherness might be taken. Wolfe agrees with both Hayles and Haraway and insists that posthumanism does not only talk about “a thematics of decentering the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological or technological correlates”, but also about “how thinking confronts that thematics, what thought has to become in the face of those challenges” (2010: 17). Some fiction writers face those challenges in their posthumanist animal fiction texts, since literature is one of the oldest forms animals inhabited.

POSTHUMANISM IN LITERATURE/LITERARY CRITICISM

Two main tendencies can be identified in the posthuman

discourses: techno or cyborg posthumanism and animal posthumanism. Both tendencies have found their way to fiction. The first gives birth to the techno-centric fiction accommodated by dystopian and cyberpunk science fiction, while the second boosts the emergence of a new category of animal fiction in which animals are not incidental but are treated as unique subjects. The new fiction requires new critical tools.

Full-length posthumanist literary criticism is still in the making. There are, however, major contributors to this field. It is important to outline this area since it is the big umbrella that HAS falls under.

Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) is a seminal text in the discourse of posthumanism. She says that her intention is “to keep disembodiment from being rewritten once again into prevailing concepts of subjectivity,” and that her dream:

is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival. (p.5).

Hayles' book provides an account of the development of first and second order cybernetics after the Second World War in the United States. The central thrust of Hayles' book may be summarized as an analysis of embodiment in relation to technology and information. She relies on literary texts written “contemporaneous with the development of the scientific theories and cybernetic technologies . . . [and] clearly influenced by the development of cybernetics” in order to construct a narrative about “the (lost) body of information, the cyborg body, and the posthuman body” (1999: 21).

Bruce Clarke's *Posthuman Metamorphosis* is another contribution to the field. Like Hayles, Clarke turns to cybernetics, although he relies principally on its later incarnation as second-order systems theory. His thesis, in essence, is that “neocybernetic systems theory resonates with narrative forms, valorizing narrativity as a significant allegory of systemic operations” (Clarke, 2008: 5).

In *A Genealogy of Cyborgothic: Aesthetics and Ethics in the Age of Posthumanism* Dongshin Yi is of the opinion that the limits of traditional literary criticism are in no small part due to its conforming to the tradition of representation. For Yi posthumanism is of vital importance because

[D]epending on how we choose, our posthuman age will be either one that re-presents the humanistic age in a more technologically updated manner, or one where

a reciprocal – responsive and responsible – relation is in progress between humans and the rest of the world. . . (2010: 9).

While Wolfe's *What is Posthumanism?* (2010) is not dedicated solely to literary criticism, Posthumanist art is central to Wolfe's analysis, with his volume including criticism of contemporary painting, film, and architecture, as well as the poetry.

The question of the animal is evident throughout the scholarship of posthumanism. This includes but is not limited to: Wolfe's *What is Posthumanism?* (2010), which dedicates two chapters to animal studies; and Braidotti's *The Posthuman* (2013), which includes a chapter titled "Post-Anthropocentrism: Life Beyond the Species," with its headed "The Posthuman as Becoming-animal". What emerges from these writings is a critical posthumanist perspective that gives way to deconstruct other-than-human identity from a non-anthropocentric point of view, to analyze identities that are constructed in fiction as a result of interspecies contact, and to take animal identity seriously; hence the emergence of animal-centric criticism.

Cary Wolfe sees animal-centered criticism as following in the footsteps of earlier political criticisms.

Given what we have learned in recent decades about many non-human animals—the richness of their mental and emotional lives, the complexity of their forms of communication and interactions—many scholars now think that we are forced to make the same kind of shift in the ethics of reading and interpretation that attended taking sexual difference seriously in the 1990s (in the form of queer theory) or race and gender seriously in the 1970s and 1980s. (2009: 567-68).

Most political criticisms, Donovan argues, are rooted in what has come to be called standpoint theory, the original formulation of which was presented by Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukacs in his *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), which attempts to identify and articulate the point of view or standpoint of a silenced, oppressed group (2011: 207).

