# Strong Bonds:
# Child-animal Relationships in Comics

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Couverture : *Jinchalo* ©Matthew Forsythe. Used by permission. Image courtesy Drawn & Quarterly. The editor and the publisher would like to thank Matthew Forsythe for allowing them to use an image from his graphic novel *Jinchalo* for the cover. Discussed in detail in Laura Pearson's chapter in this volume, the image shows the child protagonist, Voguchi, fascinated by and merging with the plant and animal life around her. The image poetically captures this volume's concerns with disentangling—and re-entangling—the connections between children and animals in comics.

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# Strong Bonds:

## Child-animal Relationships in Comics

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# Introduction

# Child-animal Relationships in Comics:
## A First Mapping

Maaheen Ahmed

Children and animals are recurrent, favorite characters in comic strips. Many of the most well-known young comics protagonists have pets or animal friends partaking in their daily lives and adventures: Charlie Brown has Snoopy, his independent, precocious dog, Calvin has Hobbes, a stuffed tiger animated by the boy's imagination, *The Beano*'s Dennis the Menace eventually acquired an equally destructive canine companion called Gnasher, Tintin (successfully eluding the adult-child distinction, but remaining in many ways a child with a degree of agency accorded only to adults) has Snowy. Already the Yellow Kid was accompanied by several stray dogs, cats and other animals that accentuated the action and the humor. Decades later, the importance of animal sidekicks persists, as exemplified by the series devoted to Spirou's fantastic Marsupilami. These children and their animal friends combine characteristics of both adults and children, which ensures their appeal to a broad audience and offers clues to the complexity underlying these characters, contradicting their flattened appearance and frivolous acts. Thus, for Umberto Eco, "Schulz's children create a little universe in which our tragedy and our comedy are performed" and "Snoopy carries to the last metaphysical frontier the neurotic failure to adjust".

Even though child-animal relationships have been a staple of comics production, they remain overlooked by comics scholarship, which is only tentatively broaching the study of children and comics, as exemplified by recent publications (Abate and Sanders; Abate and Tarbox; Gordon; Hatfield; Heimermann and Tullis). In expanding on existing scholarship and combining it with studies of animals in comics (Groensteen; Herman; Yezbick), this anthology seeks to build stronger bridges between the fields of comics studies, childhood studies and animal studies

and takes a first step towards a more profound and holistic understanding of animals and children in comics. Covering a historically and culturally diverse corpus, each chapter in this book elaborates on an original aspect of the bonds between children and animals that are presented or, less frequently, ruptured.

If animals are tropic, in the sense of embodying a central structural element of a story or a medium (cf. Ortiz-Robles), we might need an entirely new bestiary for comics that captures the transformation the animal undergoes in comics. The most dominant animal in this bestiary would be the funny animal. Only associated with children since the 1930s, these funny animals, playing on their apparent innocence and childishness also voiced critique and satire (cf. Groensteen; Gardner). Embodying the childish characteristics frequently associated with comics, the funny animal also highlights the ambiguity of those associations. This is already discernible in characters such as Mickey Mouse, who are now assimilated as innocent, harmless components of children's culture, but who started out with more adult, anarchic inclinations. The funny animal embodies crucial, often overlooked elements of comics history including the drive to animate and with it to anthropomorphize, as suggested by Thierry Groensteen in *Animaux en cases* (which can be translated as animals in panels, boxes or cages). This drive coexists with the impulse to entertain, usually through provoking laughter.

Narratologist David Herman, in many ways like Ortiz-Robles, suggests that comics with animals entail a rethinking of narrative structure. Animal studies scholar Glenn Willmott explains this complexity through the example of (the animated) Donald Duck:

> Disney's Donald Duck is neither a bird that talks, nor a human who quacks, but a unified organic figure with traces of duck and human drawn into each vocal syllable and graphic line, a figure whose identity and coherence is sustained not by the recognition of individual parts but by the dynamic and functional orchestra of parts in motion, organizing its own space and time (840).

Both comics children (cf. Chaney, *Reading Lessons*) and comics animals are an integral part of comics vocabulary. A key starting point for exploring child-animal relationships is animation and its corollary, anthropomorphization. In placing animals and humans on comparable planes, anthropomorphization relies on a problematic illusion of comparability: is it a moment of restrained animal empowerment? Or is it inevitably shackled in an anthropocentric hierarchy? Scholars approaching animal studies from diverse angles such as Steve Baker, Éric Baratay and David Herman suggest that there is no categorical answer. Focusing on language, Mel Chen has admirably shown how animacy can confer agency and power. In reactivating the linguistic concept of animacy, which confers degrees of "liveness" to nouns and situates them in "an animate hierarchy" (3), Chen encourages indulging in the thought experiment of restructuring such hierarchies to understand the extent to which animation also implies power and agency and how it is embedded in broader structures of control and even persecution.

Hence, the animal's perspective (while remaining aware of the role played by human interpretation in conveying such a perspective) is a productive means of interrogating anthropocentric structures and presumptions. This book builds on these concerns by adding the figure of the child to the equation: what happens to the (anthropomorphic) animal when juxtaposed to the child? What are the power dynamics at play? What are the varieties and possible significations of the different kinds of child-animal relationships in comics, which range from the most recurrent relationship of unconditional friendship to disturbing and exploitative relationships?

The current increase in pets per household and the likening of pets to children in social discourse is mirrored by the tendency to blur boundaries between the child, the childish, the animal and the feral in comics and children's culture (Feuerstein and Nolte-Odhiambo 2). For Anna Feuerstein and Carmen Nolte-Odhiambo such parallels imply that constructions of children and childhood as well as pet and pethood are mutually dependent and reveal child-adult and animal-human hierarchies (3). These issues persist in comics. More specifically, child-animal relationships in comics, and beyond, are hinged on two vectors: affect and power. This is already reflected in this book's sections: starting with the family, the sections cover queered relationships, traumatic contexts, politicization and politicized readings of child-animal relationships before ending with the poetics, or reflections on the functioning of child-animal relationships, through the lens of anti-authorianism, zoopoetics and multispecies thinking.

The contributions in this book seek to account for and contextualize the heavily policed states of childhood and animalhood. The perspective is double-edged: the chapters closely read the kinds of relationships established between children and animals while drawing connections with comics history. The different kinds of functions fulfilled by the relationships include friendship, mimicry of parental bonds and queered connections that complicate the notion of heterosexual engagement. These relationships are often encapsulated in different kinds of ideologies, be it propaganda in *Corriere dei Piccoli* (Loparco) or an endearing anti-authorianism in *Calvin & Hobbes* (Rougé).

However, as an early paean to Buster Brown's dog Tige suggests, comics animals are not easy to pin down: they are neither fully domesticated, nor fully savage (Hervieu). In an article entirely devoted to Tige in the Parisian edition of *The New York Herald* in 1906, Paul Hervieu suggests that Tige is a somewhat unorthodox kind of dog that provides companionship to Buster Brown but also contributes towards his education. This is complemented by the anthropomorphic nuance in Tige that fascinates Hervieu: not only does Tige sometimes talk but his forelegs often resemble human arms, bestowing the dog with further agency and importance. These anthropomorphic nuances are a recurrent tension in comics and children's literature and call for further unpacking. Such unorthodox behavior is now an established trope: the comics child's animal friend is a source of amusement and

a companion but sometimes also a means of channeling society's expectations and preferences for the child character (and the reader). These tendencies are best understood as recurrent but fluctuating, adjusting to each new story.

The trajectories of affect and power struggles that underly these relationships inform each of the five sections in this anthology, which elaborate on different kinds of orthodox and unorthodox relationships, their ideological underpinnings and structural functioning. Before introducing the chapters, however, I would like to unpack the issues of affect and powerlessness through focusing on the figure of the bear in children's literature and comics.

## Reconsidering comics animals through bears: trajectories of affect and power(lessness)

In *Literature and Animal Studies*, Mario Ortiz-Robles examines the tropic functioning of animals across literature. We encounter literary cats and dogs of course, and songbirds and vermin but only briefly the bear (during the discussion of the animal collective which also includes Baloo, the Teacher of the Law from *The Jungle Book*). Although the bear is not particularly prominent in literature, comics profess a strong attachment to bear characters. After underscoring the caged aspect of comics animals in his introduction (13), Thierry Groensteen provides an impressive, non-exhaustive list of animals in comics. This list starts with James Swinnerton's *Little Bears and Tykes* (1895) and ends with the *Critters* (1985) comics, which collected stories with funny animals involved in adult humor. Laura Pearson reads such animals as reflecting "the imbrication of speciesism with sexism as well as the tension between the juvenile/adult divide". The bear, in pagan Europe as animal historian Michel Pastoureau has shown, was considered king of beasts for centuries before being replaced, in the wake of Christianization, by the lion. Since the late nineteenth century, the bear continues to live, in a friendlier, domesticated form, in circuses and in children's culture where the teddy bear has been ruling over every child's world since the beginning of the twentieth century. Pastoureau calls this the revenge of the bear (325-332). This brief overview points towards two dynamics that are, in many ways, best embodied by the bear: affect (tied to care and protection) and power. Both are cemented by the appropriation of the bear by the burgeoning children's culture of the early twentieth century.

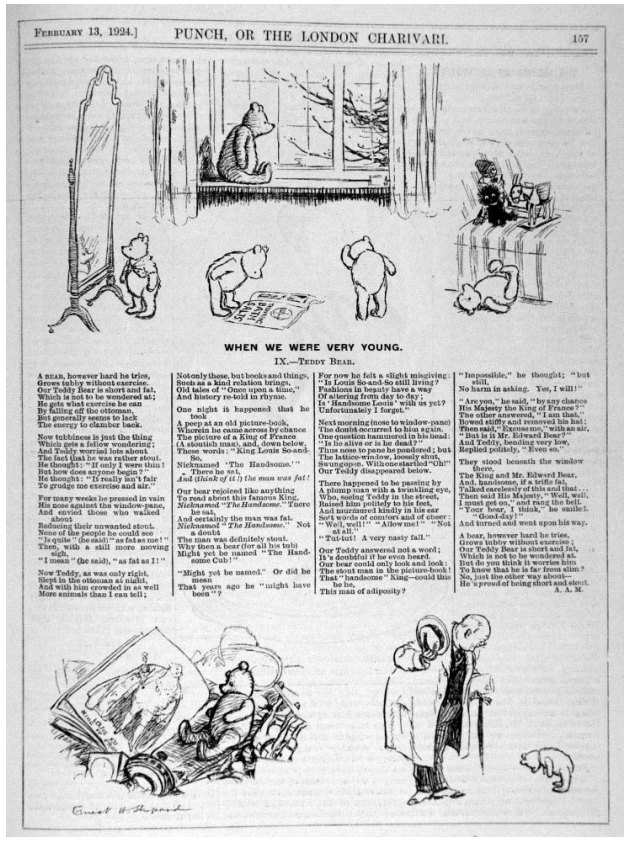
Even before the teddy bear got his name from Theodore Roosevelt's famous hunting expedition (cf. Abate), the bear was a recurrent protagonist in comic strips such as, in the U.S., Swinnerton's *Three Little Bears* and Gene Carr's *Bearville*. In the U.K., two other bears have acquired timeless relevance, A.A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh and Rupert Bear, first drawn by Mary Tourtel and later by Alfred Bestall for *The Daily Express*. Winnie is a toy animal, childlike while maintaining the animal-human distinction. Rupert has certain uncanny elements, such as his human hands, which are already present in the Tourtel version but are even more prominent in

Alfred Bestall's *Rupert Bear Annual* covers. Having real hands instead of paws, and immaculately dressed, like any ideal middle-class child, Rupert is more of a child with a bear's head than an anthropomorphized bear. Baker points out that while early drawings by Tourtel suggested that Rupert was a teddy bear, the character has been increasingly humanized with the years (129). Further, Rupert Bear's "identity is inextricably bound up with his whiteness" (Baker 133), which extends to his animal friends.

While Rupert is arguably only a short step away from the child-animal hybrids in Jeff Lemire's *Sweet Tooth*, Winnie remains a teddy bear and companion to Christopher Robin and his other toys. Both Rupert and Winnie belong to the realm of children's culture. This does not mean that they cater exclusively to a young audience but they exist in a specific context of creation and reception that is different from the context of comics, even those with children and animals that are read mostly by children: while children's literature often marries entertaining and pedagogical elements, comics are rarely obliged to do so. Comics core business is to entertain (Bukatman).

Shunning word balloons, Winnie's and Rupert's stories unfold across illustrations (paneled illustrations in the case of Rupert), prose and poetry. That said, the medium in which Rupert's adventures unfold, even though it shuns word balloons, is closer to comics than the illustrated book. Rupert made his first appearance in the winter of 1920, in the heyday of bears in cartoons and material culture. Mary Tourtel, wife of *Daily Express* sub-editor Herbert Tourtel, created Rupert as the "Little Lost Bear" to rival the *Daily Mail's Teddy Tail* and the *Daily Mirror's Pip and Squeal* (Perry 9). Hence, Rupert appears at a point where children had been recognized as not only non-adults with very specific needs but also consumers.

Winnie the Pooh appeared only four years after Rupert in a poem published by A.A. Milne in *Punch* about a bear who grows "tubby without exercise" as bears are wont to do and who ends up travelling through a picture book to meet the King of France (Fig. 1). Lots is happening in this poem for children but essential for our discussion is the poem's nursery rhyme like quality based on repetition and simple rhymes. It also relies heavily on the world of imagination. The bear is placed in a world that is closer to the reader's reality than Rupert's because only the toys are animated and anthropomorphized and these toys never forget their status as toy representations of domestic and wild animals. In contrast, Rupert's world is heavily anthropomorphized, so much so that animal-human hybrids largely outnumber regular humans, even children. As Steve Baker points out, Rupert absolutely refuses being treated like an animal when he finds himself in, for the *Rupert* stories, exotic setting of Noah's ark (130). Since the few children in the *Rupert* stories—Tiger Lily and the Gypsy Boy—often belong to marginalized communities, they accentuate the normalized (white, human) status of Rupert.



FEBRUARY 13, 1924.] PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI. 157

WHEN WE WERE VERY YOUNG.

IX.—TEDDY BEAR.

A BEAR, however hard he tries,
Grows tubby without exercise.
Our Teddy Bear is short and fat.
Which is not to be wondered at;
He gets what exercise he can
By falling off the ottoman,
But generally seems to lack
The energy to clamber back.

Now tubbiness is just the thing
Which gets a fellow wondering;
And Teddy worried lots about
The fact that he was rather stout.
He thought: "If only I were thin!
But how does anyone begin?"
He thought: "It really isn't fair
To grudge me exercise and air."

For many weeks he pressed in vain
His nose against the window-pane,
And envied those who walked about
Reducing their unwanted stout.
None of the people he could see
"Is quite" (he said) "as fat as me!"
Then, with a still more moving sigh,
"I mean" (he said), "as fat as I!"

Now Teddy, as was only right,
Slept in the ottoman at night,
And with him crowded in as well
More animals than I can tell;

Not only these, but books and things,
Such as a kind relation brings,
Old tales of "Once upon a time,"
And history re-told in rhyme.

One night it happened that he took
A peep at an old picture-book,
Wherein he came across by chance
The picture of a King of France
(A stoutish man), and, down below,
These words: "King Louis So-and-So,
Nicknamed 'The Handsome.'"
There he sat,
*And (think of it!) the man was fat!*

Our bear rejoiced like anything
To read about this famous King,
*Nicknamed "The Handsome."* There
he sat,
And certainly the man was fat.
*Nicknamed "The Handsome."* Not
a doubt
The man was definitely stout.
Why then a bear (for all his tub)
Might yet be named "The Handsome Cub!"

"Might yet be named." Or did he
mean
That years ago he "might have
been"?

For now he felt a slight misgiving:
"Is Louis So-and-So still living?
Fashions in beauty have a way
Of altering from day to day;
Is 'Handsome Louis' with us yet?
Unfortunately I forget."

Next morning (nose to window-pane)
The doubt occurred to him again.
One question hammered in his head:
"Is he alive or is he dead?"
Thus nose to pane he pondered; but
The lattice-window, loosely shut,
Swung open. With one startled "Oh!"
Our Teddy disappeared below.

There happened to be passing by
A plump roan with a twinkling eye,
Who, seeing Teddy in the street,
Raised him politely to his feet,
And murmured kindly in his ear
Sort words of comfort and of cheer:
"Well, well!" "Allow me!" "Not
at all."
"Tut-tut! A very nasty fall."

Our Teddy answered not a word;
It's doubtful if he even heard.
Our bear could only look and look:
The stout man in the picture-book!
That "handsome" King—could this
be he,
This man of adiposity?

"Impossible," he thought; "but
still,
No harm in asking. Yes, I will!"

"Are you," he said, "by any chance
His Majesty the King of France?"
The other answered, "I am that."
Bowed stiffly and removed his hat;
Then said, "Excuse me," with an air,
"But is it Mr. Edward Bear?"
And Teddy, bending very low,
Replied politely, "Even so."

