



# St. Mawr, Lassie and a ‘naive hedgehog’: Theoretical and Practical Issue about Representing the Animal qua Animal in Literary Narratives

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# BESTIARIUM

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MARIE CAZABAN-MAZEROLLES

ST. MAWR, LASSIE AND A 'NAIVE HEDGEHOG':  
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES  
ABOUT REPRESENTING THE ANIMAL  
*QUA* ANIMAL IN LITERARY NARRATIVES

Western literature has a long history of both symbolization and anthropomorphization of non-human animals. From Aesope's fables to Orwell's revolutionary pigs; from medieval bestiaries to Lewis Carroll's bunny; or from Baudelaire's albatross to Leopardi's *passero solitario* – literary animals more often than not 'appea[r] as significant figures [...] strictly in terms of metaphor'.<sup>1</sup> Yet over the last century, a growing number of writers in line with the global reassessment of animal nature and our human relationships with them have opposed such a use of animal figures, and ostensibly strived to reach a non-allegorical, non-symbolical representation of the animal as an animal. Like human sciences, literature is 'now struggling to catch up with a radical evaluation of the status of nonhuman animals that has taken place in society at large'.<sup>2</sup>

Through the analysis of British writer D.H. Lawrence's short story 'St. Mawr' (1925), which features a young lady rejecting the society she lives in in the aftermath of her encounter with a powerful stallion and was considered by Margot Norris as one of the earliest attempts to 'restor[e] the animal *qua* animal to literature by liberating it from its tropological enslavement to the human',<sup>3</sup> this paper first contends that such a way to frame the issue is problematic since it relies upon a homogeneous view of 'the animal' that reproduces dualism and ultimately runs the risk to lead back to the anthropocentrism it was supposed to escape. I will then turn to the French contemporary writer

- 1 Susan McHugh, *Animal Stories: Narrating Across Species Lines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p.7.
- 2 Cary Wolfe, *Zoontologies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p.xi.
- 3 Margot Norris, *Beasts of the modern imagination. Darwin, Nietzsche, Kafka, Ernst, and Lawrence* (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 1985), p.18.

Éric Chevillard's *Du hérisson* (2002), in which a writer who is about to pen his autobiography confronts a hedgehog suddenly appeared on his desk, as an example of how the use of specific ethological and ecological knowledge can provide a way to solve this first difficulty. By drawing on contemporary ethological debates, I will nonetheless try to unveil new anthropocentric biases in such representation. Finally, the rewriting of collie-star Lassie's tale by the contemporary American writer T.C. Boyle in 'Heart of a champion', a short story published in 1974 in which the relationship between the young Timmy and his faithful dog is seriously amended, will provide the opportunity to question the relationships between animal individualization and anthropomorphism as the ultimate pitfall any literary representation of the animal has to deal with.

It must be immediately added that such an argumentative agenda does not aim at assessing literary works on a pass-or-fail basis, and shall not be considered as a normative discourse distinguishing between good and bad representations of the literary animal. The reader then will be asked to accept the fact that the literary texts under consideration will, to some extent, undergo a test they are not intended to pass. One should recognize the full legitimacy of literary works to feature animals for purposes other than naturalistic *mimesis*, and keep in mind that literary discourse is not to be evaluated according to what contemporary scientific knowledge and cultural trends claim is true or false, right or wrong.

Therefore, the paper's aim is rather to enlighten the innovative paths explored by 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries narratives in order to create a less anthropomorphic or anthropocentric literary representation of the animal, without assuming that such an ambition stands for the authors' whole poetic project. In addition, the framework within which literary scholars engage with the so-called animal question will be put under scrutiny, so that not only the writers' representations but also the general theoretical and lexical biases will be critically examined.

### *Lawrence's 'St. Mawr': an all too Platonic Animal*

In her book *Beasts of the Modern Imagination*, Margot Norris indicates Lawrence as an early representative of what she terms a biocentric tradition that originated from Nietzsche and Darwin. Lawrence's short novella 'St. Mawr', she states, especially attests to the British author's inclination towards a non-anthropocentric, non-anthropomorphic, and non-symbolical representation of the animal:

He treats the encoding of the animal as symbol, metaphor, or allegory, as an impoverishment and a denigration, and [...] he restores the animal *qua* animal to literature by liberating it from its tropological enslavement to the human.<sup>4</sup>