The first issue several standpoint critics have objected to is the "aesthetic exploitation of animals" (Donovan 2009: 39) by using animals as symbols of humans or metaphor for human emotions. When used metaphorically, Adams argues that the real or literal animals are obscured by their signifier, which renders the animal "an absent referent." In much literature she points out, animals have in fact "becomes absent referents, whose fate is transmuted into a metaphor for someone else's existence or fate...whose original meaning...is absorbed into a human centered hierarchy" (1991: 42).

Along the same line Simons is of the opinion that what is needed is a new kind of literary study that includes

"animal rights" as "priority" analyzing the "cultural text" for "tracks of animals" (2002: 5). Such an approach, Simmons believes, will look for texts in which animals are not "displaced metaphors for the human" (2002: 6). Perkins likewise criticizes the use of animals as metaphor for human emotion and finds such a device "dubious" since it renders the animal as "just a metaphor with little character of its own" (Perkins, 2003: 147). In this regard Shapiro and Copeland calls for a "full-blown, animal-based interpretative theory" that should examine whether this symbolic use is "figurative appropriation" or "ideational exploitation" and "therefore reductive or disrespectful...or at least anthropocentric" (2005: 344).

Moreover, animal standpoint critics are of opinion that earlier critics ignored or trivialized the animal's suffering. That is why animal standpoint critics should note past critical blindness to animal's existence and suffering in literary text. They "may also question the absences or blind spots, the lapses and lacunae, in texts where animals appear and consequently "they might raise the question why this suffering is ignored or repressed by the author, the likely answer being what specieist assumptions condone such blindness" (Donovan 2009: 40).

Shapiro and Copeland, editors of the journal *Society and Animal*, outline three approaches that this emerging literary theory should emphasize. The first approach is to deconstruct reductive, disrespectful ways of presenting nonhuman animals. The second is to evaluate the degree to which the author presents the animal "itself" both as an experiencing individual and a species-- typical way of living in the world (2005: 345). As for the third approach, they believe that the critique should include an analysis of human-animal relationships in the work at hand. They further explain this third approach:

The critical task is to explicate the form of that relationship and to place it in the universe of possible relationships= from the animal as forgotten resource for a consumer (the steak, medium rare) to the animal as more or less equal partner in a relationship= the fruit of which is a common project, a shared world. (2005: 346).

Best extends the scope of the analysis of the relationship between human and non-human animals to cover the past as well as the present and the future arguing that all histories even so-called "radical" narratives have been written from the human standpoint. According to him, the animal standpoint interprets history "not from the evolutionary position that reifies human agency as the autonomous actions of a Promethean species, but rather from a co-evolutionary perspective that sees non-human animals as inseparably embedded in human history and as dynamic agents in their own right" (2009: 13).

In the same vein, Donna Haraway argues in her *Companion Species Manifesto* that any narration of history that assumes that humans are the central histographical agents is historically incorrect. In her manifesto Haraway sees companion species as the hybrid beings co-constituted by humans and any other species that have symbiogenetically given birth and co-evolved each other. Symbiogenesis refers to how various beings (i.e. bacteria, genes, larger organisms) can in fact only come into living existence through utter codependence on other quite different beings. Haraway asserts that particular populations of humans and dogs have in fact co-evolved each other throughout most of humanity's history and there can be no way in which humans can accurately understand not only what canines are but what 'humans' are, without accounting histographically for this complex relationship. Haraway practices what she preaches. In the manifesto she rewrites the history of two breeds of dogs: the Great Pyrenees and the Australian Shepherd. The manifesto foregrounds questions concerning what these non-human populations might need and how humans can enter into a mutually beneficial relationship with them. This approach underlines the possibility of treating non humans as something other than passive objects of study since they are rarely considered to be "subjects of life." DeMello is of opinion that the reluctance to see non humans as subjects stems from the fact that if humans grant subjectivity to nonhumans, it would become more difficult for humans to "justify many of the practices that humans engage in with animals" (2012: 6).