They stood beneath the window
there,
The King and Mr. Edward Bear,
And, handsome, if a trifle fat,
Talked carelessly of this and that.
Then said His Majesty, "Well, well,
I must get on," and rang the bell.
"Your bear, I think," he smiled.
"Good-day!"
And turned and went upon his way.

A bear, however hard he tries,
Grows tubby without exercise;
Our Teddy Bear is short and fat,
Which is not to be wondered at.
But do you think it worries him
To know that he is far from slim?
No, just the other way about—
He's proud of being short and stout.

A. A. M.

Fig. 1. "Teddy Bear", from A.A. Milne's poetry book, *When We Were Very Young*, first published in *Punch*, February 13, 1924.

Writing about nineteenth century British fiction, Tess Cosslett points out that stories by Beatrix Potter or Anna Sewell do not attempt to account for the animality of their characters. Their animal characters work instead as "metaphors for slaves, women or children" and, eventually, animals themselves (Cosslett 182). This is similar to Baker's notion of the "denial of the animal" through which "the animal might become a spanner in the workings and self-identifications of the dominant culture" and its animalhood is ignored (125). Nevertheless, for Baker the talking animal story, by giving the animal a voice can offer a space (however limited) to the animal. Groensteen's observation that comics imbue their characters with dignity in bringing them to life through animation and Chen's discussion of empowerment through animacy also emphasize the possibilities of giving a voice to the animal. Language remains one of the most blatant barriers that separate humans from animals (Derrida). It also remains one of the tools of human power, as Derrida points out in deconstructing the word *animal,* that reduces the diversity of animal species into one kind. Animating the animal always comes with a price.

Like most works for children, the Rupert and Winnie stories are read by both children and adults. Adults often read together with the child and hence "chaperon" readings (Sanders). This is also why successful children's literature often combines the opposing perspectives of child and adult. This holds for Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books (Beer 78) but also, in a different way, for graphic novels recounting childhood experiences, where the child's (remembered) perspective is filtered through that of the (remembering) adult (Chaney, *Reading Lessons,* 57).

Groensteen discerns two traditions of storytelling at work in animal comics: children's literature on one side and satire and fables on the other (10). He suggests a material, medium-specific element: the constant repetition and potential changes offered by comics confers on funny animals the same kind of dignity offered to other human characters. Since the key distinction in the comic is between the animate and the inanimate rather than the animal and the human (11), comics allow for human-animal interaction on a more level playing field than most animation films (Wells 121). Wells show how animals in animation can never completely acquire the same status as humans and vice versa (51). He is also careful to emphasize that the status of both animals and humans is in constant oscillation and never fixed. Pointing out that "animation" is not far from "animalization", Groensteen suggests that animals and humans in comics (which are also animated since the sequentiality of the medium entails metamorphoses) have more similarities than differences.

Wells explains his concept of bestial ambivalence through *The Bear That Wasn't,* a children's book by animator Frank Tashlin from 1946 about a bear who wakes up surrounded by humans and is unable to convince anyone that he is a bear and not "a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat". Soon the bear is confused about whether he is really a bear. While the bear eventually assumes his bearishness, he captures the uncomfortable rift between the reality of animalhood and its (anthropomorphized) representation in animation. The same rift between animal reality and representation is also palpable in literature. As suggested by Groensteen, in comics this rift complexified by the tendencies towards animation and anthropomorphization that seem to be heavily ingrained in comics practices. The applicability of Wells' notion of bestial ambivalence to comics is taken up on several instances in this book: it is nuanced by Benoît Glaude in his zoonarratological reading of the *Yakari* series as well as José Alaniz's discussion of loss and mourning in Jack Kirby's *Kamandi* comics. Both suggest that such ambivalence in comics is complexified because of the frequent hybridization of animal and child characters. Children and animals in comics, irrespective of their degree of hybridity or reality, automatically activate and rely on different kinds of associations (or even memories) with other forms, genres and media, especially the worlds opened up by children's literature and culture. They are layered with emotion and affect.

The affect that both the child-like anthropomorphic animal and the animal-like child generates is often empathy, defined by Susan Keen as "a vicarious,

spontaneous sharing of affect" (cited in Cardoso). This empathic encounter opens the door to other kinds of affects such as surprise, joy and attachment. As Michael and Sara Chaney discuss in their chapter on *Peanuts* in this volume, the transition from living being to object transforms the animal from "potential subject of feeling (a role typical for children in art and in literature) to hyperbolic object of surplus feeling". Since "the device of animal representation becomes a signifier for children", objectified children, or children that are fixed and rendered immobile by the adult gaze, also become loaded with empathetic significance (Chaney, "Animal Subjects", 48). They crystallize and filter readers' personal memories of their own childhoods and associations with children.

The affective hold of both child and animal characters is reinforced through their coexistence. Both children and animals, as André Cabral de Almeida Cardoso suggests in his article on child-animal hybrids in *Sweet Tooth*, have a strong empathic hold. This hold is generated through the feelings of protectiveness and concern they evoke, as in the case of real children and animals. Children and their animal companions open up specific modalities of affective encounters with their readers that are often centered on the shared features of cuteness and the pre-civilized state. Cardoso shows how Lemire creates direct contact between child-animal hybrids and the viewer throughout his stories to generate empathy. Heimermann makes a similar claim, while emphasizing how two different processes of othering—the othering of the child and the othering of the animal—converge in Lemire's series (240-241). Heimermann also points out how these "hybrid bodies" mirror the hybrid form of the comic (see also Alaniz's chapter here). It is important to emphasize that this is not just a mere case of mirroring between form and content; it builds on the similarity established between children and animals and their affiliations with the comics medium.

## Bonded insights: from family to politics and poetics

Strong bonds between children and animals are repeatedly affirmed and even assumed in culture as in our lived realities. The child-animal relationships examined here often involve care and responsibility. They also serve as testing grounds for desire and powerplay.

The strong bonds between children and animals and the accompanying dynamics of care and domination are exemplified in Wilhelm Busch's *Plisch und Plum* (1882), which reproduces and then rejects the Romantic connections established between the savage child and the animal. While early images narrating the first encounter between the mongrel pups and the mischievous boys are idyllic, as in Figure 2, where both boys and pups are naked and find themselves in a rural setting, this idealization is later undone when Busch shows how annoying and disruptive the boys and the puppies can be.

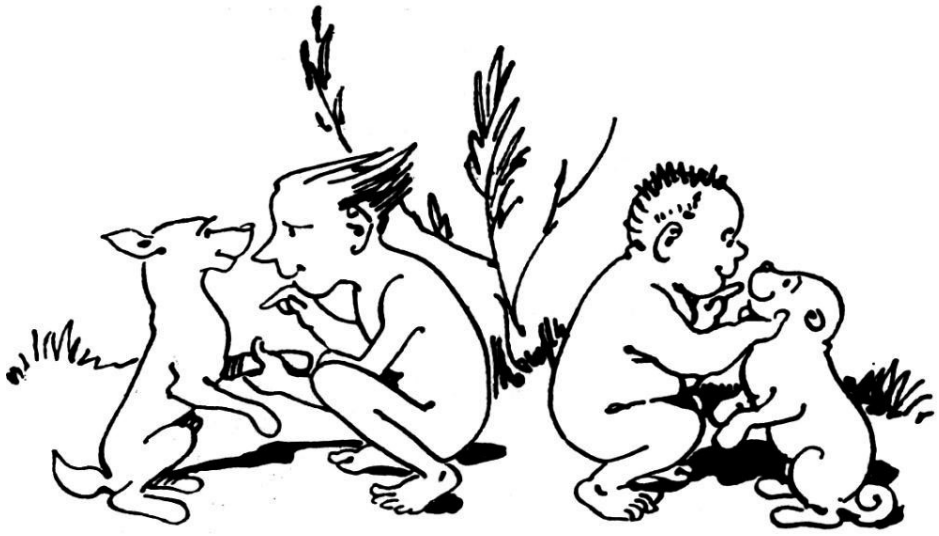


Fig. 2. First encounter between Plisch and Paul and Plum and Peter in Wilhelm Busch's *Plisch und Plum*.

In the comics examined here, the idyllic childhood of Romanticism is rarely more prominent than a vague idea: it is playfully overturned in *Calvin & Hobbes* (Emmanuelle Rougé), it is constantly debunked in *Little Orphan Annie* (Peter W.Y. Lee), it is repurposed for propaganda in the stories published in *Corriere dei Piccoli* (Fabiana Loparco), it remains a distant, even cruel, dream for most of *A Tale of One Bad Rat, Joe the Barbarian* (Mel Gibson) and Brecht Evens' *Panther* (Shiamin Kwa). In all of the comics discussed here, which cover a broad range of genres and stories, there is one important constant: the strong bonds formed between children and animals. While most of these bonds are positively connoted, in certain cases, such as *Panther*, these bonds are harmful. The familiar child-animal pair consequently has multiple connotations, especially in the case of comics, where children and animals, childishness and animality, abound.

Children and animals in comics, as elsewhere, often fuse into one character or, alternatively, trade traits (wildness, innocence, ignorance). This is most evident in "feral children" such as Mowgli or Tarzan, who grow up in the wild in the company of animals and behave in a manner that is almost indistinguishable from that of the animals surrounding them. Indeed the fascination behind the feral child lies in their animality, their inability to effectively integrate into human society, usually failing at acquiring human language, which is matched by their ability to survive in the wild, like any other animal. This throws into question the presumed superiority of humankind and the nature of humanity (see for instance, Strivay; Wesseling).

The strong bonds in the chapters that follow are mostly those of trust, friendship and support but also failures in communication (Pearson) and perversions of trusting relationships (Kwa). By virtue of their affective connections, these relationships bring to fore certain sociopolitical issues, ranging from the notions of family and gendered roles, as in the case of *Little Orphan Annie* (Lee) and the early *Corriere dei Piccoli* stories (Loparco), to both overt and implicit politicization of children and animals, to the tenacity of adult-child and child-animal power hierarchies and the imagining of their subversion. Comics children, Michael Chaney points out, "merge the political and the social. They trigger temporal confusions indicative of and resistant to reigning ideologies" (*Reading Lessons* 57). This underscores the relevance of contextualized, nuanced readings of comics children that highlight the extent to which the characters, often simultaneously, conform to and rebel against pervading ideologies. Relationships between children and animals are far from one-dimensional.

Organized under five sections—alternative families, queered relationships, childhood under threat, politics and poetics—the chapters bring to light the relevance of different kinds of child-animal relationships in comics. The book begins with the most obvious bonds between children and animals already captured in *Plisch und Plum*: friendship, companionship and family.

In addition to highlighting the diverse bonds of companionship and the kinds of surrogate families formed between children and animals, these chapters show how the animals are also a means of socializing children and weaning them into particular roles. These include maternal care and sacrifice in *Little Orphan Annie*, where Annie's adopted pet (and fellow mongrel) Sandy, domesticates an otherwise wild, unfeminine Annie, while also constituting an alternative family for her. As Lee shows in his chapter opening the section on alternative families, Sandy also succeeds connecting with most of *Little Orphan* Annie's readers by bringing out her human side.

The alternative families section shows how child-animal relationships reflect, mitigate or reverse the real-life hierarchy of power relationships between children and adults, as in the case of the Flemish comic strip, *Jommeke* (Meesters and Lefèvre). The anthropomorphized animals, introduced relatively early in this long-running strip that began in the 1950s, fulfill several functions in the stories. These range from teaching readers about different kinds of animals, attracting young readers and, more importantly, fulfilling narrative functions through indulging in behavior proscribed for child characters and being a source for humor. That all of the children and most adults have pets leads Meesters and Lefèvre to suggest that the animals function as totems, complementing and completing the human characters' personalities. They also liken Jommeke to the *surenfant* or superchild, a term introduced by Jean-Marie Apostolidès to describe how Tintin incarnates a tendency, at work since the end of the nineteenth century, of rejecting or at least questioning adult supremacy and bestowing more power to the child. For

Apostolidès, Tintin stands apart from previous superchildren in that he reconciles generations while retaining his ability to navigate and solve problems in the adult world. In *Jommeke,* much like in *Tintin*, children assume adult responsibilities as adults become increasingly irresponsible and incapable of managing situations on their own.

Perhaps the most crucial element of serialized comics strips is that readers lived with and through children such as Annie, Jommeke and Tintin, who indulged in a kind of freedom and absence of protection that most of their young readers were unfamiliar with. Moreover, the serialized, constantly evolving nature of the strip and its presence in the public domain opened up space for readers to react to and potentially even influence comics characters' fates, as Lee shows in his chapter on *Little Orphan Annie*.

In the third and final chapter in this section, Jennifer Marchant focuses on the roles incarnated by two animal sidekicks created by Hergé, Tintin's dog, Snowy and Jo and Zette's monkey, Jocko. Arguing for the importance of comparing *Tintin* with Hergé's other creations, Marchant discusses child-animal relationships in the light of Eric L. Tribunella's interpretation of boy-dog relationships as conduits for schooling children about marriage and parenting. Marchant goes further to point out that while these animal companions maintain close relationships with their child masters, they also uncomfortably mirror the relationship, with all its ambiguities, between the colonizer and the colonized on two levels: by being hierarchically above colonized and othered populations and by being in turn dependent, submissive or forced to submit to the superior powers of their masters.

Potential romantic relationships between children and animals are explored more fully in the second section through the lens of queer theory. Here the interpretation of child-animal relationships as a step towards heterosexual romancing is questioned and nuanced. Olivia Hicks proposes that the teenage Supergirl and her horse, Comet, should be seen as doppelgängers, as facets of the same identity that becomes complete, just like the hybrid and problematic body formed by girls and their horses. The teenage Lunella, aka Moongirl, also merges into the body of her animal companion, to become the Devil Dinosaur. Nicole Eschen Solis shows how this reworking of Jack Kirby's *Devil Dinosaur*, which replaces the white boy protagonist, Moon-Boy with an African American girl, incorporates queer temporalities, such as Jack Halberstam's nonlinear time and Kathryn Bond Stockton's concept of growing sideways. Examining the *Alice* books, Beer evokes another kind of sideways relationship that is more linked to space and power rather than queer theory (51): in portraying abnormal, erratic forms of growth, the *Alice* books reflect anxieties that plagued both children and adults in a Victorian society facing rapid change while resisting it. All of these interpretations highlight the extent to which children are tied to the concept of growing up, of becoming and, by extension, to the process of being molded into adults.

Hicks turns to Tess Cosslett's observation that "[t]he child [...] has still to learn these markers and rules, and exists in a space of play in which boundaries could potentially be transgressed" (476) to show how Supergirl channels fears of changing and growing bodies as well as notions of normative girl- and womanhood. This transgression of boundaries or blending of worlds remains a constant possibility in comics focusing on child-animal relationships since they bring together spheres (of the child, of the animal) that are already closely related and on the verge of blurring into one another while retaining their distinct connotations. Such blending reappears throughout this volume and includes transgressing boundaries between humans and animals or blurring modes of reality and fantasy.

The book's third section which takes its title, "Childhood under Threat" from Mel Gibson's chapter, examines how relationships between children and animals unfold in situations of mourning, abuse and their aftermath. Juxtaposing two graphic novels with troubled children who have (imaginary and real) pet rats as friends, Gibson draws parallels between the denigration of non-normative young people and rats. Both Bryan Talbot's *A Tale of One Bad Rat* and Grant Morrison and Sean Murphy's *Joe the Barbarian* portray the child protagonist's relationship with animals rejected by society as a constructive one that, through providing companionship and support to othered children, enables them to overcome their traumas.

José Alaniz teases out the far-reaching implications of the kinds of loss portrayed in *Kamandi*, from its traditional role of teaching children the principles of sacrifice to functioning as a means for readers to deal with loss. Focusing on Jack Kirby's savage child Kamandi and the loss of his insect companion Kliklak in a postapocalyptic world where the dominance of humans over animals has been reversed, Alaniz discusses how comics can rework the feral tale and how "the feral tale authorizes a blurring between animals and children often effected in comics through visual-verbal interspecies blendings". In *Kamandi* such blendings run parallel to the liminality of childhood and fade as a traumatic event forces the young protagonist to grow up. Alaniz also shows how the presumed closeness to nature of both children and animals has strong connotations of loss and mourning in the face of looming ecological disaster.

The last chapter in this section by Shiamin Kwa discusses how the ties of care and trust usually formed between children and animals—which are in many ways traditional in comics, if not always in children's literature—are subverted in *Panther*. In her reading of Brecht Evens' *Panther*, Kwa elaborates on how boundaries of the real and the fantastic are blurred and interrogates the boundaries of the intimate. The complexity of the graphic novel, Kwa suggests, is mirrored by the panther whereby both character and form are intertwined. Building on the ambiguity at the heart of anthropomorphic animals, the abusive father in *Panther* takes advantage of the aura of innocence and friendliness associated

with the cartoon, anthropomorphic animal to lure his daughter into a sexually abusive relationship. Panther is therefore closer to the likes of the Big Bad Wolf who manipulates children through ruse and disguise. He is almost, but not quite, the complete opposite of the anthropomorphic bears and other pets in the comics discussed here.