I agree to a large degree with such a claim. Indeed, the horse St. Mawr, eponymous character of the story, is mostly shown as a figure who resists symbolization despite the numerous attempts by the human characters who surround him. Whether it is Lou (the horse's owner), her husband, her mother, or the upper-class London people: each and every character keeps trying to give the stallion a metaphorical significance. In their discourses, it sometimes appears as God, sometimes as Evil, sometimes as an allegory for rebellion from those who are treated like slaves, or even as a symbol of sexuality. Nonetheless, the very proliferation of such attempts and the contradictions they give rise to, none of them being endorsed by the narrative voice, ultimately prove them wrong. St. Mawr resists all these conflicting guesses which Lawrence appears to mock, so that the endeavor of symbolization itself is bound to fail. As shrewdly noted by Norris, the human proclivity to give non-human animals symbolical significance is disclosed in the story as a new kind of exploitative power and violence. After St. Mawr overthrows Lou's husband Rico during a ride, the symbolical interpretation of its behavior leads to a death sentence:

But St. Mawr? Was it the natural wild thing in him which caused these disasters? Or was it the slave, asserting himself for vengeance?

If the latter, let him be shot. It would be a great satisfaction to see him dead.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, I believe a few restrictions should be added to Norris' statement. First, it is clear in the novella that 'the liberation [of the animal] from its tropological enslavement' is achieved at the cost of its outright disappearance from the text. Towards the end of the story indeed, St. Mawr who has been brought to the United States by her mistress starts showing signs of interest for mares, compelling the human characters to acknowledge it as a bodily creature filled with instincts which are

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4 Norris, p.17-18.

5 David Herbert Lawrence, *St Mawr and others stories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.82.

directed towards its own species. The horse turns into a horse and ceases to be an idea, thus inhibiting any symbol-making impulse: 'And St. Mawr followed at the heels of the boss's long-legged black Texan mare, almost slavishly. What, in heaven's name, was one to make of it all?'.<sup>6</sup> Hence this is the moment when the horse, not being able to serve as a support for Lou's or anyone's projections anymore (nothing can be 'made' of it), disappears from the story: 'They left St. Mawr and Lewis'.<sup>7</sup>

Such disappearance at the time when Lou has just left both her husband and Britain in order to meet with the wild American West only makes clearer the overall diegetic function of the horse: St. Mawr is left behind because it has completed its mission which was to awake Lou to an alternative way of life opposed to the one lived by the refined men and women of the modern society who repress the animal within themselves. Such a role then necessarily stems from a process of essentialization which presents St. Mawr as a mere embodiment of the abstract idea of 'the animal'. So, even though Lawrence's story does question the long tradition of projecting anthropomorphic features and all-too-human fantasies onto non-human animals, I contend that it doesn't disrupt as much as it replicates a tropological use of the animal figure since St. Mawr ultimately appears to stand as a synecdoche for animality. The animal remains a symbol, but one which takes place in an autotelic allegory: here, the animal character refers to an undefined animality, without any attention being paid to the singularity of its own way of being an animal.

In this respect, Lawrence's discourse is to be held responsible for the same sort of idealization that Lou shows when she tells her mother: 'I don't want to be an animal like a horse or a cat or a lioness, though they all fascinate me, the way they get their life *straight*'.<sup>8</sup> We see here that there is no consideration at all for the differences that exist between the life of a horse and the life of a lion, Lou acknowledging only one uniform 'straight' animal life. According to Philip Armstrong, here lies a typical modernist bias which prevents the de-symbolization process to be fully achieved:

Where industrial modernity reduces animals to a collection of raw materials or a sequence of processes, modernist aesthetic sublimates

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6 Ibid., p.132.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., p. 61.

them into essence. [...] Clearly, then, a particular animal can only ever provide a temporary signifier of the redemptive power of vital 'animality'.<sup>9</sup>

This is what I propose to call – by drawing on a note about Ted Hughes' poetics made by Coetzee's fictional character Elizabeth Costello in *The Lives of Animals*<sup>10</sup> – the Platonic bias in the sense that the animal character is left to embody an abstract Platonic Idea of animality. And so does Norris, somehow, when she talks about 'representing the animal *qua* animal', referring to an essentialist idea of what is an animal, despite the now-famous warning by Derrida about using the name 'the animal', in its singular form:

[A] notion as general as 'the Animal', as if all nonhuman living things could be groups without the common sense of this 'commonplace', the Animal, whatever the abyssal differences and structural limits that separate, in the very essence of their being, all 'animals', [is] a name that we would therefore be advised, to begin with, to keep within quotation marks. Confined within this catch-all concept, within this vast encampment of the animal, in this general singular, within the strict enclosure of this definite article [...], are *all the living things* that man does not recognize as his fellow, his neighbors, or his brothers. [...]. There is no animal in the general singular, separated from man by a single indivisible limit. We have to envisage the existence of 'living creatures' whose plurality cannot be assembled within the single feature of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity.<sup>11</sup>

In Derrida's view, the monolithic concept of 'the Animal', or the very Platonic idea of 'animality', eludes the heterogeneity and diversity of animal lives and then reactivates the dualism in which the thesis of human exceptionalism originates. Consequently, it can be said that every mention (or representation) of 'the animal' is loaded with

9 Philip Armstrong, *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity* (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), p.149.

10 Commenting on Hughes' poem 'The jaguar', Costello states that 'despite the vividness and the earthiness of the poetry there remains something Platonic about it' (Coetzee, p. 53). Incidentally, it should be stressed that Costello begins her analysis by putting Hughes 'in a line of poets who celebrate the primitive' (Ibid., p.52) among which she puts Lawrence himself.

11 Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)', trans. by David Willis, *Critical Inquiry*, 28.2 (2002), 369-418 (pp. 402; 415).



anthropocentrism since it acknowledges only the unicity of the human being, whereas *homo sapiens* doesn't have the monopoly of being unique and each and every animal singularity demands recognition.

*Chevillard's Hedgehog: towards Eco-etho Specification*

This is the same path that the French writer Éric Chevillard seems to follow in *Du hérisson*, in which he escapes such a Platonic bias by paying accurate attention to the ecological and ethological specificities of the animal he features.

The first paragraph of the book foreshadows the effort of singularization and witnesses a particularly interesting use of the phrase 'the animal' criticized above.

Cela m'a tout l'air en effet d'un hérisson naïf et globuleux, l'animal, là, sur mon bureau. Je ne crois pas me tromper. J'ignore comment il est arrivé ici, ou qui l'y a mis et pourquoi. Que dois-je en faire ? [...] Je connais mal cet animal, je l'avoue, le hérisson naïf et globuleux / ne m'est pas familier.<sup>12</sup>

The abstract significance of the formula 'l'animal' used in the very first sentence is here annihilated by its use as an apposition to the preceding nominal group 'un hérisson naïf et globuleux', that stipulates which specific kind of animal the narrator is dealing with and undercuts any Platonic bias thanks to the use of the indefinite determiner, further reinforced through the use of the deictic reference 'ici'.<sup>13</sup> Hence at the end of the paragraph, 'l'animal' is replaced with the more specific 'cet animal', thus attesting to the fact that the text evades both abstraction and essentialization. Though the narrator confesses he does not have a clue about hedgehogs in the last sentence, the text is about to show how he overcomes such ignorance and how he tries to gain access to the singular and specific life of this animal being he has just met.

12 Éric Chevillard, *Du hérisson* (Paris : Minuit, 2002), p. 9. 'It does seem to be a naive and fuzzy hedgehog, the animal, here, on my desk. I don't think I'm wrong. I don't know how it got here, nor who brought it nor why. What should I do with it? [...] I don't know this animal very well, I have to confess, the naive and fuzzy hedgehog / is unfamiliar to me.' (All translations are mine).

13 I will comment later on the two adjectives 'naïve and fuzzy' that systematically qualify the noun 'hedgehog' throughout the text.

As announced by the book's title derived from an old-fashioned structure the author borrows from scientific discourse, natural sciences function as a major source for Chevillard's narrative which regularly offers its reader scientific insights about hedgehogs, their way of life, their diet, their natural habitat, and so on. We learn for instance that their average life expectancy is between seven and eight years, that 'la saison reproductive du hérisson naïf et globuleux dure d'avril à août',<sup>14</sup> and that 'il nage, il n'aime pas l'eau mais il nage bien, et vite'.<sup>15</sup> Drawing on specific ethological, ecological and anatomical knowledge, Chevillard's representation of the animal thus avoids the abstract discourse about 'the animal' and subsequently the inherent anthropocentrism it conveys.<sup>16</sup>