Thus, recognizing non humans as subjects is at the heart of the animal centric criticism. Donovan elaborates this point:

It critiques the figurative use of animals where such use is anthropocentric, eliciting subjective character and independent reality of the animal; in addition it points up authorial blindness or silence when animals are treated merely as background objects rather than subjective presences. (2009:38).

Acknowledging the subjectivity of non-human animals entails recognizing their agency. Donna Haraway espouses the recognition of non-human world as a witty agent or actor, an active collaborator in the construction of meaning or a rebellious obstacle to it (Haraway, 1991:201). In fact, many of the most prominent advocates for a new understanding of animals "foster the witnessing of subjectivity in animal life by representing action as performed by rather than happening to animals" (Crist 1999: 40). In that sense, nonhuman subjectivity will be substantiated in that we call agency. That agency is expressed and oppressed in different ways and according to the different contexts. It should be noted, however, that agency is problematic. It depends on the

animal in question, it depends on the circumstances, and it depends on how agency itself is framed. These problems, as McFarland and Hediger emphasizes, "open more questions about how we understand the relationships between the human and the nonhuman" (2009: 16), which is the main aim of the HAS scholars. Thus the animal centric criticism can be summarized as 'ethical' as well as 'political' criticism that questions ideologically driven representations of animal figures and identifies speciesist representations and formulations (Donovan, 2009: 41).

A DOG'S PURPOSE

In 2009 Marion Copeland ends his review of Philip Armstrong's *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* by expressing this opinion:

[O]ur fiction, by tapping into the narrative (or sympathetic or metamorphic) imagination that has always mediated between species and is responsible for the animal-centric story that lingers in legend, folklore, myth, and the oral and written literatures of human cultures world-wide, will evolve toward contemporary narratives capable of revealing to human readers what nonhuman animals mean to themselves as well as to us (2009: 74).

Copeland's vision is materialized in Bruce Cameron's *A Dog's Purpose*, published in 2010.

As the title indicates the book is about a dog who searches for his purpose in life. Surprised to find himself reborn as a golden-haired puppy after a tragically short life as a stray mutt, Bailey's search for his new life's meaning leads him into the life of 8-year-old Ethan. During their countless adventures Bailey discovers how to be a good dog. But this life as a beloved family pet is not the end of Bailey's journey. Reborn as a puppy yet again, Bailey wonders--will he ever find his purpose? The story centers completely upon this dog. The dog tells his own story in the first person, a narrator or an authorial voice is completely non-existent in the text. As such it is told entirely from the non-human animal point of view. Since it is told from the dog's point of view, it is only natural that the members of his species are the only creatures he recognizes when he is first born and all other "creatures" are "things." This is the first time Bailey meets humans:

When the thing came into view striding along the creek bed, I felt Mother's fear ripple across her back. It was big, it stood on two legs, and an acrid smoke wafted from its mouth as it shambled toward us.

I stared intently, absolutely fascinated. For reasons I

couldn't fathom I was drawn to this creature, compelled, and I even tensed, preparing to bound out to greet it. One look from my mother though and I decided against it. This was something to be feared, to be avoided at all costs. (17)

By adopting the standpoint of the animal Cameron invites the reader to adopt the vision of the dog and alienates him/herself from the human perspective which in turn allows the reader to stand apart of his/her humanity and concentrate on the interests, wants and suffering of the other non-human animals.

Another animal centric characteristic that Cameron displays in his "novel for humans" is the sensitivity and the empathetic eye with which he depicts feelings and sufferings of non-human animals. The authorial voice never comments on what happens to Bailey. Bailey just describes what he as a *dog* thinks of or feels, a technique that Cameron emphasizes to intensify the subjectivity of Bailey and diminishes if not obliterates any other human subjectivity. Bailey's reaction to the first time he is sterilized is a very good example:

When I wake up, I was instantly aware that there was something around my neck, a white cone of some kind, so stupid looking I worried I might be dismissed from the pack. I had an aching itchy feeling between my back legs, though I couldn't get to it because of the silly collar. I stumbled over to the faucet and drank a little, my stomach queasy and my underside very, very sore. (38).