The penultimate section on politics begins with Michael Chaney and Sara Biggs Chaney's chapter on *Peanuts* in which they argue that the comic strips "model neurodivergent forms of sociality, communication and affect". They propose neurodiversity "as a relation that relies on the animal-child dyad for its complete expression" and suggest that "[t]ropes of animality and cognitive difference meet in the figure of Snoopy" since he alternates between states of bestiality and (pseudo) intellectualism. Like Kwa, Chaney and Chaney also evoke the "sinister motives behind ludic masks". They do so by focusing on the potentially sadistic gaze underlying the comic strip's humor for interrogating the relationships between animals and children and for making fun of non-normative children such as the "loser" Charlie Brown.

In her chapter on issues of the Italian children's magazine *Corriere dei Piccoli* from the First World War, Fabiana Loparco examines the propagandist elements at play in the magazine's stories. She also shows the stark gendered differences in stories starring girls and those starring boys, with boy protagonists being more numerous than girl ones. While the farm animals surrounding the young girl Didì support her in her efforts to help her country and sabotage the enemy they, much like Sandy in *Little Orphan Annie*, are also a means of initiating Didì into the role of motherhood. For boy protagonists, such as Luca and Gianni, who end up joining opposing armies, animals serve to channel emotions that boys were not expected to indulge in. Although the pedagogical, nationalistic program in the *Corriere dei Piccoli* during the First World War was less implicit than in *Rupert Bear*, similarities, especially formal ones, are discernible, including the rejection of word balloons and the use of rhyme, pleasant to read and easy to remember. It is important to remember that, as in the case of the *Alice* books, the "primary constituency of child readers for the *Alice* books does not imply simplicity—rather, struggle, loneliness, pleasure" (Beer 77-78). Children's culture is loaded with affective markers for both children and adults. The comics discussed here are no exception.

While both chapters in this section on politics emphasize how adult over child over animal hierarchies are often inevitable, the book's final section turns to the poetics underpinning relationships between children and animals and the frequent blurring or subversion of those hierarchies. In her chapter opening the section on poetics, Emmanuelle Rougé makes a case for the central role played by anti-authorianism in *Calvin & Hobbes*. This anti-authorian poetics involves a tension between the child's identification and distancing from his companion, often, but not always, shared impulse to rebel against adult, human authority and ultimately an overturning of the human-animal hierarchy. This is inscribed in an entertaining

logic familiar to comics and children's culture and an educational impulse that underpins many works destined to be consumed by children. Hobbes, for instance, fulfills the three interconnected roles of toy, pet and companion, teaching, like other transitional objects and companions, about emotions and relationships.

Benoît Glaude conducts a zoopoetic reading of the *bande dessinée* series for children, *Yakari* , which narrates the adventures of a Sioux boy who has the unique ability to talk to animals. For this, Glaude combines David Herman's call for the inclusion of the animal's perspective with Éric Baratay's more nuanced attempt to take the animal's perspective into account while remaining aware of the limitations of such projects. Baratay, as Glaude explains, is careful to distinguish between anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism, suggesting that even though anthropomorphization of animals does have a strong human bias, it is an attempt to better understand animals (Baratay 62). In highlighting the limited verbal interactions between animals and humans in comics, Glaude suggests that verbal communication between children and animals challenges the boundaries between the human and the animal. Very often however, as in the case of *Yakari*, these interactions, in erasing differences between the human and the animal, only reinforce anthropocentrism.

Boundaries between species become more fluid in Laura Pearson's chapter, which examines the mapping and problematization of cross-cultural communication in *Jinchalo* through focusing on the mechanisms of othering and their eventual dissolution through cross-species hybridity. Pearson demonstrates how the shape-shifting skills of the central character, Voguchi, challenges binary, divisionary and hierarchical identity constructions. She argues for the potential of multispecies thinking, which emphasizes moving away from anthropocentrism through bridging gaps across species and cultures and challenging the superiority of the word.

The book ends with a short essay by Philippe Capart providing insight into the life, influences and inspirations of Jean Roba, creator of the long-running, successful French-language comics series, *Boule & Bill*. Starring a boy and his dog, this comic glossed over uncomfortable realities to create lovable characters and reassuring situations that were cherished by many. Capart's essay unpacks some relevant aspects of how the boy-dog tandem became emblematic. It contextualizes the strip's inception in the post-war economic boom in Belgium and the lasting influence of Disney. The strip's durability and marketability were anchored in its comfortingly repetitional and escapist features. In many ways the boy and his dog embody the ideal family life offering comfort, emotional support and the freedom to take part in harmless adventures.

As the chapters in this book confirm, charting the constructions of, and relationships between, children and animals shed light on ideologies and inclinations that permeate comics with influences from the sociopolitical context of their making

as well as the medium's history, conventions (cartoonish distancing of drawing) and recurrent genres (funny animals, family strips). Childishness and animality permeate comics worlds and their characters even in the absence of child and animal characters. Returning to the bestiary mentioned at the beginning, it might be possible to imagine a comics bestiary beyond funny animals, a bestiary that accounts for how children and animals are often inextricable in comics, regularly coupled, implicitly when not openly. While unfolding through the power dynamics of care, these relationships also offer "alternative voices, subjectivities, and models of kinship and belonging" (Feuerstein and Nolte-Odhiambo 3). In doing so they question and disperse the classic real-world dynamics and hierarchies of care, especially within the family and parallel to it. The strong bonds between children and animals mapped out in this volume point towards alternative modes of conceptualizing family and identity and, ultimately, alternative means of imagining and interpreting. These bonds also navigate possibilities of dealing with problems associated with coming of age and (adult) living. We cannot, however, forget that the children and animals remain heavily molded by the adult gaze, which is nostalgic and limiting: often freer than real children and domestic animals, the freedom of these comics characters remains constrained through idealizations. Although confined to the page, usually boxed within frames, drawn in playful lines and bearing friendly faces, these children and animals and their interactions mirror issues—and sometimes offer solutions to those issues—that are very real.

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# Alternative Families

# The Maternal *Arf!*:
## Raising Canines in the Roaring Twenties in Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie*

Peter W.Y. Lee*

In the 1920s, "tomorrow" came to the United States in the form of an industrialized, urbanized modernity. The Great War quashed the ideals of propriety and gentility that characterized American sensibilities in the early twentieth century. The Jazz Age that followed not only ushered in a decade of new fads, consumerism, and technological marvels, but signified a larger "Lost Generation" of teens and young adults who discarded their elders' values. In 1925, Judge Ben B. Lindsey, overseeing the Juvenile and Family Court of Denver, put it bluntly: "Sometimes the growing economic independence of girls, combined with their spunky determination to do their own thinking, works in ways that are almost comic reversals of all our old traditions" (Lindsey and Wainwright 123). But not every spunky girl was a socially-maladjusted brat. Cartoonist Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie* depicted its titular heroine as independent, but whose combative spirit—matched with a mean left hook—empowered her to resist the decade's social-climbing, status-seeking trends that Gray rejected as antithetical to American values. Annie's aggressiveness and candid demeanor projected masculinity as she punctured through these motifs, but she ultimately reinforced her role as a feminine educator and nurturer, as she raised her pets, notably her dog Sandy, to embrace American values of individualism and industriousness. In return, Sandy's protectiveness affirmed the child's vulnerability and innocence, and socialized her maturation as a "good girl".

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## Defining motherhood in early twentieth-century America

Searching for the root causes of "the Lost Generation's" supposed waywardness, various civic guardians pointed fingers at social institutions, starting with the home. Failed parents, mothers in particular, shouldered the blame for not raising their kids as responsible citizens. One parenting manual bluntly stated, "Mothers are bound to be teachers, if they would fulfill their motherhood; never forget this" (Barbour 247). The conditional *if* and the note to not forget this principle suggested some moms lapsed when it came to this cardinal rule for good motherhood. Popular culture projected the fallen mother who, through her man-hungry proclivities and/or virtuous victimhood, became social pariahs. Seminal works like *East Lynne* (1861) and *Madame X* (1908) demonstrated the continual social anxieties over women who defied the values of respectability and domesticity. The Roaring 1920's glorification of "It" girls and flappers encouraged mothers to cut loose. The 1926 film *Dancing Mothers* even ended happily, with mom ditching the standards of maternal self-sacrifice to party the night away.

With mothers susceptible to corrupting forces that drove them out of their homes, their kids were at risk of following their footsteps. While some children did become dancing daughters and sheiks, others took the high road as moral correctives. Historians have pointed to the perceived innocence and inherent goodness of children and animals, both requiring direct "saving" from evil, a heritage from nineteenth-century Romanticism (Pearson 30). Animals and children shared strong bonds; reformers saw pets as a way of guiding children into future adult responsibilities. "The essential point in education should not be mathematics, science, or languages", one educator proclaimed in 1920. Writing in the American Humane Education Society's magazine, *Our Dumb Animals*, he advocated, "Nothing is better in the case of children then the awakening in them of a feeling of interest and love for animals" (Bell 74).Such love and care, Progressives believed, would socialize children into right-thinking adults.

Orphans, by definition, lacked parental guidance in vice-laden cities. Although orphanages—euphemistically called "homes"—supposedly provided an orphan with the basic necessities of life and education, reformers deemed them overcrowded, prone to social ills, and staffed with corrupt supervisors, creating "colonies of beggars, drunks, drifters, and innocent victims of misfortune" (Crenson 51).The vulnerable orphan permeated popular culture, such as books like *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), in which a poor, little waif overcomes hardships and melts the icy hearts of society, thereby disciplining child readers about the proper way to grow up (Sanders). The poem "Little Orphant [*sic*] Annie," published in 1890, mixes childish humor with a grim reality as Annie finds a home, but in between playtime, she cleans and cooks for the family and watches the livestock to "earn her boarding an' keep" (Riley and Vawter). The 1918 film adaptation starring Colleen Moore also blended the mix of childhood sentimentality and exploitation. More

famously, Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid* (1921) featured a tramp who adopts a vagabond brat, and the makeshift family makes do with scraps and pluck, battles meddling child savers, and love each other unconditionally. Child actor Jackie Coogan shot up to superstardom playing resilient urchins who find happiness in the end reel. The sentimental hokum rebutted the money-mad, materialistic hedonism that characterized the Roaring Twenties.

Cartoonist Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie*, starring a curly-haired, blank-eyed spitfire heroine, reflects the duality of childhood innocence and failed civic institutions. Gray consciously centered his orphan in a corrupt environment of inept civic leaders, callous social climbers, and dysfunctional families, with a focus on bad moms. As biographers note, Gray had little use for scientific child rearing as administered by experts, bleeding-heart social workers, and intrusive do-gooders. He later criticized social welfare programs and child labor laws for interfering with individualism and self-improvement (Barker 11-13). His comic strip reflected his views on these timely issues. Gray claimed, "It's impossible even to mention topics of the day, or religious and social matters without a terrific hue and cry being raised at once. Usually a cartoonist has to keep on the fence at all matters. He is to talk a lot, but never say anything" ("Little"). While some cartoonists relied on humor gags to convey hidden messages, Gray hit audiences with wordy preachments, defying his own assessment of a cartoonist's supposed self-censorship by tapping into multiple social forces. Annie's preachments rejected consumerism-as-social ascent in favor of bootstrap individualism, yet Annie herself lived with a rich benefactor. Her lectures rejected sentimental maternalism as she addressed real world issues of class divide and economic hardship, yet she also filled her feminine role as mother and nurturer to her pets.

For Annie, animals served two purposes: as a constant companion, Sandy was a built-in audience for Annie's lectures and, through Sandy, the readers. As if Sandy was her son, Annie taught Sandy to "grow up" as a socially-approved masculine dog, not a pampered puppy. In return, Sandy saved her from becoming hardboiled; pets needed a mother figure as nurturer, which allowed Annie to channel her aggressive, un-ladylike behavior from perceived delinquency; saddled with responsibility, Annie didn't grow up to become a frolicking flapper of the Lost Generation or a spineless dependent on social services. In these early stories, Sandy offered constant companionship for the orphan, completing Annie's family unit as she navigated an unfriendly world.

Right from the start, Annie certainly needed a family. Readers first meet her in an orphanage, where life is a Darwinian struggle. In the first installments, Gray defined Annie by having her defend herself against other kids competing for attention from a mercenary headmistress, Miss Asthma. The aged spinster is an early archetype in the strip—an unmarried, childless woman who exploits well-intentioned, but ineffective, social workers and charities. Unqualified as a mother figure due to her spinsterhood, Asthma has no qualms "renting" her orphans

as unpaid laborers, has little interest in their welfare, and doles out punishment with glee. Annie retaliates against what she sees as cruelty, but her actions often backfire. In one strip, a wealthy couple wants to adopt her, but their son sniggers, "Orphans are always funny, but you're a riot!" Annie socks him in return and his mother huffs, "If I had a rowdy like that, I'd certainly train her" (Gray 6 Aug. 1924). The mother's response signifies parental ineptitude—the reader plainly sees where the ill-mannered boy gets it from and the mother is not fit to "train" Annie—but Annie is so desperate for a family, she blames herself. The next installment has the remorseful orphan praying, "Please make me a real good little girl so some nice people will adopt me" (Gray 7 Aug. 1924). Annie recognizes she lacks the qualities to be a "real good little girl", at least, from the well-to-do point-of-view, and hopes divine intervention would allow her to enter society's good graces. Unfortunately for her, Asthma gripes about how Annie is "disgraceful", "ungrateful", and "untrainable" (Gray 7 Aug. 1924). Annie accepts Asthma's words at face value, blindly accepting the words of her elders as authoritative—even if these elders are unqualified to make such assertions. While the reader may side with Annie in hitting the rich kid, Annie also believes she faces incredible odds to grow up as a good girl.

With Annie facing a bleak future, Gray gave her hope for a brighter tomorrow through pets, especially dogs, as companions and makeshift families. According to a tear sheet from the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Gray based Sandy on his childhood "canine pal", an Airedale, and "that much of the interesting natural habits of the 'Sandy' of the cartoon was [*sic*] obtained" from this boyhood pet ("Little"). In an unpublished autobiography, Annie once had "two little black kittys" named Tip and Top (Gray, "Looking"). In this backstory, the two cats were central to her family, but her orphaned status stripped Annie of her household.[1] Although not canonical, this biographical sketch suggests her affinity for animals were attempts to recreate her family unit. By forming new families, Annie channeled her aggression in a way that reaffirms American values of individualism and family togetherness—not those propagated by unfit women like Asthma. At the same time, her rehabilitated pets became guardian figures, contributing to society by protecting their mother figure.

## Stepping in for the bad parent

Annie's first stint as a mother redeemed pets suffering from narrow-minded parents. Mrs. Warbucks, a middle-aged, childless social climber, thought having

1. Gray did not make up his mind how Annie became an orphan. In "Looking Backward", Annie's parents are victims of a hit-and-run driver. In another version, "Didn't I Ever Have Folks?", Annie's parents are government spies executed by an unfriendly nation during World War I. In 1928, Miss Asthma reveals she knows Annie's family history and keeps the records in a safe, but refuses to discuss Annie's background. The Home later burns down in a fire.

a child around the house would lead her into the respectable smart set. Although Mrs. Warbucks's faux sympathy is plain to readers, her ploy tapped into a larger societal sympathy for misbegotten, helpless kids, particularly orphans. As her name implies, the Warbucks had entered high society during World War I by selling arms to Washington, but these munitions makers who made a killing in profits at the expense of shell-shocked American doughboys faced public scorn.[2] Helping an orphan was a socially-approved way to re-enter the social registrar. The War Department propagandized downtrodden European war orphans to rally the public against German aggression, and adopting orphans was a patriotic gesture during and after the war. As one critic scoffed in 1916, "The munitions makers of Wall Street pledge themselves to support hundreds of thousands of French war orphans over a period of the next fifteen years by raising $130,000,000 in this country", even as these profiteers churn out weapons to create more orphans (Collman 196).[3] Indeed, Asthma explains the Warbucks "have no children and they are very wealthy—they feel it is their *duty* to adopt an orphan" (Gray 13 Aug. 1924). But Mrs. Warbucks's sense of responsibility is a door-opener to rub elbows with the in-crowd.

Mrs. Warbucks's dismissal of her maternal duties matches her mistreatment of animals. Her bulky presence contrasts with her tiny dog, One-Lung. The pampered, perfumed Pekingese sits passively in Warbucks's arms and the name indicates exertion would overwhelm the delicate creature. One-Lung is the "wrong" type of dog, with a weak, cowardly, and vain demeanor, signifying a bad trainer/mother figure; at least one dog expert asserted a puppy was like a toddler and a puppy "can be taught his first lesson in the line of obedience just the same as a child", and "if not done about in the proper manner, it can be spoiled to such an extent, that it will take a good deal more correction to undo the mistakes" ("Beagles" 15). Indeed, popular works such as *Lad: A Dog* (1919) blatantly stated how dogs loved children, "loved them as a big-hearted and big-bodied dog always loves the helpless" (Terhune 162). One-Lung's introduction shows the effects of misguided parenting, especially Mrs. Warbucks's school of indulgence and luxury. His helplessness requires a protector from harsh social ills.