However, I will contend that this text, while efficiently opposing the essentialization of the animal, expresses another tropological bias that I would call the Aristotelian one starting from the French philosopher Baptiste Morizot's recent work *Les Diplomates*, where he makes the following statement:

Notre compréhension infrastructurelle de l'animal est restée aristotélicienne. On croit que l'essence (les traits spécifiques) suffit pour étudier le comportement d'un animal: que l'individu n'excède pas les traits spécifiques.<sup>17</sup>

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- 14 Chevillard, p.47. 'the breeding season of the naive and fuzzy hedgehog lasts from April to August'.
- 15 Ibid., p.92 : 'he swims, he doesn't like water but he's a good and fast swimmer'.
- 16 Stating that paying attention to ecological and ethological specificities of an animal is a way to avoid its abstract representation does not presume the necessity of true etho-ecological features. The important point here is to provide the animal character with specific singularities, with no regard for their scientific relevance. In this respect, Jim Crace's representation of *pseudogryllidus pelagicus* in *Being dead* - a fictional species of sea-crickets that is granted in the novel with very specific, if necessarily made-up, ethological and ecological features - can be said to avoid abstraction and idealization as much as Chevillard's conscientiously realistic hedgehog.
- 17 Baptiste Morizot, *Les Diplomates* (Marseille: Wildproject, 2016), p.133. 'Our infrastructural understanding of animals has remained an Aristotelian one. We are still convinced that in order to study the behavior of an animal, there is no need to look any further than its essence (the characteristics of the species): that the individual doesn't exceed its specific features'. My translation.

Chevillard's hedgehog embodies hedgehogness: it is no more than one exemplar of the species it belongs to, expressing only features which are specific to its species, without being singularized as an individual. The text does not grant it any particular or individual (as opposed to specific) characterization, so that it still appears as a genre of synecdoche: this hedgehog stands for all hedgehogs. Even the 'naïve' and 'fuzzy' adjectives used all along the book and likely to individualize the hedgehog are said to be a taxonomic qualifier – the narrator ensuring the reader he is only naming a characteristic of the whole species here: 'Je suppose que le hérisson naïf et globuleux doit ce qualificatif taxinomique de *naïf* à son regard principalement'.<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, Chevillard's hedgehog does not stand as a proper individual, nor as its narrative equivalent, that is, as a proper character. And in such reluctance to grant animals individuality, one can find again an anthropocentric residue that denies the very possibility of a genuine animal subject – subjectivity being considered as another privilege of the one and only human being. Therefore, as stated by Erica Fudge in 'Reading animals', fully eschewing anthropocentrism implies the representation of a truly individualized animal:

[T]he truly meaningful animal is often a very individualized being. That is, whatever the intellectual context of discussion –religious, legal, scientific and so on- it is often the singular animal –*that* sheep, rather than general sheep- that has the greatest power to upset human status.<sup>19</sup>

At this point, it is fundamental to add two different remarks about Chevillard's 'failure' to represent animal individuality and subjectivity in his text. Firstly, even though this may not be a deliberate goal of the author, one can notice that the hedgehog, (prevented from acquiring a genuine subjectivity by the narrator's limited literary representation) precisely turns out to prevent the human narrator and protagonist of the tale from writing his autobiography, that is from building his own representation as an individual subject by the means of a writing performance. In *Du hérisson*, the animal figure as well as the human narrator fail to achieve subjectivity through narration, as if the animal, thwarting the human writer's commitment to give a particularized

18 Chevillard, p.19. 'I assume the naïve and fuzzy hedgehog essentially owes the taxonomic qualifier naïve to its gaze'.

19 Erica Fudge, 'Reading Animals', *Worldviews*, 4 (2000), 101-13 (p.110).

and singular representation of himself, was paying him back for the a-biographical nature of human discourses about animals.