Cameron depicts in detail the subjective perspective and experience of Bailey the dog. Bailey goes on describing the "humiliation" he feels because of the stupid collar and how he has to suffer the "indignity of an inspection of the sore area by every male in the pack." He is then "flipped on his back" by Top Dog and has to "lay there in misery as first he and then the other males sniffed [him] with undisguised contempt." The episode ends with Bailey announcing that after this incident he is no longer "interested in the game where [he] climbed on Coco's back (39). In the narrative there is no "aestheticizing of the animal's cruelty" (Donovan, 2011). On the contrary, what is being foregrounded here is Bailey's suffering and the humiliation that he feels as an animal. In this narrative the animal's subjective realities are attended to and respected as significant matters. There is no commentary or interference from the author, but the dog's suffering is depicted in an easy but highly sensitive manner for the human reader to realize how humans hurt and oppress animals. In fact one of the main concerns of HAS and the animal centric critical analysis is to underline the extent of 'our' ethical duty to non-humans with whom 'we' share the universe.

The first person method of narration is also very

effective in providing a dog's-eye commentary on humans, human behavior and human relations. When Bailey is reborn for the second time he is picked up by a man who decides to take Bailey home with him. While driving home the man decides to stop for a drink leaving Bailey in the closed car. The man apparently forgets all about him. The weather gets very hot and Bailey is about to die when a woman smashes the window of the car and saves him: "I was limp and helpless when I felt hands slide around my body and raise me into the air, too exhausted to do anything but to hand slackly in her hands" (64). There is a sharp juxtaposition here between the thoughtless behavior of the man and the caring attitude of the woman, but neither Bailey nor Cameron comment on them leaving it for the reader to draw conclusions.

Human-human relations are also observed but never commented upon by Bailey. One of the queer relations in the novel is that between Ethan, Bailey's second owner, and one of his neighbors, Todd:

Over the course of the next year or two I noticed that when the children all played together Todd was often excluded. When he came around, an uneasiness went through the children, a mood change that Marshmallow and I could sense as easily as if one of them has screamed. Girls usually turned their backs on Todd and the boys accepted him into their games with a noticeable reluctance. Ethan never went over to Todd's house anymore. (103)

Todd is a psychologically disturbed child who kidnaps Bailey because Bailey and Ethan wins a race against Todd. Years later he tries to poison Bailey through a piece of meat but Baily, who is very much tempted to eat it, refrained from eating it wondering "Why...did it smell so strongly of Todd?" (140). Finally, Todd tries to kill Ethan by burning his house when he is in it. Todd is always jealous of Ethan because he has Bailey. As they grow older his jealousy increases when Ethan and Hannah become friends. On the eve of his burning the house Todd sees Ethan, Hannah and Bailey together and Bailey could feel things that neither Ethan nor Hannah could feel when they stop to greet Todd:

Something in Todd came to the surface, then. Not anger, exactly, but something worse, something dark, an emotion I'd never felt from anyone before. I felt it in the way he stared at Ethan and Hannah, his face very still. (143)

Following this encounter, Todd burns Ethan's house causing serious damage to Ethan's legs who remains for the rest of his life limping and psychologically scared. Bailey leads the police to Todd who is arrested and sent to prison. With Bailey by his side, Ethan spends his

senior year recuperating at his grandparents' farm as his parents' marriage disintegrates. It becomes clear by now why Cameron subtitled his novel as "A novel for Humans." It is through Bailey that the humans reflect on their humanity, question the so called boundaries between humans and non-human animals and rework new definition of animality and humanity. Indeed, it is one of the goals of the animal standpoint theory, and HAS in general, to underline and to instigate humans to reconsider the role played by non-human animals in shaping the moral life of human animals.