Annie takes up the mantle of a guardian figure that Mrs. Warbucks cannot. In doing so, she channels her unfeminine aggressiveness into socially-approved channels as a protective mother figure. On their first outing, One-Lung runs into

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2. Gray's original depiction of Mrs. Warbucks plays into the public antipathy for profiteers during the Great War. In one scrapped strip, the Warbucks' French maid scornfully tells Annie that the family riches were "war bucks". When Gray introduced Annie's loving father figure "Daddy", he toned down the criticism, with the Warbucks contributing to the war effort in a patriotic spirit (Heer 32-33).

3. Collman wanted fair play, asking the public to support German war orphans. Chaplin regarded *The Kid* as a tribute to war orphans still suffering the aftermath of war, and, in 1924, Jackie Coogan sponsored a "Children's Crusade" fundraiser for destitute European kids (Gehring 71).

Dynamite, a bulldog with a spiked collar, and his gang of boys. The boys taunt One-Lung: "Is little Lookie Plum's nice doggy running away? Naughty-naughty!" (Gray 19 Aug. 1924). The boys have a point; One-Lung is a "naughty" dog, too weak to protect the child from bullies and probably wants to flee than fight. Annie thrashes them, including Dynamite. She overdoes her role; Gray later reiterated he "must never let her hit an animal, pull a cat's tail, or throw a stone at a cat eating birds" ("Little"). This mandate, whether a syndicate guideline or Gray's own rule, reflected the close camaraderie between children and animals. Should Annie hurt a critter, the cartoonist knew he would "immediately start to receive letters from members of societies interested in animal welfare" ("Little"). Indeed, fans preferred seeing the energetic, world-wary Annie show a softer side to the natural world. One fan, Minnie McIntyre Wallace, liked how Annie "loves animals and nature, birds and buds, and berries and bossy cows" ("Warbucks" 27). Her "love" for the animal kingdom redeems her as the "good" girl in her prayers.

Annie completes One-Lung's rehabilitation from a wasted life as a rich, lazy dog. When Annie returns to the Warbucks estate after the battle, Mrs. Warbucks is horrified with the raggedy Annie before her and One-Lung's eye blackened. But Annie proceeds undeterred; the next day, she says "a little soap and water" would wash the pampering out of his hair (Gray 20 Aug. 1924). One-Lung's responds with "Eeeee" and "Yi Yi Yi"; the yips resemble feminine cries rather than masculine barks. When Mrs. Warbucks sees One-Lung hung up to dry, she is aghast at the girl's usurping her role as caretaker. She scolds Annie for being "very cruel to poor little One-Lung" and claims, "Cruelty to dumb animals is one fault I cannot tolerate" (Gray 21 Aug. 1924). Although she spouts the mission of humane societies, Mrs. Warbucks perverts this goal by coddling One-Lung and scolding Annie for making a "man" out of her puppy. Indeed, in 1918, Dr. Arthur W. May of Harvard University informed dog owners that the pet "especially when young, should be regarded as a child," and warned owners "not to pamper or bathe the pets too often, but give them the intelligent care that you would give a child" ("Care of Dogs and Cats" 23). Nor was this a new view; historian Susan J. Pearson points out that middle-class parents in the Gilded Age associated pet and child rearing as moral ventures, with children learning the "idealized version of family life" by treating their pets the same way that their parents treated them (Pearson 33-34). Mrs. Warbucks aspires to high society, but through her treatment of One-Lung and orphans, Annie and readers know she fails as a mother.

Annie slowly transforms One-Lung from a lazy dog into "her" pet. The final breakthrough occurs when Mrs. Warbucks laughs at Annie's calling her "mother," and the sobbing orphan throws herself on the couch. One-Lung approaches and licks her cheek in consolation (Gray 2 Sept. 1924). The dog accepts his role in cementing a family bond, showing that he appreciates Annie as a true mother, a title that Mrs. Warbucks disdains. Indeed, with animal trainers creating a parallel between child rearing with pet training, this perceived close camaraderie between

kids and canines enabled either party to find solace in the other during hard times; as one child saver noted, a "harmless creature" makes up for the "hundreds of thousands of parents among the depraved and criminal classes of this country" who deprive their children of love (Mason 19). Mrs. Warbucks's cruelty towards Annie renders her such a "criminal", and the dog redeems himself with a masculine "Arf!", foreshadowing Sandy's signature line. One-Lung's tactics work, as Annie's tears dry immediately. She suspects that "under that sissy make-up I'll bet you've got a heart as big and warm as a plum pudding" (Gray 2 Sept. 1924). One-Lung's big heart, once revealed, continues; three days later, the dog earns a black eye roughhousing with Annie and some urchins in a game of indoor football. Mrs. Warbucks is scandalized, but her tiny dog partakes with gusto.

One-Lung's rehabilitation completes when Oliver Warbucks returns home as a patriarch and master of his household. Annie was a better mother for the Pekingese puppy, but she herself was a child. In the "Home," she prayed to turn into a good girl for prospective parents, but Mrs. Warbuck's rebuttal to Annie's calling her "mother" drove the girl to tears. Worse, Mrs. Warbucks indicates that her husband is a colder disciplinarian than she. But Mrs. Warbucks's assessment of her household, from her role as a mother to her trumped-up social standing among snooty associates, marks her a poor judge of character. When Mr. Warbucks enters his mansion, the reader instantly senses a kindred spirit between him and One-Lung; unlike his wife's passivity, Warbucks tries to train One-Lung to sit up and speak (Gray 27 Sept. 1924). One-Lung replies, "Arf!" and the bark indicates the dog views his owner the same way he does the girl (Fig. 1). Annie picks up on this closeness, thinking, "A guy that would make a fuss over One-Lung can't be very mean" (Gray 27 Sept. 1924). Warbucks proves her right by scooping Annie into his arms and orders her to call him "Daddy". This patriarchal command ends One-Lung's purpose—she doesn't need two friendly faces in the same house. Warbucks is an appropriate father figure to guard her from Mrs. Warbucks, which One-Lung could never do. The dog last appears entering with a gang of kids as Annie as she rides her Daddy like a horse. The dog's "Arf!" and grin contrast sharply with Mrs. Warbucks's horror as she entertains a foreign dignitary in the opposite room. The foreigner laughs at the lowdown Americans, a slap to Mrs. Warbucks's phony sophistication. But for Annie, her Daddy signifies the "genuine" parent in her prayers.

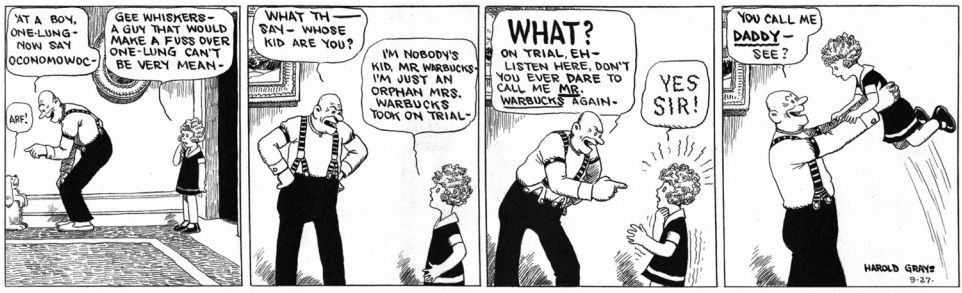


Fig. 1. Annie recognizes that animal kindness is a marker of human worth as she meets her father, "Daddy" Warbucks. September 27, 1924. Copyright Tribune Content Agency.

### Annie and Sandy: companions in any home

Daddy Warbucks's wholehearted affirmation of Annie's goodness makes him a protective guardian figure that the tiny One-Lung could never be. But Daddy never stayed in the strip for too long. The strip's title identified Annie as an orphan, which required her to consistently renew her parentless status. Gray continually broke up the Warbucks household, such as sending Daddy on business trips, killing him off, or creating other predicaments that gave Mrs. Warbucks an opportunity to kick Annie out the door or entice the girl to run away. In the course of her exile, Annie finds other households, including a farm, a circus, and other communities, and other pets, including a pig, lion, elephant, and other beasts needing a mother's hand.

But Annie's most consistent companion is Sandy. In early 1925, the re-orphaned Annie sees some boys torturing a puppy. The sandy-haired stray's defenselessness prompts Annie to charge in, just as she did against Dynamite for One-Lung. After stomping the bullies' faces, she identifies with the dog: "I'm an orphan, too—but don't *you* worry—I'll take care of you from now on, I will" (Gray 5 Jan. 1925). On the surface, Sandy was just another stray needing a mom. But unlike One-Lung, Sandy was an orphan in the same mold as Annie. One-Lung's tiny size made him unsuitable for Annie's cross-country adventures, but as Sandy grew up, he was fit for any environment, from the Warbucks estate to a desolate countryside, to the cramped quarter of a squatters' camp. Indeed, even as a puppy, the street dog serves as a bridge between Annie and her working-class community. In 1921, the *National Humane Review*, a magazine dedicated to animal welfare, reported "that a great majority of the stray cats and dogs are worthless animals of mongrel breeds that nobody wants. Only a small proportion of such animals can be placed in suitable homes", with the rest destroyed ("Disposing of Unclaimed Cats and Dogs" 75). Gray later revealed that Sandy was indeed a "mongrel", but in the dog's origin, the friendly community takes pity on the child and stray who have found each other. In Sandy's introductory strip, Police Officer Ryan witnesses the

mutt's dramatic rescue, but does nothing. As the girl hugs the puppy, the lawman doffs his cap and blesses the "little saint" as a mother figure (Gray 5 Jan. 1925). When the gang of bullies catches Sandy four days later, Ryan again stands by, allowing Annie to defend her pup singlehanded (Gray 9 Jan. 1925).

In addition to the cops, the working-class safeguards Annie's makeshift family by watching out for the stray. Another kind soul, Mr. Butcher, gives Sandy a large bone, which Sandy gives to a starving Annie (Gray 10-12 Jan. 1925). An old crone cautions Annie to get a license for Sandy lest the dogcatcher sends the puppy to the pound (Gray 14 Jan. 1925). When the dogcatcher appears, Ryan saves Sandy, locking the dogcatcher in his paddy wagon and ignores his threat to report Ryan for disorderly conduct unbecoming an officer. Ryan doesn't care: "Now then report me but leave town quick fer yer health, see?" (Gray 20 Jan. 1925). Ryan's warning the dog catcher with bodily harm reflects a larger justice than any written rule. The lawman prioritizes a kid's best pal—her dog—overdue process.[4]

Annie continues to mother Sandy, socializing her male dog in proper gentlemanly etiquette. She had toughened One-Lung to an extent by washing out the perfume and pampering from Mrs. Warbucks's misguided maternalism, but here, Sandy's status as a stray dog requires refinement. If a dog represented a child's "child", as pet trainers asserted, in which a kid trained a canine as a means of socializing himself, then Annie's turning Sandy into a gentleman represented her own affirmation of social values. As a "good girl", Annie demonstrates that her new Daddy, Mr. Warbucks, is a positive father figure (even if his rough-and-tumble persona scandalizes Mrs. Warbucks) and a role model for readers to emulate. She forbids Sandy to go with her to the opera (Gray 7 Jul. 1925), she brushes his teeth (Gray 8 Jul. 1925), and scolds him for playing in dangerous places when he returns injured (Gray 25 Oct. 1925). Annie spills many a breath imparting moral values to her companion to teach the mutt, her audience, and herself, how to behave. Standing in for the audience, Sandy listens about how Annie would "rather be just ordinary folks" than wealthy—"Daddy's" fortune notwithstanding—citing the merits of good, hard work (Gray 16 Jul. 1925) (Fig. 2). Such bootstrap individualism matched Gray's disdain for social reformers, including Mrs. Warbucks's *faux sentiments* for wanting an orphan, and the hallmarks of American manliness, where

4. The police remain Annie's societal guardians. The following year, a gangster rolls over Sandy (Gray 22 Feb. 1926). The police chief tells his men to bring in a vet. "For a dog like that?" asks one incredulous cop (Gray 23 Feb. 1926). The chief silences the junior officer, calls him "Few-brains", and orders him to bring in the surgeon, even by kidnapping. "Don't argue with him—bring him, see? Think we're goin' to let any dog named 'Sandy' die?" (Gray, 23 Feb. 1926). All the while, Annie sniffs and sobs, calling out her dog's name. While this sentimental ploy tugs the audience's heartstrings, societal barriers remain firmly entrenched. The chief tells Annie they cannot let it get out that this important doctor from "Eu-rup" operated on a dog because "it'd hurt his business with a lot of folks" (Gray, 24 Feb. 1926). This type of snobbery references the Mrs. Warbucks of the world, in which their class standards prioritize social standings ahead of a girl and her dog.

a gentleman is also a fighter, demonstrating his strength, confidence, and honor in an urbanizing (and emasculating) environment of white-collar work (Kasson 166-167). As a mother figure, Annie balances her aggressive tomboy behavior and thrives as a rich little poor girl.

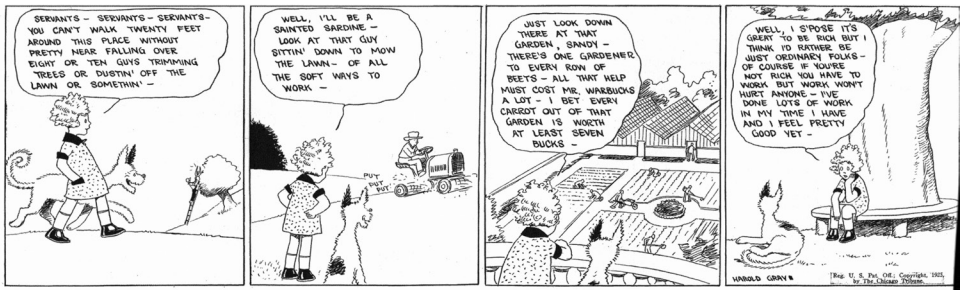


Fig. 2. Annie uses Sandy to channel Harold Gray's criticism of class in the United States. July 16, 1925. Copyright Tribune Content Agency.

In return for Annie's lessons on gentlemanly behavior, Sandy tempers Annie. Before, the orphan simply thrashed bratty kids and righted wrongs. But Gray had Sandy strip Annie of her orphaned status by making her responsible. Sandy's care mandates Annie's maternal sacrifice, including tolerating hardships for her charge. Mrs. Bottle, who "rents" Annie out as a day laborer from Miss Asthma, gives Annie scraps and the girl sneaks them off to her dog rather than feed herself. "I'm all he's got to depend on", she muses as she does without. "I've got to make good, I have, or his little heart will be broken" (Gray 7 Jan. 1925). Annie's greatest sacrifice is one any mother knows: letting go. When Ryan warns her that she *must* have a dog license, Annie gives her dog to a kindly restaurateur, Paddy Lynch, who promises Sandy all the bones he could eat. Annie grows up, sniffling, "I guess you're right, but I do hate to give him up" (Gray 21 Jan. 1925). As she would later do for other animals, she acknowledges her loss in familial terms, refusing to take money because it "would be just like selling a little brother—if you give him a good home, that's all the pay I want" (Gray 22 Jan. 1925).

Sandy, of course, returned throughout the comic's run as Annie's protector from corrupt outside forces. With Mr. Warbucks frequently out of Annie's life to keep the girl "orphaned", Annie depends on Sandy as a bodyguard. Sandy rapidly ages from a puppy to a fighting beast, making him an effective guardian, and the dog remains central to all of Annie's families. He is not a complete father figure, as he does not "teach" Annie anything nor does he provide basic staples, but his canine senses lead him to reappear whenever his "mother" needs help (Gray 1 May 1925). Nevertheless, this twinning effect, in which child and dog trade roles, with each socializing the other, has long roots in popular "boy and dog" stories (Tribunella 153). When Annie considers Sandy's miraculous intervention, musing, "Maybe it's this instinct I've heard about", readers familiar with classics

like *The Call of the Wild* can agree (Gray 2 May 1925). Despite her roles as a mother and a plucky, combative youngster, Annie is still a child and Sandy's rescuing her allows her to retain her innocence and vulnerability. In one case, Sandy sniffs out a villainous mortgage shark, Mr. Willis, who menaces an impoverished couple, the Silos, whom Annie stays with at one point. Annie knows Willis is corrupt, but he works within the law. Like Miss Asthma, who exploits social welfare loopholes or Mrs. Warbucks's maneuvering among high society, Willis abides by the letter of the law, but not the spirit. In doing so, he remains untouchable. Annie might embarrass Willis, but she, the Silos, and the community are at the banker's mercy.