Secondly, such state of things is all the more ironic considering that, whereas Chevillard has chosen to draw on the genre of scientific treatises as the main intertext for his tale thus subsequently depriving himself of the particularizing virtues of the literary narrative form throughout the making of characters, contemporary ethological sciences are now promoting literary narrative forms as a highly relevant hermeneutic pattern. As stated by the French philosopher Dominique Lestel:

Une des grandes découvertes de l'éthologie de ces trente dernières années est d'avoir démontré qu'il est difficile de décrire et comprendre certains animaux sans faire l'hypothèse qu'ils sont des individus, c'est-à-dire que rendre compte de ce qu'ils sont passe par une biographie qui excède largement la description comportementale. [...] Ces animaux ont une *histoire*.<sup>20</sup>

The American bio-ecologist Marc Bekoff and the bioethicist Jessica Pierce called for a 'narrative ethology' in their book entitled *Wild justice: the Moral Lives of Animals*, by praising stories as a means to 'stimulate thought, activate the imagination of scientists, lead to new questions, represent anomalies, and challenge conventions of thought';<sup>21</sup> whereas the French philosopher and wolf behavior's expert Baptiste Morizot also demands a new narrative epistemology likely to oppose the old-fashioned Aristotelian one that, he states, "[s'est] trop longtemps concentré[e] sur ce qu'il y a de *commun* à toute une espèce [...] supposant trop peu de variabilité des animaux".<sup>22</sup> By contrast, he argues that it is necessary to pay attention to the importance of storytelling in the production of individual difference: 'Il faut ici narrer le processus

20 Dominique Lestel, *L'Animal singulier* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), p. 36-37. 'One of the most important discovery made in ethology for the last thirty years was the demonstration that we can't describe and understand some animals without assuming that they are individuals. In other words, to give a full account of what they are implies a biography that goes far beyond the mere behavioral description. [...] These animals have a *story*.' My translation.

21 Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce, *Wild justice: the Moral Lives of animals* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 37.

22 Morizot, p. 133. 'ethology has focused on what is *common* to a whole species for too long, [...] assuming too little variability among animal individuals'.

des événements, l'histoire des variations sur ce qu'on croyait être la norme'.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, narration, being the place where variations and singularities can be told, forces animal individuality into our speeches – something which Chevillard's old-fashioned ethological model (with Buffon being his primary source) could not achieve. The strength and potential of the literary narrative form – when it comes to unsettle the anthropocentric bias it contributed to champion for such a long time – are ultimately brought out into open. But then an old question rises again: to what extent can the individualization of the animal figure in the form of a literary character eschew the anthropomorphization typical of centuries of Western literature's representation? And can anthropomorphism *per se* not be the real issue?

*Boyle's Lassie: the Issues of Anthropomorphization and Autonomy in the Representation of Animal Subjectivity*

The case of Lassie, the famous fictional Collie character firstly imagined by the British writer Eric Knight who then became a Hollywood star through the eponymous American TV show, is emblematic of the endeavor consisting in providing an animal figure with genuine individuality and subjectivity. Throughout its adventures, the dog grew as a highly individual character, granted with a peculiar psychological profile and an exceptional intelligence going far beyond the features usually attached to its breed. According to psychology professor Stanley Coren in his best-selling and awards-winning *The Intelligence of Dogs: A Guide to the Thoughts, Emotions, and Inner Lives of Our Canine Companions*, Lassie's impact on the way we might refer to non-human animals was great:

We believed that this dog (thus, by extrapolation, all dogs) could think, plan, sympathize, feel pain, have emotions of sorrow and joy, remember complex facts, and even plan acts of retribution. Hadn't we actually seen Lassie do it?<sup>24</sup>

23 Ibid., p. 149. 'One needs to tell the stories of dynamic events, of the variations departing from what we once thought was the norm'.

24 Stanley Coren, *The Intelligence of Dogs: A Guide to the Thoughts, Emotions, and Inner Lives of Our Canine Companions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), p. 10.

Yet T.C. Boyle's rewriting of the story in 'Heart of a Champion' shows how such an individualization through narration and the construction of the character led to both anthropomorphization and anthropocentrism again, since all too human features, and more importantly all-too-human desires were projected onto the dog character.



Lassie meets with sponsor - 1954.



Lassie and Tommy - circa 1955.

Boyle's short story moves along a series of scenes described as if they were looked at by an external viewer putting both narrator and reader together through the use of the pronoun 'we'. Such configuration makes it clear that his text was not designed as a rewriting of Knight's novel, but as a remake of Robert Maxwell's TV show, whose excessive anthropomorphism is targeted. Indeed, as the Collie starts accomplishing its usual tricks and feats, preventing young Timmy boy to get smashed by a falling trunk as early as the second paragraph, Boyle soon gives the dog character an overly human behavior, to the extent that Lassie's skills as 'Man's best friend' just appear farfetched and ludicrous. For instance, not only is Lassie able to rescue its master from the roaring waters he has fallen into, but it also gives him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation: 'The collie sniffs at Timmy's inert little form, nudges his side until she manages to roll him over. Then clears his tongue and begins mouth-to-mouth'.<sup>25</sup> Later on, when Timmy has been knocked unconscious by another falling trunk, the reader witnesses Lassie rushing home, where interspecies communication appears not to raise any difficulty at all:

25 T.C. Boyle, *Descent of Man* (Boston & Toronto: Atlantic Monthly Press Book, 1974), p. 39.



‘What is it girl? What’s the matter? Where’s Timmy?’  
 ‘Yarf! Yarfata-yarf-yarf!’  
 ‘Oh my! [...] Timmy’s trapped under a pine tree out by the old Indian  
 burial ground –’  
 ‘Arpit-arp.’  
 ‘– a mile and a half past the north pasture.’<sup>26</sup>

Here, Boyle’s irony towards the televisual representation of the dog character slammed for its unrealistic anthropomorphism is obvious. However, I shall argue that Boyle’s short story displays a more complex way to set up such an issue – and makes a subtler statement about it.

Because of its similarities with *The Call of the Wild*, it might be argued that ‘Heart of a Champion’ is a rewriting not only of Robert Maxwell’s show but also of Jack London’s story. That Boyle was a keen reader of London, whose name frequently pops up in his works and interviews, is an established fact. Surely, one can assert that Lassie going through the same pattern as Buck – from domestication to responding to the ‘call of wild’ here embodied by a coyote instead of a wolf – is no coincidence. Yet *The Call of the Wild*, published in 1903, was one of the targeted books during what is known as ‘the Nature Fakers controversy’, inaugurated by the naturalist and writer John Burroughs who rebuked the early-century American writers’ tendency to picture the animals in a sentimental, unscientific and anthropomorphized way in their novels. In 1908, London puts an end to his previous silence and writes a harsh response to both Burroughs and President Roosevelt who had joined the debate in the meanwhile. Referring to both *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, the novelist defends his representation of dogs’ reasoning and feeling as typical of dogs’ nature, and as confirmed by the Darwinian evolutionist theory.<sup>27</sup> He then dismisses the very accusation of anthropomorphism as a ‘homocentric’ one, which denies any ‘kinship with the other animals’ by holding even simple reasoning and feelings as exclusively human features.<sup>28</sup>

26 Boyle, p. 43.

27 Darwin’s notebook M contains many observations on dogs, granted with feelings such as shame, pride and, to some extent, free-will by the British naturalist.

28 Jack London, ‘The other animals’, *Revolution and other Essays* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910) p. 259. As judiciously noticed by Hub Zwart (*Understanding Nature. Case Studies in Comparative Epistemology*, p.122) London ‘elaborates a line of argument here that will be taken up later

Such a background invites to look back suspiciously at 'Heart of a Champion': is really T.C. Boyle, an admirer of London and a fervent supporter of Darwinian Theory, taking on himself to duplicate the old guard's argument about animal stories? It is unlikely. Actually, Lassie is granted with inner thoughts till the end of the text in Boyle's story, that is, even when it is not Maxwell's character anymore, but rightfully Boyle's. Moreover, Boyle's own additions to the archetypal Lassie scenarios do not shy away from anthropomorphism, as displayed in the seduction game between the Collie and the coyote that echoes *Romeo and Juliet's* balcony scene:

[S]he rises and slips to the window, silent as a shadow. And looks down the long elegant snout to the barnyard below where the coyote slinks from shade to shade [...]. [The coyote] leers up at the window and begin a soft, crooning, sad-faced song.<sup>29</sup>

Consequently, it appears that if Boyle's short story does sneer at excessive anthropomorphism, his main target is not the picturing of an animal as a conscious and sensitive subject – which was Burrough's accusation – as much as shaping a complacent, obedient, and ultimately heteronomous animal subjectivity.

Indeed, dog-star Lassie's subjectivity is marked by heteronomy on at least three different levels. Firstly because the dog character, called a 'sentimental icon'<sup>30</sup> by Henry Jenkins, has been granted with a personality that would fit the values American society was seeking to celebrate during the fifties and sixties, that is, obedience and heroism. As stated by Kelly Wolf, Lassie's adventures featured 'a nostalgic longing for the traditional values of loyalty and working-class pride lost on the onset of modernity and industrialization'; the dog protagonist figuration being 'instrumental in constructing appropriate standards of obedient behavior and American heroism'.<sup>31</sup> As a cultural icon, Lassie's character is shaped according to the needs and desires of the American

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by Freud himself in his famous essay 'Eine Schwierigkeit der Psychoanalyse' (1917). Scientific breakthroughs such as the theory of evolution contain a 'narcissistic offense'.