Bailey's subjectivity is more strongly emphasized through his agency. In fact he stresses his agency by searching for the purpose of his life. Bailey is a major actor in his owners' lives. He is not a mere pet in the houses he stays in but he plays a vital role in the lives of these houses. Since his first life as a stray dog, he believes that his purpose is to make his human owners happy and safe. In fact he asserts this purpose at the end of each life he lives. He ends his first life by acknowledging that making Senora happy is the only thing that gave his life any purpose (54). Ending his second life with Ethan, he confesses that his purpose, his whole life "had been to love him and be with him, to make him happy" (177), which he magnificently achieves. During his third life, he works as a rescue dog and is able to save many children from being lost. As Ellie the chopper dog, Bailey asserts his willful agency when he, defying his caretaker orders, is able to save an old woman in the wake of an earthquake that kills hundreds of people:

I didn't pay attention to Vernon as he trotted away. My focus was on the person hidden in the rubble. I could smell fear, though the biting odor from the chemicals was clawing at my nose ..."Ellie? What's Vernon doing? Where's he going?"
 'Hey, Ellie! Look!' Vernon shouted. He started to run slowly up the street. I stared after him: I wanted to chase him and play, but I had work to do. I turned back to the collapsed building.
 "Ellie! No!" Maya called. (232)

Refusing to listen to others, Bailey rescues the old lady and sacrifices his sense of smell in the process.

But it is during his fourth life that his agency is strongly emphasized. Reborn again near the place he lived in with Ethan, he searches until he finds him, now a lonely old man living on the family farm. Soon Ethan adopts "Buddy," who reunites Ethan with his lost love Hannah rescuing him "not from the pond but from the sinking despair of his own life" (314). Bailey always wants to be "a front seat dog" and he has become a front seat dog in all the lives he lives, not only sitting next to his owner but sharing with him/her the wheel of life. So when at the end of the novel Ethan dies, the reader is more concerned

with the dog's deep grief than with the human's death:

As for me: I loyally remained right where I was remembering the very first time I had ever seen the boy and then just now, the very last time-and all the times in between. The deep aching grief I knew I would feel would come soon enough, but at that moment mostly what I felt was peace, secure in the knowledge that by living my life the way I had, everything had come down to this moment.

I had fulfilled my purpose. (318-19)

In Cameron's *A Dog's Purpose* "animals are seats of consciousness-subjects, not objects... they are individuals with stories/biographies of their own, not undifferentiated masses... they dislike pain, enjoy pleasure... they want to live and thrive" (Donovan 2011: 205).

Anthill

Edward O. Wilson is one of the most important biological theorists since Darwin. Author of some two dozen books, two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, expert on social insects, discoverer of new species, and an advocate of bio-diversity. He is most famously known as the father of sociobiology: the scientific study of the biological basis of social behaviour, which when extended beyond social insects to other animals – including humans – has proved highly controversial. His first novel is *Anthill*.

The protagonist, Raff Cody, inhabits working-class Clayville. There he wanders the pine woodlands, catching spiders and frogs for close scrutiny mentored by Professor Norville, a biology professor at Florida State University who has known him from childhood. Young Raff writes a history of Nokobee's ant species, entitled "The Anthill Chronicles": this forms the center of the book. After which Raff goes to Harvard, becomes an environmental lawyer, takes a job with the very developer threatening his cherished Nokobee, and defends it, as right-wing zealots target his life.

Unlike in Cameron's novel, here there is a narrator. The narrator is Raff's mentor, Frederick Norville, who narrates the first part of the novel based on what he knew from Raff and what he himself knows about him. The second part is the Anthill chronicles, and the third part is narrated by an omniscient narrator, this final part brings the fates of Raff and the Anthill together. Wilson writes a Prologue to his novel in which he emphasizes his anti-speciesist stance. He declares that he is representing "three parallel worlds, which nevertheless exist in the same space and time." These worlds are the ants' who "build civilizations in the dirt," the humans' "one of the countless species forming the biosphere" and the biosphere or "the totality of all life, plastered like a membrane over all of earth"

(15-16). In the novel, a parallelism is drawn between the ants as a species and the human as a species by different methods.