As an orphaned dog, Sandy is not bound by mortal men or their rules as he openly growls at Willis. In doing so, Sandy even allows disreputable elements of society an opportunity to redeem themselves. Willis complains to his masked henchman about how "the meanest looking dog I ever saw—spoiled everything" when he attempts to kidnap Annie (Gray 7 May 1925). When the thug tries his luck, the beast leaps on him, jaw wide open. The thug quits, realizing crime doesn't pay with the "man-eating tornado" at his heels for seven miles (Gray 9 May 1925). The thug's outsider status—unlike Willis, cheap crooks aren't respectable or law-abiding—leads him to admire the orphaned mutt. When Willis decides to kill Sandy, the henchman draws the line, calling his boss's scheme to poison Sandy a "yellow trick" (Gray 18 May 1925). As the thug sees his boss's true colors, he calls him out for lacking a sense of honor among thieves, saying he "always did my fightin' wit men", not dumb animals (Gray 21 May 1925). He needn't have worried, as Sandy kicks the poisoned gumdrop into a well—an abandoned well, Gray notes, thereby sparing the water supply. Sandy continues to maul the banker throughout, prompting the thug to laugh that he is "beginnin' to love that dog" as a bandaged Willis moans in pain (Gray 23 May 1925). Meanwhile, Annie remains clueless; when Sandy winks at the audience, she wonders if the dog knows more than he lets on.

Sandy continues to fill in as guardian *and* source of imperilment, protecting the family unit and simultaneously threatening its dissolution with his potential death. In one sequence, a tyrannical hobo forces Annie to beg for food, cashing in upon the kindness of strangers. He knows Sandy threatens his control over Annie because of the familial relationships between animals and kids, and he kicks the cur from a moving train into a freezing river (Gray 19Feb. 1927). A sniffling Annie (and her fans) mourn the dog's death for a week until a blackened, disheveled Sandy returns to save Annie from a life of crime (Gray 28 Feb. 1927) and keeps the bum away when he resurfaces (Gray 1 Mar. 1927). A few months later, Sandy saves Annie from a hit-and-run murderer (Gray 6 Aug. 1927) and, a month later, attacks a kidnapper while Annie sleeps (Gray 3 Sept. 1927). The next morning, Annie fears an approaching stranger's steps, but Sandy barks, "Arf!" The bark underscores Warbucks's presence, turning the danger into a happy reunion (Gray 5 Sept. 1927). A few days later, the family unit is again imperiled when gangsters kidnap Annie

and shoot Sandy (Gray 8 Sept. 1927). Warbucks gets a posse together and Sandy, leg bandaged, goes off to save her (Gray 20 Sept. 1927).[5]

Annie's lowest point comes in 1926, when she is crippled and has little to do but talk to Sandy. She assures her dog that they will "always be together," and Sandy barks in agreement (Gray 24 Sept. 1926). This "family togetherness" grows tighter when Mrs. Warbucks reenters as Annie's impoverished, humbled nurse. Annie forgives Mrs. Warbucks, telling Sandy she knows the older woman is "really sorry" (Gray 29 Sept. 1926). The dog listens and Annie senses Sandy agrees: "If she wasn't [ok] Sandy wouldn't be so crazy 'bout her—You can't fool a smart dog much" (Gray 25 Oct. 1926). Sandy's approval allows Annie to create a new nuclear family, including a genuine mother, when she needs it most. Sandy also helps reunite the Warbucks when he barks, much to Annie's puzzlement: "He never made a fuss like that over Doc before" (Gray 9 Oct. 1926). It's not the doctor; Sandy brings in Oliver Warbucks, and husband and wife rekindle by caring for Annie and Sandy. Annie enjoys this moment, lecturing Sandy about her newfound material riches and family unity (Gray 18 Oct. 1926). At the same time, she breaks down to Sandy over her crippled state. "I gotta keep chipper—I can't let 'Daddy' know how I feel sometimes—it'd break his heart" (Gray 17 Nov. 1926). Sandy, not "Daddy", remains her only confidant; like the humans around her, she can't fool his smart animal instincts.

## Failed families: defeated in class warfare

Social climbing in the Jazz Age clearly had its downside. The modern smart set, led by the gullible Mrs. Warbucks, spoke of the corruption of urban modernity. Oliver Warbucks himself condemns the money-mad world, but he maintains a fortune to finance an extravagant lifestyle for Annie. However, while Annie and Sandy share an idealized relationship that largely shuns the artificial trappings of wealth and prestige, she, too, is vulnerable to the lures of sophistication. In one story, she tries to imitate a temporary spinster caregiver, Miss Sandstone. She spurns her old gang, the police, and the street corners where she first made true familial connections. She bad-mouths her past to Sandy: "Why, ever since I can remember, Sandy, it's been fight, fight, fight", and she now associates her standing up for others as misguided (Gray 19 Mar. 1926). Annie has trouble keeping herself "clean", but she lectures

5. Gray stated he regretted this kidnapping episode because he feared it would start a trend. "'I had Annie kidnapped once, but never again,' Mr. Gray spoke empathically", after this strip ran ("Little"). Gray later violated this rule consistently, which led critics to accuse him of fostering child endangerment and torture as a form of entertainment. One reader griped, "Do you honestly think that your depictions of Orphan Annie and her various gangster adventures are wholesome reading for the young in whom we are trying so hard to instill good manners as well as good morals to say nothing about 'good English'?" She used to like the strip "at one time", but now found it offensive and dangerous. She warned Gray that "many organizations that have to do with the training of the young are beginning to start crusades against such strips, so perhaps it might save some friction if some sort of reformation could be incorporated" (Branstad n.p.).

Sandy to do as she says. When Sandy has fleas, she chastises him for "scratchin' like that right out in public" and for associating "with those tramp pups over on Tin-can Court spite o' all I told you" (Gray 24 Mar. 1926). She scolds, "**Shame on you!!!**" and to "**GIT!**" outside where she cleans him with flea powder. "Just goes to prove what I've always said, Sandy—folks or dogs—if you 'scoiate with tramps it's goin' to show on you mighty quick" (Gray 24 Mar. 1926). This language is hypocritical for Annie, who frequently spouts off her preference for "ordinary" folks to rich ones and not puffing up with false pretensions.

Sandy obeys his "mother's" words. But Annie soon wakes up. She, like many young "moderns", realizes that social expectations for women were in flux, and notions of feminine passiveness to demonstrate moral behavior that experts encouraged were outmoded (Søland 90). Instead, a young woman's athleticism and moxie demonstrated maturity and independence, not "unfemininity". Judge Kingsley, who had worried about delinquency springing from the "economic independence" of girls overturning traditional social norms, also thought the "wailing in pulpit and press about our 'materialism' and our energetic habit of making money" was overrated (Lindsey and Wainwright 310). Kingsley had no qualms about women making money per se; people only needed "good sense to control them" and "to produce in our children the ability to think straight and be honest with themselves". "Daddy" Warbucks (and Gray, who capitalized on his orphan) certainly had no problems about making money, and Annie eventually reminds herself that acting refined—as she tries to do—is not the same as actually being rich, which she already is under her Daddy's care. Fed-up with playacting, Annie throws down her school books. In an about-face to her previous adherence to respectability, she yells, "I'm *sick,* Sandy—*SICK*!!! All this milk-sop stuff—what's it get yuh, anyway? *Blah*!!!" (Gray 27 Mar. 1926). After using Sandy as a sounding board, she returns to baseball and roughhousing, culminating with Sandy inadvertently playing an April Fool's gag on Miss Sandstone (Gray 1 Apr. 1926). Annie relishes the moment, but sobers when she sees the prim and proper Miss Sandstone reading dime novels, living beyond her means, hiding from bill collectors, and marking the calendar to pay day. Despite her conservative attire and position, Sandstone is a hypocrite and a social climber in the rough, leading Annie to further distance herself from the smart set.

Miss Sandstone's "true" self underscores the pervasiveness of social facades as a disruptive force—which Annie herself learns the hard way. When elitism invades the Warbucks home in the form of "failed" children, they directly threaten Annie's and Sandy's family. In one sequence, Mrs. Warbucks imports a sniveling brat, Selby Adlebert Piffleberry, from Europe. Annie mocks the foreigner as "SAP", laughing at his exaggerated accent, narcissist snobbery, and parlance for mirror posing. Her taunts echo the bratty boy who had mocked her when Annie was in the orphanage in the strip's early days, which had promoted Annie to pray to be a good girl. But Gray portrays Annie's insults as acceptable because young Piffleberry embodies

the upper-class pretensions that Annie has rejected as artificial and shallow. Furthermore, Selby is a socially unacceptable boy; the male sissy was a national travesty, as a weak boy's failure to "man up" signified degeneracy and, at worst, homosexuality—the opposite of the "strenuous life" that represented the nation's lifeblood.[6] Despite Annie's taunts over his airs, Selby knows she's no threat because Mrs. Warbucks values his aristocratic European heritage. Mrs. Warbucks even tells him to call her "mother", the hated label she denies Annie. Annie may suckerpunch Selby and humiliate him in every strip, but he lords over her, befitting his social status.

While Annie dismisses the sap as a harmless fop, Sandy detects the boy is more than just a perfumed sissy. The dog catches Selby snooping and his animal instincts know Selby is a phony. For his part, Selby realizes that Sandy's canine instincts aren't going to fall for his act. Just as Willis's standing in the community doesn't impress Sandy, neither does Selby's refined manners. Selby tries to cover himself through the child's role as a dog's best friend, meekly calling Sandy a "nice doggie" and to be "a good fellow" (Gray 12 Aug. 1925) (Fig. 3). But the emasculate boy's ploy doesn't fool the dog and Selby retreats. Sandy trails him, sniffing at the kid's heels to figure him out. Selby tries again to master the beast as easily as he conquers the social registrar. After studying a dog trainer's manual, he sets off to find the "pooch" and determine "once and for all who is boss," but Sandy chases the brat up a tree and the boy calls for his "mothaw", Mrs. Warbucks, to save him (Gray 13 Aug. 1925). Unable to play by the rules, Selby resorts to outright cruelty. Selby ties Sandy's tail with barbed wire and the dog howls in pain (Gray 25 Aug. 1925). The dog's "mothaw", Annie, defends her "child" by pouring ink in the boy's deluxe shampoo and then beats him into a wheelchair.

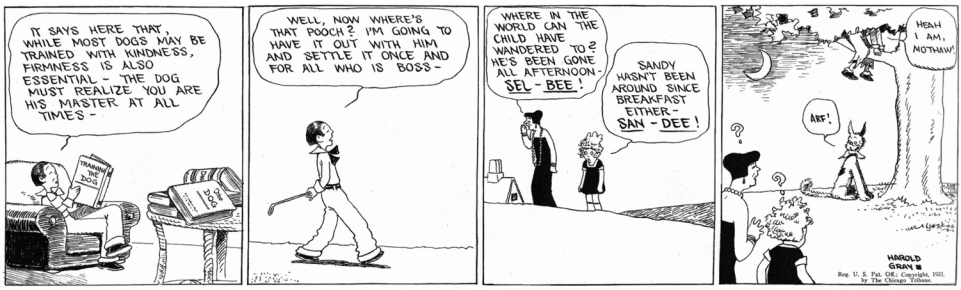


Fig. 3. Young con artist Selby Adlebert Piffleberry fails to show animals he is boss because bad children lack the "natural" bond between kids and canines, no matter how many books they read. August 13, 1925. Copyright Tribune Content Agency.

6. Harold Gray originally intended the strip to center on a boy and called the comic *Little Orphan Otto*, but publisher Joseph Medill Patterson nixed the idea because Otto "looks like a pansy". Patterson told Gray to "put skirts on him" and change the name to "Annie". Gray later claimed he came up with Annie because the idea of using a girl was a "novelty" in a comics page flooded with boy characters (McCracken 41).

The rivalry in the Warbucks mansion between Selby and Annie/Sandy escalates when the no-count Count De Tour visits from Europe. He and Selby trade hand signals, conspiring to rob the Warbucks. De Tour, like Willis, has no scruples in harming Sandy, even persuading Mrs. Warbucks to have the "mongrel shot at once" (Gray 27 Oct. 1925). After two fretful daily strips, servants bag Sandy in the midnight hours for trash disposal. Sandy's impending death struck fans with horror and *The Chicago Daily Tribune* reprinted several letters to promote their star feature. One fan, Rhetta Gibson, prayed, "I hope they don't kill her dog Sandy", and reader Grace Moore ordered Gray to "retain Sandy. He's a wonder" (Gibson 27; Moore 27). Another reader implored Gray, "Please save Annie's dog. He is one-half the interest for dog lovers" (Meek 27). Their emotional pleas signified Sandy's purpose as "one-half" the strip, in which the "dog lovers" who read newspapers took Sandy for their own. Indeed, an editorial in *The Dog Fancier* pointed out how dog lovers united against those who would do their four-legged companions harm. "We lovers of dogs acquire some of the same instinct in our judgment of animals and people", the magazine declared. "The hobby of kennel management and the practice of dog-showing promote a sympathy which levels social distinctions and welds all dog lovers together in one vast understanding fraternity" ("Freemasonry of the Fancy" 10). The editorial depicted an either-or scenario, with dog lovers on one side, sharing an "unerring instinct in immediately recognizing a person who is genuinely doggy", and casting everyone else as an opposing Other ("Freemasonry of the Fancy"10). Gray's audience clearly sided with the teary-eyed orphan desperate to save her dog, identifying Sandy as "one-half" the strip's appeal and she—and through Annie, all dog lovers—as the other half. The child-reader relationship was crucial to the strip's success.

Sandy's plight and Annie's helplessness cues their "Daddy" to intervene. Oliver Warbucks orders the servants to spare Sandy and Annie reflects on the lesson. "I guess when you nearly lose somebody you love it makes you love 'em more" (Gray 30 Oct. 1925). Sandy's imperilment brings Annie closer to him and, together, closer to the fans. Annie herself follows this philosophy when Mrs. Warbucks makes an ultimatum, telling her husband to choose between her (and, through her, Selby) and Annie. Knowing that Mr. Warbucks can't break up his marriage, Annie tells Sandy that, as orphans, they can "get along most anywhere" and they leave (Gray 14 Nov. 1925). Warbucks keeps a family in name, but it's a sham. His marriage to Mrs. Warbucks depends on wealth, not warmth, and Selby secretly regards his "mothaw" as a cash cow. Elitism triumphs and Annie departs, with Sandy faithfully sticking by as her only family when she is at her lowest ebb.

Mrs. Warbucks eventually redeems herself, but she and her husband continue to "orphan" Annie when they temporarily exit the strip. While Annie finds some good families, many others are not. Those headed by single women spinsters, like Asthma and Sandstone, are distortions of motherhood; their unmarried status signify their social unfitness to raise children despite their qualifications as

social workers and teachers. While these women may have assumed the mantle of educators and caregivers, they are hardly independent career women or have the altruistic motives required for their jobs as social workers. Sandstone draws a monthly stipend from Warbucks (which she consistently overspends on herself), Asthma rents out her charges as workers and exploits state funding for her Home, and Mrs. Warbucks has no marketable skills other than cashing in on her husband's wartime ingenuity. When the Warbucks go off on a pleasure cruise, they send Annie to her worst family, Happy Hollows Seminary.

Happy Hollows Seminary is a posh girls' school that churns out socialites. The name belies its social engineering tactics, with the girls projecting snobbery with little substance underneath. They immediately snub Annie, reducing her to tears for being "fresh" (Gray 13 Jan. 1927). The headmistress, Miss Brussels, is another frustrated spinster, with her spectacles and mannish tie and coat signifying a lack of femininity and maternity. Miss Brussels also doesn't care about Annie's wellbeing; like Sandstone, she puts up with the orphan to collect Warbucks's tuition fees. The headmistress treats this new student cordially, but takes out her ire on Sandy. The cur especially irks her because he's a "mongrel", a living melting pot of "about sixteen breeds, I should say, mostly wolf" (Gray 19 Jan. 1927). While Sandy's mixed breed make-up can stand in for the United States in general, Brussels see the uncouth wolf that responds to the call of the wild as a sign of degeneracy and the unmaking of the social order. In contrast to the mongrel Sandy, Brussels prefers pure pedigrees, like her own cat, Galahad, whom she treats as the perfect pet.

Galahad is a Persian kitty and, like One-Lung's Pekingese breeding, this foreign connotation makes him appealing in the eyes of social climbers like Brussels and Mrs. Warbucks. As theorist Edward Said points out, for centuries, the Euro-American fascination with the Orient parlayed into scientific and cultural imperialism, colonization, and appropriation to demonstrate white superiority (Said 14-15). In Annie's world, the elites associate the exoticness of these "Oriental"-sounding breeds as social signifiers, enhancing their reputation and public identities over the plain "American" mixed breeds like Annie's mangy mutt. However, unlike One-Lung, who was a lazy lapdog for Mrs. Warbucks, Galahad defies his chivalrous and genteel namesake with outright viciousness. Like Selby's and his "mothaw's" aspirations for sophistication, Galahad and his owner are faux families, superficial in airing their trumped-up elitism.