29 Boyle, p.40.

30 Henry Jenkins, *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), p. 222.

31 Kelly Wolf, 'Promoting Lassie. The animal star and constructions of 'ideal' American heroism', *Cinematic canines: Dogs and their work in the Fiction*



society of its time. Secondly, the very values it is meant to exemplify make it a complacent animal, whose every action and thought are directed towards its human companions. Boyle's story makes this two-fold human alienation very clear in his text, displaying how the representation of nature in the show ought to gratify both human spectators and characters. Here is how the first paragraph of the novella reads:

We scan the cornfields and the wheat fields winking gold and goldbrown and yellowbrown in the midday sun [...]. There'd have to be a breeze – and we're not disappointed [...]. The boy stops there to gaze out over the nodding wheat [...]. Then he brings three fingers to his lips in a neat triangle and whistles long and low [...]. And then we see it – way out there at the far corner of the field – the ripple, the dashing furrow, the blur of the streaking dog.<sup>32</sup>

The representation of nature is as complacent to the human viewer (giving them the breeze they expect) as Lassie is obedient to Timmy (answering his whistle). Even the wheat is 'nodding' here, since Boyle's problem is not the anthropomorphic gesture *per se* but rather the obedience model from which it does not depart. Lastly, as a TV character, Lassie was played by a real dog – Pal – who was performing under Maxwell's staff, that is, acting just what it was asked to act and whose image was strictly controlled. Lassie, Boyle notices in his story, has 'her lashes mascaraed and curled'.<sup>33</sup>

On the three levels, the representation of Lassie's subjectivity is thus shaped by human others (American society, Timmy and his family, Pal's trainers and marketing team) following human desires and rules. By contrast, Boyle's concern is precisely to emancipate his character and to grant it with an *autonomous*, not humanly-carved, subjectivity.

Therefore, his dog character progressively becomes less and less compliant with the young Timmy, to the extent that Lassie leaves its young master die and flees with its new coyote friend which turns out to be instrumental in Lassie's metamorphosis. Concomitantly, the text displays a more and more untamed and uncensored poetics, indifferent to the viewer's sensibility. For instance, when Lassie meets with the coyote

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*film*, ed. by Adrienne L. McLean (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), p.106.

32 Boyle, pp. 37-38.

33 Ibid., p. 39.

in the woods, it chooses not to fight it – so that Timmy and his family's poultry are safe – but rather engages in sexual intercourse with it:

[S]he licks at his whiskers, noses at his rear, the bald black scrotum. Timmy is horror-struck. Then, the music sweeping off in birdtrills of flute and harpstring, the coyote slips round behind, throat thrown back, black lips tight with anticipation.<sup>34</sup>

Not only does the scene allow the animal figure to escape the cheap sentimentalism of the TV show, but it also displays the dog's achievement of its own pleasure, so that its actions as a character are not bound to human beings anymore, but are now self-directed. Lassie ceases to be an instrumental subject, while its inner life breaks the hold of human beings. At some point, the text says, '[w]e watch the collie's expression alters in midbound – the look of offended AKC morality giving away, dissolving'.<sup>35</sup> The change of gaze expresses the conversion of the dog's subjectivity. Boyle's story thus frees Lassie not only from its domestic way of life but also from the status of sentimental anthropocentric icon that Hollywood assigned to her.<sup>36</sup> Providing the animal with inner-life and the capacity to think and feel is not enough to make it a genuine subject; indeed, it needs also to be an independent 'I' able to build its own identity against heteronomous human discourses.

The ultimate irony, however, is that the full completion of such representation of the animal as an autonomous subject demands its disappearance, so that it will escape even the (human) narrator's and the reader's gaze. Therefore, at the end of the story, Lassie leaves Timmy behind in the valley where he is about to drown:

The two animals start at that terrible rumbling, and still working their gummy jaws, the dash up the far side of the hill. We watch the white-tipped tail retreating side by side with the hacked and tick-blistered grey one – wagging like ragged banners as they disappear into the trees at the top of the rise.<sup>37</sup>

34 Ibid., p. 41.

35 Ibid., p. 44. The American Kennel Club (AKC) is a registry of purebred dog pedigrees in the United States.

36 In 1960, the character of Lassie received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and in 2005, the show business journal *Variety* named Lassie one of the '100 Icons of the Century'.