One of these methods is Owen's style in portraying humans. Since the narrator is Professor Norville, he frames his account in scientific prose. When a new character is introduced, his/her features are described in a scientific manner. Raff, for instance, "was a wisp of a child, short for his age and skinny" (40). The description of Raff's uncle, Cyrus Semmes, is worthy to be highlighted:

Cyrus was not physically imposing. Scarcely an inch taller than the jockey-sized Ainesley, he was naturally stocky and starting to go to flab, which strained his waist buttons of his monogrammed shirt. Nor was he handsome in the conventional sense. He had thin lips that tended to tighten when he was lost in thought, slightly hooded eyes, and thin dark hair that had made a significant retreat from the forehead. He was a habitual pencil-chewer and chin scratcher. He seldom laughed. Usually he just chuckled and then only briefly, with a slight nodding of the head. (77)

In another example, Raff assesses JoLane, a potential girlfriend, and proceeds in the same programmed sequence: "JoLane had a keen, intelligent face and two of the traits scientifically considered beautiful, small chin and wide-spaced eyes, but not the third, high cheekbones" (251). To bring the point home, Wilson presents humans as if he is presenting an animal species: shape, characteristics and distinct features making them identifiable in a field guide to other species.

Human animals are equal to ants, a premise that Wilson seems to emphasize over and over again using different methods. Another method that he uses is underlining the equality between humans and nonhuman animals as species is the parallel structures. Raff's father does not get along well with his wife's family so he is always ready with "an escape strategy" (63) to avoid visiting them. Water snakes that Raff tries to hunt from time to time also adopt "escape strategies" which they inherited from their ancestors that for millions of years "had been stalked by predators a great deal faster than Raff." (131) In another incident, when ten-year old Raff is dragged by his mother to visit the family matriarch, Aunt Jessica, she is the perfect Queen Ant. Sitting torpid in her chamber, she disseminates faint odors and crucial information about the family: "Marcia and Raff followed Jessica into the parlor, and were struck by the telltale scent of neglected old age, a mix of unwashed flesh and decayed upholstery with just a hint of urine" (66). Raff follows wide-eyed as the worker-ant Sissy forays outside the house, looking here and there, chasing a hen in the chicken yard: "She cornered it at the angle of the rear wooden fence, gathered it struggling and squawking in her arms. She grabbed its lower legs with both hands and

turned it upside down and held in that way, with its wings flapping and its head hanging down" (69). She then dispatches her prey with the announcement: Dinner. This scene is equivalent to the opening scene of the *Chronicle* where the dead queen's body will be lying in the inner chamber "smelling alive" with the workers moving around her doing their usual work.

The second part of the novel is "The Anthill Chronicles." Presented as Raff's undergraduate thesis, it carries the reader down the ant-hole to describe life from the ants' point of view. It opens with the death of the queen of the Trailhead colony and the consequences of this death on the colony. This is the most important event in the life of the colony because the queen is "the fountainhead of all its energies and growth. She was the key to its success or failure. The metronomic pumping out of fertilized eggs from her twenty ovaries was the heartbeat of the colony" (182). Then the chronicle gives minute details about the life of the ants in the colony. A very important insight about the ants' life that the chronicle provides in details is the fact that ants have language of their own:

And so the business of the Trailhead Colony was conducted by a vocabulary of odor and taste. Pheromones were emitted, occasionally reinforced by touch. Messages were created, sometimes with a single chemical substance, sometimes with the same substance at different concentrations, and on occasion two or more in combination. Meanings were changed according to where the substances were delivered. The vocabulary grew. Different message were delivered.

Here, let me lick and clean you.

Get to work, do what others are doing here.

This is my caste, and this is my condition.

Let us lay down territorial pheromones, announcing to rivals our dominion over this land.

We don't have enough soldiers; raise some in the nursery.

We have too many soldiers; raise fewer.

Who is leading the struggle to become our new Queen? (185-6)

Having a language is one of the basic differences that distinguishes animals from human animals and which gives supremacy to human animals. In the novel, however, "we are permitted to recognize semiotic or embodied forms of communication common among animals as kinds of language, each in its unique way" (Macfarland and Hediger, 2009: 10), thus disavowing the absolute and singular distinction traditionally made between the human animal and all other animals, the language.