Annie hopes to redeem Galahad in the same way she mothered every animal before him. She dismisses "Galahad" as "a lot o' name for a cat" and tries to rename him "Tommy", alluding to tomcat, her own tomboyish behavior, and an informal boyish rendition of "Thomas" (Gray 28 Jan. 1927) (Fig. 4). But Galahad rejects this makeover and a classmate clarifies: "He's a real pure-blood cat, Annie—Miss Brussels is crazy about him" (Gray 25 Jan. 1927). The feline's aristocratic bearing resists Annie's social reconditioning—unlike One-Lung, Annie can't simply rinse the pampering out of Galahad to bring out the "true" animal underneath, one

presumably molded on Annie's own Americanized sensibilities. The other social-climbing girls pick up on the tension, speculating over a cat-dog fight between Galahad and Sandy, with a "Persian cat" being able to "lick any dog any day" (Gray 26 Jan. 1927). Undeterred by Galahad's stuck-up behavior, Annie persists on renaming the kitty, cooing, "Wouldn't yuh rather be named Tommy like any reg'lar cat, eh?" (Gray 28 Jan. 1927). Galahad would not, scratching Annie and the enraged girl orders her faithful guard dog to "**GIT HIM**" (Gray 28 Jan. 1927). While Gray expected readers to side with her, and presumably the readers cheered as Sandy mauls the cat, Annie reveals the limits of her mothering skills. Like Mrs. Warbucks, who rejected the bratty, untrainable orphan as unfit for her in-crowd, Annie displays intolerance to other identities that do not align with her own views. As a "child", Galahad spurns the maternal Annie, retaining his own identity as an elite, "foreign" pet. Realizing that she has failed to recondition the cat into an appropriate "American" animal, Annie resorts to violence.


Fig. 4. Annie attempts to Americanize a Persian kitty, but the cat protects his identity and class status. January 28, 1927. Copyright Tribune Content Agency.

In response to this attack on her pet—and on her own social identity as an elite—Miss Brussels retaliates. She ties Sandy to Annie's bedpost as a form of house arrest, claiming Galahad would "never scratch anyone without abundant provocation" (Gray 29 Jan. 1927). In this respect, the headmistress is correct; Annie's name-change for Galahad strips the cat of his pure-blood pedigree, turning him into just a "reg'lar cat". Brussels ends by denying Annie a family altogether, reiterating the school policy that "forbids dogs," and then edges Galahad to attack the confined dog (Gray 30 Jan. 1927). When Sandy wins and Annie cheers, Miss Brussels expels Annie, kicking her out of the "family." While Gray probably intended Brussels's actions to seem villainous and heartless to generate sympathy for Annie, Miss Brussels also needed to protect her own community and familial values, lest Annie corrupt the Happy Hollows Seminary entirely.

Annie leaves, realizing that Miss Brussels's rage stems from the prevalence of misplaced societal values that prioritizes pretentiousness over plain folk. Families built on snobbery, like Happy Hollows Seminary or Mrs. Warbucks's "mothaw" to Selby, are ultimately "bad" families where Annie can't fit in. Annie's jabs at rich

folks—her hard-working father figure excepted—hint at larger societal changes, especially motherhood and money-mad social mobility. Sandy, a nonparticipant in human norms, understands his companion's troubles. Annie later concludes by noting how in "story books, th' law always punishes th' crooks without anybody helpin'", but, having been subject to injustices from unqualified mothers and failed families, knows better, calling "most story books must be th' bunk" (Gray 4 Oct. 1927). By keeping close companions in the animal world, Annie stays clear of bunk, staying "genuine" as her saga—Harold Gray's comic strip—continued into tomorrow.

## Conclusion: the family still in trouble

Not everyone wanted little orphan Annie to have more tomorrows. When Sandy bites Mrs. Warbucks on the leg at one point, one reader cheered, hoping for swift retribution. The reader, "Unsigned", bluntly complained, "How disgusting to picture a cur dog biting people and an impossibly snotty kid. I suppose the dog will continue to bite people. To have it according to life, picture the dog shot in [a] future strip", which the reader clarified as "a dog's penalty for biting people" (Unsigned 27). The death of Sandy, which Annie feared continuously as a mother figure and best friend, would certainly have been a "real life" lesson for the so-called snotty brat. By playing on the popular link between children and animals, Unsigned justified Sandy's death as an appropriate payback for what the reader saw as Annie's phony modesty.

Nor was Unsigned the only critic. During the 1920s, Gray subverted social norms as he explored issues of spice and vice, but this freedom had limits, even in his casual depictions of animals. "I am not allowed to use snakes, rats, mice, or flypaper in my cartoons", in which creepy rodents, slithery reptiles, and dead insects (and the potential sticking to men's facial hair) unnerved some readers ("Little"). However, Gray's soapbox speeches also made readers angry. During the Depression, some readers worried over the lax morals of heroes during hard times; as scholar Pamela Robertson Wojcik points out, Annie's main legacy is rooted in the 1930s as an intermix between a "fallen woman"/hobo and resourceful girl navigating unfriendly streets, at times criticizing the popular New Deal for its social welfare programs (Wojcik 16).[7] During World War II, Gray fought fascism with positive portrayals of African American kids, and later defended the art form when civic guardians linked comic books to juvenile delinquency (Heer). Gray's challenging the public grain led to Annie's fall in popularity. One reader, writing under

7. One fan wrote to Gray in 1939, claiming that, during the Depression, "my principle source of relief has been my canine friends". He marvels to the dog's "joy at just being allowed to BE WITH YOU on your walks! His joy at having tossed you an old ball for him to catch!" However, his praise might be disingenuous, as he segues into a lengthy and passionate discussion about anti-vivisection (Landberg).

the penname "A Sufferer", even urged Annie's beloved pet to turn on her. "The only person in the whole dumb thing that is any good is that poor stupid dog Sandy. I say stupid for if he had any brains at all he would have let Annie get hit by a car long ago" ("A Sufferer"). This proposed scenario reversed the dog's role from faithful companion and guardian to accessory in a mercy killing.

That the self-described "sufferer" advocated Sandy to act as an instrument in Annie's death spoke to the long-standing relationship between children and animals in the strip, by then its second decade. Since the late 1890s, progressive reformers lumped together child saving and animal protection as innocent beings caught up in a cruel world of cold social forces. In the 1920s, older people feared youth craziness among a Prohibition-era, fad-mad "lost generation" and clung to these ideals concerning kids and canines as a form of security and an idealized childhood.

In Annie's early adventures, Gray set the strip's tone, criticizing what he saw as the excesses of the period, including family togetherness as the cost to enter high society, the growing urban/rural divide, corruption of civic figures, the interference of well-intentioned, but ineffective social guardians, and the proper ways to socialize children in the changing American landscape. The changing social roles for women figured prominently in *Little Orphan Annie*, with spinsters and social climbers using facets of traditional womanhood and motherhood for personal gain. Gray used Annie and Sandy as correctives, in which Annie mothers Sandy, rehabilitates"orphaned" pets, and uses animals as a soapboxes to lecture readers about moral lessons. One reader even hoped that Sandy and Annie's other pets could redeem Mrs. Warbucks. Lucille Crowhurst wrote, urging Gray to feature Mrs. Warbucks taking Annie "to a circus and see her pet pig 'Grunt' [*sic*]. Have her like Sandy and let him chase Selby out of the house" (Crowhurst 27).[8] Sandy repays Annie by creating family units when she needs them. While the Warbucks provide wealth and a happy home life, such opulence makes Annie's continued orphaned status all the starker. Thankfully, the girl's faithful pooch and the animal kingdom stood ready to give the little, orphaned Annie hope that tomorrow will come after all.

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# Towards an Unexpected Equivalence:
## Animals, Children and Adults in the Popular Flemish Comic Strip *Jommeke*

Gert Meesters and Pascal Lefèvre

### Introduction: *Jommeke* in relation to the historical context in which it emerged

Some of the most famous classic French and francophone Belgian comics of the first half of the twentieth century feature a youthful hero accompanied by an animal (think of Zig and Puce and the penguin Alfred, Tintin and the fox terrier Milou, or Spirou and the squirrel Spip).[1] A Dutch-language series from Belgium that started a few decades later, *Jommeke* by Jef Nys, aimed at children in elementary school, does not only combine a child protagonist and a pet (in this case a parrot), but has turned this pairing into a systematic feature of the main cast. The four main child protagonists all have a pet and even some recurring adult characters are rarely seen without their accompanying animal, their combined appearance so systematic as to warrant the classification of the animals as "totem animals", in the sense that they complete the protagonists' personality.[2]

Remarkably, these animals were not present in the initial cast of the series, which started as a gag series in 1955, before being turned into a series of longer humoristic adventures set in contemporary Belgium from 1958 onwards, pre-published in Flemish dailies (mostly in *Het Volk*), two tiers a day. In contrast to most Flemish comic strips from the period, *Jommeke* was never aimed at the general newspaper readership. From the beginning, the intended readers were children in elementary school, probably the same age as the four main protagonists: ten-year-old Jommeke, his best friend Filiberke and their female friends, identical twins Annemieke and Rozemieke. In the very first long story, *De jacht op een voetbal* (*The Chase for a Football*), animals still do not play a role, but in the second story,

1. See for instance Thierry Groensteen's edited collection (1987) *Animaux en cases*.
2. The use of "dæmons", totem animals, in Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials* is another instance of this concept.

*De zingende aap* (*The Singing Monkey*), Jommeke receives a parrot called Flip as a gift from his uncle, missionary in the then Belgian colony Congo. In the same story, Filiberke also gets a pet (a black poodle named Pekkie). From this moment onwards, animals play an important role in the majority of the *Jommeke* stories.

This long running series consists of more than 290 albums so far. At its peak, circulation figures exceeded 100,000 copies sold in Flanders only, in a region of six million inhabitants. In our chapter, we will limit our case study to the first twenty books (1958-1965) because they form the mold for the later stories, and a couple of thematically interesting books, such as *Kinderen baas* (XXV, 1966) and *Lieve Choco* (XXXVII, 1969).[3] We aim to show that the divisions animal-child-adult in *Jommeke* are seriously blurred, which is surprising considering the context in which these stories came into being.

As various authors (Spencer *et al.*; Morgan and Cole) have explained, human attitudes towards animals depend upon the circumstances: the type of animal, the type of human (age, location, educational status), and the function of the animal.

> The term speciesism was coined to describe different attitudes towards humans and animals, but (unless the logic is self-defeating and humans are seen as different from other animal species, and so demanding of different consideration) the term must also apply to having different attitudes to different animal species. In practical terms, this was an unworkable tenet, since then one could not treat insects differently from monkeys, and in practice speciesism applies only to sentient animals with a defined complex nervous system. (Spencer *et al.* 19)

In *Jommeke*, not all animals are equal indeed. Some species like sheep, camels, sled dogs and mice are just considered animals. With them, there is no anthropomorphism as with the pets of the main characters. The humanization processes are not restricted to Jommeke's parrot Flip and the dogs Pekkie and Fifi (XVII en XVIII) though, and also include the domesticated stork Hieroniemus (VIII) and wild animals such as the chimps from Paradise Island (XII and XX).

This speciesism can be extreme, as it is reflected in the status of a species as food or not. In *Jommeke*, all nonanthropomorphic species can be eaten if the humans consider them tasty. This even extends to humanized species such as the parrot in extreme circumstances in the jungle (XVI). Flip protests explicitly when Jommeke and his friends hunt parrots, but to no avail.

This eating of animals, thematized by Flip, is paradoxical, considering the humanization of animals in the series. On the one hand, the speciesism makes sure that the distinction between animals for food and humanized animals remains rather clear, force majeure notwithstanding. On the other hand, it would be a clear divergence from the world the readers knew if humans would not eat animals in

3. The Roman numbers refer to the chronological order of the stories and may be different from the numbers on the albums. The complete list of the albums in our corpus (including a tentative English translation of their original Dutch titles) can be found at the end of our chapter.

these stories. At the time, vegetarianism was extremely rare. Flemish villages and communities had many small or larger farms for the production of meat. Animal slaughter, nowadays confined to slaughter houses, was done at the farms or even at people's homes in the countryside. Rural residents were thus much more familiar with both keeping animals and their slaughter than today.

Unsurprisingly, the adult characters defend a relation between man and animal closer to the one in Flemish society in the fifties and early sixties, as they embody that society more than the children. Jommeke's mother does not want the Paradise Island monkeys in her house, until the youngest monkey poses like a human baby (XX). When Jommeke and his friends take the train with the giant dog Fifi (XVIII), the train manager wants him out of there, saying that they are not in an animal carriage. When Fifi shows his affection to another passenger by licking her, the latter does not appreciate it: "Let him keep his mop inside!" These examples already show that the relations between humans and (other) animals in *Jommeke* reflect both a fictional ideal in which children and animals have rights they would not have had at the time when the stories were written and their oppression by adults who represent the social status quo, in which animals and children should behave according to the position accorded by adults.

This is illustrated by another regular event in the *Jommeke* stories. Often, the animals suffer. Violence against humans is not absent, but never seems to have consequences beyond a black eye. Animals really hurt. On the one hand, one can see behavior from humans that was acceptable at the time of creating the story, but is not acceptable anymore in Flanders: throwing a ball or a plate at a cat (I, VIII), kicking a cat (III), pulling a lion's tail or a so-called monkey's hair (II). Sometimes, this harsh behavior is on the verge of animated cartoon violence (think of *Tom and Jerry*). In XXV, Jommeke like a real Sergey Bryukhonenko[4] operates on a cat and a dog and exchanges their heads. Flip especially suffers from violence that is partly supposed to be funny. His feathers burn (IV, VIII), he is plucked or plucks himself (II, XX), he is shot like a cannon ball (III) and tied to a flare (VIII) or shot at (XXXVII). The consequences that Flip endures are somewhat different from what animated cartoon animals have to bear. The latter can be temporally "hurt" very badly, but they always regain their former, healthy form in a second. Such animated cartoon animals are literally immortal. By contrast, the consequences of violence have a longer duration in the case of Flip, which makes him a little more realistic in the eyes of the reader. The latter is supposed to pity him as well as laugh at him, in a reference to the slapstick that was very much present in silent movies and in early funny comics, all of which influenced *Jommeke*'s creator Jef Nys.

Considering the context governing the treatment of animals in general at the time of creating *Jommeke*, we will look into anthropomorphization, animalization,

4. For Bryukhonenko's experiments from 1940, see https://archive.org/details/Experime1940 (consulted 20 November 2018).

the narrative role of animals and the child-adult relationship respectively to build the argument that categories in Jommeke are more blurred than one would expect in this kind of comic strip for children.

## Anthropomorphization

In comics, there is a long tradition of animals with human characteristics. In the early twentieth century, one of the first cartoonists to create a series with such a character was Charles M. Payne (Glasser 1987, 139). The animals in *Jommeke* are often shown behaving like humans, in the sense that they seem more intelligent than their real-world counterparts and can display emotional behavior that is often seen as unique to humans. However, the extent to which the animals are anthropomorphized varies.

### *Flip, an emotional half-boy half-parrot*

No animal in Jommeke is more human than the parrot Flip, Jommeke's pet. He is the only animal in the first twenty books that can speak like humans and seems to have a human brain. Sometimes, he even forgets that he is a parrot himself (XVII and XVIII). This is especially clear in the first story in which he features: *De zingende aap* (II, 1959). As a sign of colonial times (the story about independence was first published in the newspapers before the unexpected indepence of Congo, 30 June 1960), Jommeke's mother thinks a related catholic priest has sent Jommeke an African boy when Flip's impending arrival is announced in a letter, claiming that Flip is civilized but needs to learn to speak properly. Flip immediately behaves like a human by using the doorbell on his arrival, eating human food, taking a bath in the bath tub and calling Jommeke's mother Marie "mother", which he is told not to do. The latter act shows that he sees himself more as a child than as an adult, which is confirmed by the potion that makes children smarter and adults dumber in XXV, *Kinderen baas*, having the same effect on Flip as on children.

He can reason and experience feelings like humans. The quantity and the intensity of his expressed emotions in particular distinguish him from most other animals in the series, e.g. feelings of friendship. When he thinks that Jommeke has died in *De zonnemummie* (XI, 1962), he becomes very sad and he calls Jommeke his best friend and his brother. This brotherly behavior can also be seen in playful challenges, e.g. Flip mocks Jommeke's bicepses in *Wie zoekt die vindt* (XIX, 1964) or pulls a prank on him by impersonating a kidnapper in *De koningin van Onderland* (III, 1959-1960). After one of their fights and a scolding by Jommeke in *De straalvogel* (X, 1961-1962), Flip admonishes Jommeke to be gentler with his best friend. Flip can also be jealous of Jommeke, when the latter has received a present from Saint Nicholas and Flip himself has not: "Just because I'm a parrot, that does not mean that I don't like receiving gifts from Saint Nicholas! How dare you say that… I do not matter to you!… You do not grant me anything!… I'm not staying

with you any longer!… I'm off!… I'm going to Annemieke and Rozemieke!… At least they will pity me." Interestingly, it turns out later in the story that Saint Nicholas did bring a present for Flip, thus considering Flip a child, as Saint Nicholas normally only brings gifts for children.