37 Ibid., p. 45.

Lassie is not a 'good girl' anymore, but an animal among other animals, beyond the reach of all-too-human discourses.

### *Conclusion*

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Western fictional narratives have endeavored to cleanse the literary representation of the animal from its symbolical, metaphorical and, broadly speaking, anthropocentric *habitus*, and have moved towards picturing it as an animal *per se*, freed from the instrumentalization it has been subjected to for such a long time. Nonetheless, this paper has tried to disclose three biases causing the subsistence of both a tropological use of the animal and anthropocentrism, including in our own critical and theoretical discourses.

Firstly, the *Platonic* bias, which consists in representing the animal so that it merely embodies an abstract, ideal, and homogenous idea of animality, which thus becomes a symbol within an autotelic allegory, as illustrated by Lawrence's novella. Secondly, the *Aristotelian* bias, when attention is paid to ecological and ethological characteristics of the animal without recognising any kind of individuality beyond the features of its own kind, so that one given animal appears to stand for the whole species it belongs to, a tendency exemplified by Chevillard's book. Finally, the *Pygmalion* bias, which consists in not being able to picture animal subjectivity in and for itself, but only patterned after an all-too-human perspective, that is shaped by human desires, will, rules, and standards so that the animal character is granted with a deficient iconic subjectivity that acknowledges its individuality, but not its autonomy, an issue addressed in Boyle's short story.

All three biases in a certain way, and to some extent, duplicate rather than defeat the anthropocentrism they challenged in the first place. Therefore, one may legitimately ask whether the issue of the representation of the animal '*qua* animal' is not ultimately an aporetic one.

In this respect, it is worth noticing that in the three texts examined, the animal emerges as a resistant figure defying even its own literary representation. St Mawr remains ontologically alien by escaping Lou's understanding, resisting attempts to be trained, and finally disappearing from the text long before the story ends. So does Lassie by leaving the scene with its coyote mate and giving up on its human masters; whereas Chevillard's hedgehog remains an obscure character, mostly

an obstacle that prevents the narrator from writing, eats his papers, and in a word, is an embarrassment: 'Que dois-je en faire?'<sup>38</sup> the narrator asks repeatedly in the opening lines of the book. Each time, a certain kind of adversity characterizes the relationship between the animal and the human being who is trying to figure out how to proceed with it. And each time, it seems that the genuinely successful way out of anthropocentrism ultimately consists in the detachment and remoteness of the animal figure, finally eluding the very possibility of human speech and representation.

Following Donna Haraway's analysis of photographic safaris as a continuation of the hunter's violence in which the camera replaces the gun and forces the animal to 'hold forever the gaze of the meeting',<sup>39</sup> or even Steve Connor's extension of the same theme to arts – when he argues that every representation that aims at making animals conspicuous is a violation since 'most natural creatures exist in a kind of discretion, semi-concealment'<sup>40</sup> –, one might argue that allowing the animal to hide within the literary text and to escape our gaze as readers is finally the ultimate and paradoxical liberation the author can provide. This perhaps explains the recurrence, noticed by the French literary scholar Anne Simon, of the representation of the animal as a hiding character, 'un être de fuite' whose main phenomenological manifestation within twentieth and twenty-first century literature proves to be elusiveness. Yet the fact remains, as she puts it, that 'plus l'animal fuit, plus l'écrivain le cherche'.<sup>41</sup>

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38 Chevillard, p. 9. 'What should I do with it?'

39 Donna Haraway, 'Teddy bear patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden. New York City, 1908-1936', *Social Text*, 11 (1984-5), 20-64, (p.25).

40 Steve Connor, 'Such Stuff As Dreams Are Made On', expanded version of an essay published as 'The Right Stuff', *Modern Painters*, 2009, 58-63 (online, np).

41 Anne Simon, 'Chercher l'indice, écrire l'esquive: l'animal comme être de fuite, de Maurice Genevoix à Jean Rolin', *La question animale*, ed. by Jean-Paul Engélibert et al. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011), p.170. 'The more the animal flees from him, the more the writer tries to track it down'. My translation.

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