As the ants are no longer suffering the "linguistic eclipse" (Webb 1998: 87), they are also no longer objectified. The chronicles gives account of the life inside

the colony. There are detailed descriptions of the daily jobs that each one assumes: the workers that go out for food, the nurses and even the ones that take care of the cemeteries. The soldiers also play their role, not by going to battle unnecessarily, but by displaying, the equivalent of military parades by human armies. Armies are very important since the *Chronicles* focuses on how the Trailhead colony perished when attacked by the Streamsider colony that led to the birth of a new generation of ants. This section is an example of species empathy since Owen the biologist is imagining exactly what it is like to be an ant at war. Wilson invokes the poet Homer in his introduction, suggesting that ant "histories are epics that unfold on picnic grounds"(15). The *Chronicles* emphasizes how ants are so complex in their societies and so intricate in the way they fight among themselves.

As the Streamsider scouts gathered in the arena, they found their Trailheader counterparts also assembling almost equal numbers. A few climbed up on top of pebbles to serve as sentinels. The first scouts on both sides to encounter the enemy ran home to recruit reinforcements...Within an hour hundreds of ants from both colonies were milling around one another. The original scouts all of whom were relatively small and thin, were soon joined by contingents of the more massively built soldiers.

The opposing forces were careful not to start a battle. Their strategy was the opposite: the displays were the equivalent of competing military parades by human armies. They wanted their performance to be viewed by the enemy.

As the tournament unfolded, the individual performers made themselves appear as large as possible. They inflated their abdomens by pumping them up with fluid. They straightened their legs to form stilts and strutted around every foreign worker they encountered- sometimes bumping against them...The effort they were making was meant to persuade the other side that their colony had a great many soldier. (203)

The ants described here are thinking ants, they plan schemes and develop strategies to win the war. Wilson even conveys that ants could be conscious of their predicament in the way some of them remember the previous year's experiences: "During the desperate hours the oldest Trail headers workers remembered another extraordinary event that occurred the previous summer, when they were young and most of their nest mates now present had not yet been born" (210). Wilson avoids any anthropomorphism to give vivid insight into the life of the threatened nest, its anxieties and its battles. He gives ants recognizable emotions, when emotions, like anxiety and anger, are manifested into activity:

The entire colony was on the edge of panic. Agitated ants ran back and forth through the rooms and galleries of the nest, to no special purpose. The colony was not yet aware of the ultimate meaning of its own mood and actions, but it was instinctively preparing for one last maneuver, a final almost suicidal response that might yet save some of its members. (210)

Wilson does not only give ants emotions and feelings, but he gives them also higher cognitive functions similar to those of humans. Ants have mind and an awareness of the supreme powers in the universe:

To the mind of a young ant, born just this year, the elders' memories of an event of the previous year, if such could be communicated at all, was a nonexistent formidic antiquity.

But for some elders in the Trailheader superorganism, the moving trees were powers that lived outside the ant cosmos, equivalent to the way gods are viewed in the human mind. The elders thought, and therefore the colony thought in part, as a segment of the human brain might think, that the moving-tree gods cared about them in some inexplicable way. Perhaps they were gigantic nestmates. They might now, in the hour of the Trailheaders' dire peril, spread benevolence again.

Other elders did not think this way. To them the gods were just a less common version of what the colony experienced routinely, such as a powerful wind off the lake or a violent thunderstorm....Still others-a small minority, to be sure-doubted that the gods ever existed. (212)

Wilson's narrative contradicts the received notions of animals as insentient beings and emphasizes the subjectivity of nonhuman animals. He then sums it up as a lesson Raff learns upon completing his thesis on the anthill:

The foibles of ants, Raff learned, are those of men, written in a simpler grammar. Compared with those of humans, the anthill cycles are short in duration, instinct driven, and hence truly ordained by fate. The ant societies proved different in most fundamental ways from those of humans-of course- yet also convergent to them in other, also important ways. (169)