On a number of other occasions, Flip's feelings take centre stage, most of all his attraction to the opposite sex. During his time in the Congo, he recalls, he fell in love with a female parrot: "But she did not want me. My feathers were not beautiful enough, she said! Fortunately, your missionary uncle caught me and revived my spirits" (VIII, 1961). Later, he feels attracted to women. When he loses his feathers in *De zingende aap* (II, 1959), he feels ashamed of his nudity in the presence of girls, but not in the presence of boys.[5] In *De purpere pillen* (IV, 1959-1960) he asks Annemieke and Rozemieke for a kiss and challenges Jommeke afterwards: "So you laugh at me! But I got a kiss from Annemieke and Rozemieke!", to which Jommeke replies: "You should be ashamed, letting yourself be pampered by the girls!" Flip: "You are just jealous." When Jommeke's father Theofiel laughs, Flip adds: "That is right, Dad, pure jealousy! Jommeke told me once that he is going to marry Annemieke or Rozemieke when he gets older." Flip is arguably in competition with Jommeke in order to get the girls' attention. The way these feelings are shown in the stories make one think of an exaggerated, unfiltered expression of human emotions, rather than the emotional life of an animal. Flip does not feel inhibited to express his emotions, contrary to the boys.

Flip's attraction to women is not always understood nor tolerated by the children. In the later story *Diep in de put* (XVII, 1963-64), Jommeke corrects Flip when the latter is constantly trying to charm the countess. Flip says he would marry her if she were a parrot. He kisses her inadvertently and she calls him a charmer. "Aren't you ashamed", Jommeke asks him. Flip pretends to play a game at first: "Shh, can't I distract a lonely woman for a while?" In a later scene, Flip accompanies her on her ride with Fifi, her enormous dog. "Like an enchanting Amazon, you are floating on your slender white horse through the woods! A real fairy tale princess!"—The countess: "You are flattering me, Flip."—Flip: "Oh no, dear countess, my heart only beats for you." Later that evening, Flip asks her: "Should I not wake next to your bed, my lovely?" "I will keep guard in front of your door. Sweet dreams, my beautiful Amazon!" "Protecting the weak women is a man's duty, I mean a parrot's!"

At the end of the story, he decides to stay with the countess. Jommeke later tells Filiberke: "I do not understand at all. Flip is infatuated with the countess!"—"What can he have seen in her?"

5. All of these stories were published before the sexual revolution of the late 1960s, so at a time when prudishness, imposed by a dominant catholic church and laws influenced by it, was still very common in Belgian society (Trommelmans *et al.* 2006). For instance, it was only in 1973 that the prohibition of contraception and distributing information about it was abolished.

For some time, Flip imagines himself to be a count and wears a bow tie (*Met Fifi op reis*, XVIII), but eventually, he realizes that the relationship cannot last. He shows his broken heart very explicitly, much to Jommeke's amusement at first. Later, Jommeke gives him the following piece of advice: "Poor Flip! Drink a good glass of wine, that will wash away your sorrow." It is not the only story in which alcohol is suggested as a solution. In *Wie zoekt die vindt* (XIX), a disappointed Flip says: "I'm going to get wasted." Drinking alcohol is something forbidden for a boy like Jommeke, but not for a bird. In this sense, Flip symbolizes much of what an adult can do or even more (like speaking the unsoftened truth). This makes Flip very attractive to young readers. He does many things that are impossible or at least forbidden for them.

Flip's emotions are not limited to his friendship with Jommeke and a busy love life. He can also feel extremely guilty. In *Wie zoekt die vindt* (XIX), drinking water gets spilled because Flip cannot close the tap of the drinking bottle himself. He has to look for help, but looses the compass while so doing, making him totally desperate: "I wish I were a migratory bird, then I would find the North without a problem. Poor friends… because of my stupid behavior, they will perish. I am not worth living one more minute. Go on, hellish sun, don't have mercy, pierce my pitiful body with your burning rays!… Forgiveness, my friends… farewell!!… Adios!!"

Just like his animal body prevents him from saving drinking water in the cited scene, his animal nature sometimes seems incompatible with his very human characteristics, the conflict showing his exceptional status. This becomes clear in another important emotional moment for Flip when Filiberke hunts parrots for food in *De gouden jaguar* (XVI). When Annemieke and Rozemieke pluck and cook the shot birds, he cannot bear it any longer: "I cannot watch this anymore. I'm getting sick. Bah […] How dare they. Munching my feathered brothers…. Can't they shoot a monkey and eat that! […] Now they are going to fry those tender animals… I can't look at it, I'm off… I'm going to fill my belly with nuts somewhere." This scene contrasts with an earlier story (XII), in which a chicken is grilled in the oven. Flip did not protest at all on that occasion. This can of course be seen as the consequence of the story and the dominant genre logic. In the chicken scene, the humor aimed for something else: adults being so totally immersed in a Jommeke comic that they burn the chicken in the oven. Furthermore, this chicken will offer an opportunity for humor, as part of it will appear to fly away. It cannot be excluded that even the scene with the cooked parrots had a humoristic overtone to young readers, especially when the story was first published, as eating animals was much more uncontested in Flanders at that time than in the twenty-first century.

Showing his special position in the storyworld, Flip sometimes functions as an educator of other animals (e.g. Pekkie in *De zingende aap,* II, the dog Fifi in *Met Fifi op reis*, XVIII, the monkey Choco in *Lieve Choco,* XXXVII) and even of

Jommeke's father in *De muzikale Bella* (V). He likes singing traditional Dutch-language songs (VI, XVIII).

These numerous examples from our story corpus show that among anthropomorphized animal characters, Flip is the most intelligent and the most human. Taking into account his special position as the main character's pet, this barely comes as a surprise. Just like Jommeke is the most intelligent child in the comic, his pet is the most intelligent pet. As a sidekick to Jommeke, Flip is allowed to behave in a less reasonable and more chaotic manner than his human companion, as his role is not meant as a model to the reader. The things that distance him from what we see as animal behavior can even be described as extravagant or exaggerated human behavior. His friendship, love, sorrow and guilt take on extreme proportions. He adds color to Jommeke's exemplary behavior like Haddock does with Tintin.

### *Linguistic and intellectual capabilities*

Although Flip remains the only animal in these stories to speak like a human, many other animals understand human language: recurring dogs like Pekkie en Fifi (XVII and XVIII), cats like the ones that accompany the Koningin van Onderland, the "Queen of Undercountry" (III) or the witches (XIV), the stork Hieroniemus (VIII), other parrots (after some lessons given by Flip, XII), the monkeys of "Paradise Island" (XII and XX).

Sometimes humans talk to animals even whether it is not clear if they understand human language, e.g. professor Gobelijn talking to a polar bear (IX).[6] The recurring character Bella the cow certainly does not seem to understand human language, but she does react when her name is called (V) and she reacts to music.

There is also a category of animals which are never spoken to: a goat (XII), mice (XV), camels (IX, XI). Sometimes it seems to change in the course of one story: in XVI, the speaking characters do not talk to a tiger, but Flip does talk to a jaguar later on (without it being clear if the latter understands what Flip says). The narrative needs of the plot can thus impose variable characterization: storytelling is in these cases much more important than a coherent and consequent character profile. The pet characters often mirror the children they belong to on an intellectual level as well. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that Flip is a very intelligent animal and Pekkie a rather naive, clumsy dog. In this sense, the children and their pets often function as if they were one character.

In general, animals in *Jommeke* are thus more intelligent and more able to understand (and speak, in Flip's case) human language than their real-world counterparts. There is a clear component of anthropomorphism at work in *Jommeke*.

6. This is not only quite similar to scenes from other Belgian comics like *Tintin* or *Spirou*, but also to the way people talk to their pets in real life.

### *Appearance*

Another way of anthropomorphism is animals dressing and behaving like humans,[7] supposedly to be funny: e.g. the little suit that Annemieke and Rozemieke knit for Flip *(De zingende aap* II), the swimming trunks worn by Flip and Pekkie (*De gouden jaguar* XVI), Pekkie tied upright to a stick just like the captured children (*Wie zoekt die vindt* XIX), monkeys that get reprimanded for not wearing their clothes properly (*Apen in huis* XX), Pekkie and Flip dressed up as one girl together (*Paradijseiland*, XII). The latter situation introduces a number of gags, because Pekkie regularly gives in to his animal instincts: he sniffs on the floor, walks on all fours, etc.

Even when animals are not dressed like humans, their appearance can be humanized to some extent. Flip walks a lot in II, which is fairly strange behavior for a parrot, and later he often piggybacks on a bigger animal (e.g. Pekkie or Fifi). Pekkie and the monkeys walking upright or the long beard of Hieroniemus the stork's father are other humanizing characteristics. Human characters sometimes respond to the different appearance of the animals in *Jommeke*, e.g. a dog or a monkey lie in a baby carriage and an elderly passerby thinks they are human (XV, XX).

A humanized appearance is a typical mise-en-scène in popular culture of that time. Think for instance of Disney's *Mickey Mouse* or the rodents in the animal series *Chlorophylle* (1954-1965) by Raymond Macherot: the drawn animals stand upright and have no claws but human-like hands (for a detailed analysis see Lefèvre, "Medium-specific"). In *Jommeke*, the anthropomorphism in appearance and behavior does not go that far . The divergence from the world that the readers know outside of the story realm is less outspoken. The animals do not replace humans, as is the case in Disney comics or in the *Lapinot* comics by Lewis Trondheim, but the difference between human and animal characters is reduced, even though the physical resemblance to animals in real life mostly stays intact.

## APPRECIATION OF ANIMALS

From the previous paragraph, it has become clear that animals in *Jommeke* do not always behave like real-world animals. Sometimes this anormal behavior serves as a humoristic device, but not all the time (see below). This becomes especially clear in the way human characters view animals and in the position awarded to them in the paratext of the *Jommeke* books.

Human characters often treat animals as if they are human. Examples include Begonia's stork in VIII, which is greeted and talked to as if he were human. The Beguin Begonia even presents him as an alternative to a husband, although she

7. Interestingly, even in real life domestic animals are sometimes clothed: Hurn (2011) explains that the clothing of horses in the U.K. is a way to control elements of their animality, which can be regarded as an extension of the domestication process.

calls herself his foster mother. When a monkey with a mind-controlling device invented by professor Gobelijn in XX saves the town mayor from drowning together with Jommeke, Jommeke thinks the monkey should be honored as a life-saver, which actually happens. In the same story, he exclaims "my friends, my best friends", when he sees the monkeys from Paradise Island again. When Annemieke and Rozemieke are educating their monkey Choco in XXXVII, they ask a telling question: "Would you finally start behaving like a human being?" This treatment of animals can be seen as a form of emancipation of animals in a context that was not specifically inclined to value animal life as equivalent to human life.

Their importance for human characters can also be seen in the similarity between VI (*Het Hemelhuis*) and VII (*De Zwarte Bomma*). Both albums have an unbreakable bond of love as their main message. In VI, a mother is separated from her newborn baby, only to be filled with joy when finding it back after Jommeke and his friends took care of it for a while. In VII, the same bond is exemplified by the relationship between a lady and her cat Molleke. Again, Jommeke and his friends take care of the cat for a while, until the lady gets it back. There does not seem to be a difference between the mother's love for the baby and the lady's love for her cat. Neither do Jommeke and his friends seem to make a distinction in the moral duty of taking care of both living creatures.

A last telling trope in this respect is that human characters provide their pets with human beds. Flip has his own little bed in Jommeke's bedroom, whereas the countess in XVIII even sleeps on the floor because the dogs sleep in her bed.

The equal position accorded to animals by human characters in *Jommeke* is reflected in the paratext. From the cover of the second album onwards, animals share centre stage with Jommeke and his human friends. Next to the series title on the cover of this second album, a Jommeke bust shows him carrying Flip on his shoulder. Pekkie and Flip can also be seen. In half of the first twenty album covers, there is a reference to an animal either in the title, or in the cover image. New animals are seen as part of the attraction of a new story and are thus shown on the cover of the story in which they first appear, e.g. Fifi in XVIII and Choco in XXXVII.

## Animalization of human characters

Mirroring the ambiguous characterization of animals, the characterization of humans in Jommeke also deserves a closer look. We will show that the minimization of differences between humans and animals does not only happen through anthropomorphism of animal characters. Human characters are often compared to animals, physically or metaphorically.

In *De koningin van Onderland* (III), one finds several instances hereof. Jommeke's father compares the snoring of his wife and son to the sound pigs make. Previously in the same story, Jommeke's mother said she guarded her child as a

lioness guards her cub. In XX, the mother reproaches the father that he is the real monkey, when the latter wants to house the monkeys from Paradise Island. He replies: "Then I do not understand why you married that monkey!" As we can see, the comparisons are often meant to be funny and pejorative, but this is not always the case.

One of the tropes in the Jommeke stories involves Filiberke playing that he is an animal, although his vivid fantasy also makes him play inanimate objects. This tradition starts a bit later in the series than the stories in our corpus, but its onset can be seen in XXXVII, in which Filiberke claims to be an earthworm.

One step further is a physical resemblance to animals. This is a recurring trope and remains ambiguous. It seems to have as many advantages as disadvantages. In II, Jommeke is forced to grow his hair in order to become a singing ape in a circus. The hair covers his whole body and resembles fur. Although Jommeke clearly words his discontentment ("I am not an ape and I do not want to be one. Be an ape yourself, you ape!"), his success as a performer is enormous; thanks to his ambiguity he looks like an animal and sings popular contemporary songs in human language. Similar ambiguity can be found when Jommeke puts a horse's head over his own in IX, resulting in an approval of his looks by Flip. When the horse's head later lands on his father's head on the other hand, the latter is ridiculed by his wife.[8] In XVII, Filiberke likens the countess's nose to a parrot beak, thereby offering an explanation for Flip's falling in love with her.

The first of a number of stories in which the inhabitants of Jommeke's village Zonnedorp ("Sun Village") develop strange conditions, XV, *Het staartendorp* (*The Tail Village*) relates how professor Gobelijn accidentally puts a drug designed to make amputated tails grow back, in the local tap water. All villagers get various animal tails except for Jommeke, who does not drink tap water. Much attention is paid to the advantages this little extra can offer man, mostly to boost efficiency or beauty. After the situation is restored to the strict separation between man and animal and all extra tails have disappeared, feelings are mixed among the populace.

These examples have shown that comparisons of human characters to animals go much further than the occasional pejorative metaphor. Much attention is paid to the positive effects of becoming more like animals, like in XV, *Staartendorp*, even if there is a strong tendency to return to a more conventional situation at the end of the story, in which humans and animals remain clearly distinct physical categories.

8. A human character with a head of an animal is again part of a long tradition in popular culture. In comics, one could refer to the cow's head that covers Haddock's in the *Tintin* story *Les Sept Boules de cristal* (1943-1946).

## Narrative roles of animals

Animals in various forms and transformations do not only figure as pets, they also have important roles in the *Jommeke* stories, as can already be gathered from the covers (cf. supra). In this section, we will explore which functions animals often have in *Jommeke*.

In many comics, young readers may be able to learn something about the behavior of animals. This also happens in *Jommeke*, e.g. the stork trek features in VIII, *De ooievaar van Begonia*, or Darwinian evolution, as professor Gobelijn explains the existence of a tail bone in humans in XV. Their didactic function is not primordial, however. In other Flemish comics of the same period, such as *Bessy* by Willy Vandersteen's studio, education about more or less unknown fauna is much more salient.

Another reason for the presence of animals in a comic aimed at children could be their supposed attractiveness for children, consider the tradition of teddy bears and other cuddly furry animals.[9] Just like many European cartoonists at the time, Jommeke's author Jef Nys was influenced by Disney's portrayal of animals as simple figures with round lines and big eyes. Moreover, the animals in *Jommeke* are the cuddly kind: dogs, a monkey and a parrot. Nevertheless, this characteristic is less significant. As we will see, their relevance as often independently thinking characters entails much more than attracting young readers. The near absence of merchandising with the animals from the series, their popularity notwithstanding, arguably corroborates our position on the limited importance of their cuddliness.

The presence of the animals serves other purposes. They are either a source of humor or serve as impersonators of behavior that is taboo for children. Belk has observed that both aspects are in general associated with pets: they are amusing and their owners expect them to do things that are not allowed. The latter even seems to be one of the assets that humans are looking for in a pet animal. In *Jommeke*, their importance often equals the importance of the human characters and their behavior resembles human behavior. According to Belk, it is not exceptional that pet owners see human characteristics in pets, but we feel it is taken further in the *Jommeke* stories. An advantage that animals have is their capability to do things that humans cannot, such as flying, which may be useful to advance a story.

The relatively blurred distinction between man and animal detailed in previous paragraphs does not mean that animals cannot serve a number of narrative functions of their own, most of which can also be taken up by human characters, but arguably less systematically.

9. Think of Lorenz's *Kindchenschema*, proven in empirical research such as Kringelbach *et al.*, 2016.

### *Sources of laughter*

As the series *Jommeke* always mixes humor and adventure, like many Flemish newspaper comics and international kid comics (Gordon 2016), the presence of animals can be expected to cause humor. The animal that offers the most occasions for laughter and jokes is Flip, Jommeke's parrot. Apparently, being an animal means that you do not have to conform yourself entirely to human norms and traditions. In II, Flip is even introduced as an arrogant, selfish creature expressing limited empathy: he thinks he is the smartest animal on earth, sprinkles water all over the bathroom, mocks Filiberke for his speaking disorder, bites into Pekkie's tail etc. On the other hand, Flip can admit his mistakes, is very loyal and even sacrifices himself for his human friends (he is plucked several times in the series). His faults and the negative aspects of his character are shown less in later stories.