Wilson stresses his anti-speciest animal-centric stance in yet another way. Stephen Webb notes, "our use of language incorporates animals as symbols and metaphors... while real animals disappear" (89). In Wilson's novel, however, "ants are a metaphor for us and we for them" (Prologue 16). In the *Anthill Chronicles*, Wilson uses humans as metaphor for ants in more than one occasion. About to be defeated by the Streamsiders,

the Trailheaders “were like a doomed people in a besieged city” (212). In another incident the Woodlander Ants, a new species of ants, “were like human explorers coming ashore on an uninhabited island” (236) when they are exploring the abandoned Supercolony terrain. Such use of metaphors is highly significant. The use of a figure in literature is often a dominative transaction. In the metaphor or simile the entity being used as a point of comparison or similitude (the vehicle) is objectified so as to have transferred certain of its qualities to the subject (the tenor). As such “metaphors and other figurative language may thus be seen as a form of parasitical exploitation or metaphysical cannibalism of one entity (the vehicle) for the benefit of the other (the tenor)” (Donovan, 2011: 210). In the light of this opinion, Wilson’s statement that humans are metaphors to animals objectifies humans, upsets “our hierarchical view that humans are not to be exploited aesthetically to characterize animals” (Donovan 2011:210) and consequently obliterates any superiority that is often attributed to human subjectivity. There is no aestheticizing of one for the sake of the other, there is no silencing of one for the other’s voice to be heard, on the contrary, the actual realities of the animal (ants) are foregrounded and the actual animal is strongly seen, smelled and felt.

If humans dominate the first part of the novel and ants dominate the second, both of them become the main focus of the third, forming the third world Wilson refers to in his Prologue which is the whole biosphere. During his studies, Raff discovers an ant supercolony, in which a mutation has removed the ants’ capacity to recognize the important cues that create limits within and between nests. Colonies thus impaired grow boundless in size, extracting resources until their habitats collapse. Moreover humans had to exterminate the whole population of ants of Nokobee because they encroached upon their homes. As a result “the entirety of all of it, ant, colony and ecosystem, was at stake” (247), especially with the owners of the Nokobee tract having decided to sell it to developers. However, Raff as the legal arm of the land developers is able to persuade them to develop part of the land and to leave the rest of the Nokobee tract just as it is allowing both species to co-exist on equal footing.

Conclusion

Animal-standpoint criticism and HAS in general looks for “literature in which animals are taken seriously, not ignored or silenced, but with their realities empathetically imagined and in which specialist ideology—that holds animals are but objects for human use—is broken through, discarded, in favor of a view that respects their subjectivity, their souls” (Donovan, 2009). If this was not found a decade ago, Cameron’s *A Dog’s Purpose* and

Wilson’s *Anthill* testify to the flourishing of such literature. *A Dog’s Purpose* and *Anthill* have no single perspective on the questions of animals and their place in our social world but rather demonstrate the range of ways fiction writers have thought about the issue.

In their fictions of the animal neither Cameron nor Owen aestheticizes or objectifies the non-human animal, rather they assert their subjectivity and agency in their world as well as the humans’ world. Both writers adopt the non-human point of view to emphasize their experiences feelings and consciousness and to render non-human species as equal to the human species. They, moreover, emphasize that thinking through the concept of ‘the animal’ as well as through human animal material relationships is indispensable for grasping what it means to be human. This is because the concept ‘animal’ has always been the ground for production of the ‘human’ and second because it makes humans aware of their practices against and oppression of other species as well as other human beings. In this way HAS and animal-centric criticism enable the readers to understand the role of literature in ethical and intellectual life.

But what’s in it for the animals? In conveying some truth of animal existence and enabling us imaginatively to inhabit the animal’s perspective literature enables its readers to perceive animals as beings worthy of respect and entitled to equal rights:

Perhaps I, or we, cannot really know their points of view, though that does not absolve us of the responsibility of trying to think about them. I approach these questions from the perspective of someone who feels that bonds with various nonhumans are essential to my life (even if those nonhumans are indifferent to my tedious spouting of written words at the computer, unless I name aloud important things, like “walk”, or “carrot”, depending on whom I am addressing). (Birke, 2009).

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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