In general, Flip has the opportunity to play pranks and mock more than the very good boy Jommeke. In XVII, Flip teases Jommeke when the latter gets soaking wet in a storm. Jommeke replies by calling Flip a mocking bird. One album later, he even teases Jommeke's father by wishing him "good night, a lot of itching and too short arms to scratch", resulting in the father throwing a slipper in his direction.

Animals also seem more prone to mistakes than humans, which often leads to funny situations. When Jommeke asks food for a baby, Flip brings insects in VI and in XVIII, he tries to milk a sheep using his beak. Filiberke's dog Pekkie is clumsy, which brings its own share of humor. He does not know how to go through a door with a burden on his back (IV), breaks a bottle of wine and drinks its contents (XIII). The clothes the animals wear can sometimes seem ridiculous. In XVI, both Flip and Pekkie wear swimming trunks at the beach, but Flip mocks the design of Pekkie's trunks.

In the category of dogs and humor, the colossal white Fifike is the champion. Especially in album XVIII, he wreaks havoc (two cars destroyed, tulips crushed and a tree eradicated in Jommeke's garden, food spilled etc.). Much of the humor is based on an animal stereotype. A talkative bird and a clumsy dog are thus met by headstrong donkeys. In Jommeke, a donkey will never do immediately what one wants (IV, XIII, XVIII). In XIII Jommeke rides on a donkey that walks backwards.

The animal category that guarantees jokes more than any other are monkeys, and more particularly chimps, because as animals closest to humans, evolutionarily speaking, they are often cast in such humoristic roles.[10] In X, Flip advises Jommeke to buy a chimp as cheap labor ("Those are good ones, they are almost as intelligent as I am") to keep a machine running, but obviously this ends badly. In XII and XX, the chimps from Paradise Island play an important part in the story. Especially the copycat behavior, which can be interpreted as a wish to be (like) humans, leads to

10. Cf. the *Spirou* story *Bravo les Brothers* by André Franquin, 1965-1966, a couple of years after *Paradijseiland* (XII, 1962), in which the chimps first appear.

humor. The chimps imitate Jommeke constantly, not only when the boy works, but also when he stops working to rest (XII). As was to be expected, the chaotic effect the group of monkeys have on Jommeke's own household in XX causes many funny situations. Jommeke wants them to help with the daily chores, which ends in broken crockery, falling lamps and cupboards and a broken window. Even in the broader surroundings (the village) their presence leads to disorder and accidents. In addition to the servant role, chimps are also shown as exotic dancers with flower necklaces and grass skirts. Their subordinated position as servants and dancers could thus implicitly tap into stereotypes of non-white people in the (post)colonial times in which the stories were written (for further analysis of racial and colonial issues in Belgian comics, see Lefèvre, "Congo").

### Animals as facilitators or complicators of dramatic situations

Entertaining a cast of animal characters enables writers to use special characteristics of certain species or just the extra brains of an extra protagonist to advance or complicate the development of the story. Mostly, this influence on the story is positive in *Jommeke*, i.e. it facilitates the mission of the heroes. Because he can fly and he is small, Flip can spy (e.g. in XIII, XIX) or keep guard (XI, XVII). He finds clues or indications (XIX, XVI, XIX), is the first to explain strange phenomena (like a hidden electric wire in XIII), is a quick thinker (XIII), has good ideas and solutions (e.g. XI, XIV, XVIII), and saves the children from dangerous situations (cutting a rope in XIV and XIX). Thanks to his keen sense of smell, Pekkie often discovers things others do not know yet. He recognizes friends and enemies under their disguises (usually the villain Anatool, e.g. in IX and XII). He can also function as a guard dog (XI, XVI). He defends Filiberke and his friends against bad people (IX) or against a tiger (XVI). Flip too is prepared to fight for his friends. He bites when somebody attacks Jommeke (XIX).

Animals are often used as a means for transportation too. The most striking illustration is the dog Fifike, who is used as a horse by the countess. The count also rides a (smaller) dog. When the whole group of friends go somewhere, Flip usually gets piggyback rides from Pekkie. The monkeys in XII ride on goats.

From these examples, it should be clear that Flip is again a special case. He combines special intelligence, a traditionally human characteristic with embodied capabilities of a parrot due to his beak and wings. Interestingly, the writer makes use of the natural behavior of a parrot (flying) to enrich the character with feats that mostly exist as tropes in stories with animals, such as cutting ropes using a beak. Pekkie and other animals in the series display relatively more common behavior for pets: when Pekkie defends Filiberke and his friends, this can be seen as a normal behavior for a pet dog.

In general, the wider range of possible animal actions in a story is comparable to the superpowers of some superheroes: flying Superman and weaving Spiderman

have extra capabilities that come from the animal world after all. This does not mean that the animals in *Jommeke* are seen as characters that can solve any problem, but they are often at least part of a solution, thanks to their extra powers/capabilities.

Animal instincts and behavior can sometimes also be a nuisance for the children's adventures. Donkeys are typically stubborn (IV, XIII, XVIII), dogs are distracted by food (Pekkie eating the children's lunch in IX). They can be unpredictable too: in VIII, Flip convinces a stork to take him back to Africa because he is homesick, thus forcing the children to come after him.

### Animals as naughty children

Irrespective of their human characteristics detailed in previous paragraphs, animals are never entirely human. They use abilities that humans do not have, mostly obvious ones. Besides these talents that can come in handy for Jommeke and his friends, some prototypical animal acts are seen in a negative light: behavior that is considered naughty by parents.

Indeed, animals do things that are not tolerated from children: in II, Flip mocks Filiberke for a speaking disorder and Pekkie for his looks, in III, he bites off a cat's tail, in VI, he bites a police officer after the latter insulted him, in V, he gets drunk and ends up in prison. In XVII, he secretly eats too many nuts. When he regrets it, he is mocked and treated to a Dutch version of the moralizing proverb "a little goes a long way". The monkeys in XX are experts at pranks: they make people fall, they hit people with utensils, they drink people's beer, they get drunk, they lock up the police in their own prison.

On the one hand, this "naughty" behavior is used to instill moral lessons in the young readers as the animals are often reprimanded for their acts. On the other hand, one might argue that there is more tolerance for this kind of behavior from animals, as most of them are considered beings with limited intelligence by the human characters. The naughty behavior by animals may thus become a way of showing moral superiority of the children and by extension, man. This can also be linked to Fontbaré and Sohet (69), who claim that the faults of the hero's companions serve two aims: stressing the perfection of the hero and, at the same time, rendering these companions likeable, as their faults make them more human and close to the reader. In that sense, there would not be much difference between Captain Haddock and Flip.

### Children behaving like adults

In the previous paragraphs, we have detailed how animals are more like humans in *Jommeke* than in the physical world, by having special capabilities and displaying more human behavior. They also take up important roles in the narrative. The blurring of the categories animal and man is accompanied by the softening of

another social distinction, that between children and adults. We will argue that both blurrings are related.

In general, Jommeke resembles Apostolidès' description of Tintin as a "*surenfant*", a mixture of a child and an adult, in some ways. Although the children in this series display playful behavior, they are often more responsible and independent than adults. Their competences and knowledge, certainly Jommeke's, exceed not only those usually expected from children, but also those usually linked with adults.

Jommeke and his friends may sometimes miss physical strength, although the purple pills in IV make them as strong as adults, their real force is on the mental plane. This is illustrated best in XXV, *Kinderen baas*, in which Jommeke realizes that children have to take overpower in order to be able to take care of their parents, who have lost part of their intellect (due to an experimental potion of wisdom for children). "Our parents will have to listen to us", he announces. The children also see themselves taking up the educational role in a household in other stories. In VI, they take care of a baby, but already in II, Jommeke is proud of his merits as Flip's educator. He scolds Flip for drinking alcohol in V and gives moral lessons in VII. When he threatens with violence against Pekkie, this should also be seen as part of educational practice at the time, although the police intervene to stop Jommeke. Already in IX, Jommeke takes on his parents as he tells them to be good while he is away.

The traveling the children do on their own is a good indication of their independence. As soon as XII, Jommeke's parents complain that when they give him permission to go on a trip with Filiberke, they usually see him back six months later. In XVII, Jommeke and his friends seem to be on a beach holiday of their own, as no parents are in sight while they are swimming or sunbathing.

Jommeke is clearly more heroic than his adult friends. When Jommeke and Gobelijn are both tied to a stick by members of an undiscovered primitive community, Jommeke keeps his calm while the professor is weeping. His intelligence is superior in stories other than XXV as well. While his parents are busy doing simple things, like trying to make their son come to the dinner table when it's time to eat, the latter is proving to be a real inventor in *De straalvogel* (X). His intelligence is only topped by Gobelijn's, but Jommeke compensates for a little less inventor spirit by not having Gobelijn's distractedness and emotional dependence. His behavior is usually exemplary, as he has to be a moral leader to the readers. After Jommeke's honoring by the mayor in IX, he returns home to continue cleaning the attic. In spite of his unusual capacities, he stays with his feet firmly on the ground and keeps doing the things that a good child is supposed to do. This "good child behavior" is so essential that it is made explicit several times. In II, one of the twin girls says: "He is too good to hurt his parents this much" and in XV, after being yelled at, Jommeke himself qualifies his relationship with his father in this way:

"He likes teasing me, but I can stand it. My father is a fantastic guy." This moral and responsible side is complemented with more classic childish behavior, like whining for gifts. In II, Jommeke wants a monkey or a dog as a pet, in V, he keeps on asking for a recorder to play on until he finally gets it.

The flipside of children and especially Jommeke displaying capacities and responsible behavior usually associated with adults is that grown-ups regularly seem to have lost some of their intelligence or their responsibility. Jommeke's parents Theofiel and Marie display some typical characteristics associated with parents in other stories for children. They are concerned about Jommeke's whereabouts as any parent would be with an adventurous son like Jommeke. Moreover, Marie never hesitates to reprimand both her husband and Jommeke when they do not respect the order or neatness of the household.

But Theofiel, Marie and other adults also show characteristics that are seen less often in representations of adults in books for children. When Jommeke's family goes camping in IV, the parents cannot stand the cold and go back home, while the children stay in the tent. In the same album, professor Gobelijn cries because he did not get the present he wanted from Saint-Nicolas. The utter fact that Saint-Nicolas still brings him presents (traditionally, a privilege reserved in Belgium for young children), is laconically explained by Gobelijn himself: "Maybe because I am still small". In VII, an unknown adult pops up regularly with a dummy in his mouth, as if he were a baby. Although it turns out at the end that he only did this to please the cartoonist, this is again an instance of an adult behaving as if he were a child.

Not only the behavior of adult characters can be very much like children's, but (some) grown-ups also lack certain capacities. When Gobelijn is on his own in the Southern American jungle in XVI, he is unable to provide for his own food, while Jommeke and his friends turn a desert island into a paradise with food aplenty in XII.

More importantly, only adults can be villains in *Jommeke*. This is one way of presenting children as superior to adults. Violence is often cartoony. Nobody gets killed, but Jommeke does get kidnapped and tortured by villains in the stories. To reinforce the children's superiority, the villains are of the more dumb than mean type. When the adult villain Anatool is attacked by Pekkie in IX, he calls for his mother. In the same story, he is also afraid of the Miekes, because "women spoil everything".

As we have seen, the belittling of adult characters and the smartening up of the children protagonists blurs the distinction between adults and children in *Jommeke*. The distinction does not disappear completely though. One can rather claim that the categories are more similar in *Jommeke* than they tended to be in Flemish society when the stories were written. The explicit way in which the

category boundaries between "adult" and "child" are softened, is remarkable, as it has repercussions on the relationship between animal and man in this series.

## Conclusion

Like Tintin and many other youthful heroes in comics, Jommeke is a *surenfant*, meaning that he is a child with more talents and capabilities than most children. He is a mini-adult, giving the good example to his friends and to the reader. Although his friends are more typical children, they too are especially clever and courageous. The presence of a *surenfant* in comics is often echoed by the proximity of adults who are less controlled and responsible than one would expect: e.g. Haddock and Calculus in *Tintin*. In *Jommeke*, all adults can display typical behavior of children every now and then. The smarter they are (Gobelijn), the more childish their behavior is. In this sense, the series establishes an equivalence between children and adults that young readers would certainly appreciate, since in their lives, certainly in the fifties and sixties, adults mostly would have more knowledge and capabilities, establishing a power relationship that strongly affects education.

Arguably, this knowing and willing transgression of the frontier between the categories "child" and "adult" is extended to selected animals, such as the parrot Flip. Endowed with the capacity of speech, a wide array of man-like emotions and strong moral values, this animal often seems to forget that he is not human. Human protagonists often treat him and other animals remarkably equal to themselves as well. The cruelty Flip is confronted with nevertheless continues the idea of a difference between man and animal, just like adults can still exercise power over children in spite of the softening of the distinctions between the categories resulting from the constellation with a *surenfant* and child-like adults.

It would therefore be exaggerated to claim complete equality between adult, child and animal in *Jommeke*, but in this fictional world, the boundaries between the categories are less clear than in the actual Flanders in the fifties and sixties. In comparison, *Peanuts*, as a popular comic strip from the same period in the U.S., is built on a strict separation of the three categories. There too, the children take centre stage, but adults stay out of the picture and the communication with animals is almost non-existent. This shows that the fictional world of *Jommeke* is not a staple of the comic strips of the time, but a story realm of its own, with its own telling peculiarities.

Instead of the traditional power relations with adults dominating children and man dominating animal, *Jommeke* has worked towards a cautious equivalence between the three categories that corresponds better with the perceived emotional world of young children than that of adults. Kellert (1985) found that American children from a very young age onwards display a strong emotional attachment to individual animals and have a tendency to anthropomorphize them. This tendency becomes apparent between the ages of 6 and 9 years old, precisely the age of the

intended readership of *Jommeke*. Although Kellert equally indicates that this attitude towards pets is not significantly different from the position of adults, he adds that society considers children as more emotionally attached to animals than they actually are, which may have inspired Jef Nys to instill his comics series with a special, important role for animals. Nys seems to have had a desire to create a fictional world that would please young readers by giving young protagonists more responsibility, breaking the adults' hegemony and making the relationship between man and animal more harmonious.

Table: List of *Jommeke* albums by Jef Nys used for this chapter, all first published in the Flemish daily *Het Volk* with dates taken from De Laet (1982, 35-36) and Matla (1997, 307)

| Number | Original title | English translation | Start in daily | End in daily | First album |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I | **Jacht op een voetbal** | The Chase for a Football | Nov 1, 1958 | March 7, 1959 | 1959 |
| II | **De Zingende Aap** | The Singing Monkey | April 9, 1959 | August 3, 1959 | 1959 |
| III | **De Koningin van Onderland** | The Queen of Undercountry | August 7, 1959 | Nov 30, 1959 | 1959 |
| IV | **Purpere Pillen** | Purple Pills | Dec 4, 1959 | March 29, 1960 | 1960 |
| V | **Muzikale Bella** | Musical Bella | April 4, 1960 | July 28, 1960 | 1960 |
| VI | **Het Hemelhuis** | The Heavenly House | August 2, 1960 | Nov 14, 1960 | 1960 |
| VII | **De Zwarte Bomma** | Black Bomma | Nov 18, 1960 | March 14, 1961 | 1961 |
| VIII | **De Ooievaar van Begonia** | Begonia's Stork | March 18, 1961 | July 12, 1961 | 1961 |
| IX | **De schildpaddenschat** | The Turtle Treasure | July 17, 1961 | Nov 9, 1961 | 1961 |
| X | **De straalvogel** | The Ray Bird | Nov 14, 1961 | Feb 28, 1962 | 1962 |
| XI | **De zonnemummie** | The Mummy of the Sun | March 5, 1962 | June 28, 1962 | 1962 |
| XII | **Paradijseiland** | Paradise Island | July 2, 1962 | Oct 25, 1962 | 1962 |
| XIII | **Het Jampuddingspook** | The Jam Pudding Ghost | Oct 29, 1962 | Feb 2, 1963 | 1963 |
| XIV | **Op heksenjacht** | On Witch Hunt | June 3, 1963 | May 30, 1963 | 1963 |
| XV | **Het staartendorp** | The Tail Village | June 3, 1963 | Sept 7, 1963 | 1963 |
| XVI | **De Gouden Jaguar** | The Golden Jaguar | Sept 9, 1963 | Dec 14, 1963 | 1964 |
| XVII | **Diep in de put** | Deep in the Pit | Dec 16, 1963 | April 2, 1964 | 1964 |
| XVIII | **Met Fifi op reis** | Traveling with Fifi | April 3, 1964 | July 8, 1964 | 1964 |
| XIX | **Wie zoekt die vindt** | Seek and Ye Shall Find | July 13, 1964 | Oct 20, 1964 | 1964 |
| XX | **Apen in huis** | Monkeys At Home | Oct 21, 1964 | Feb 8, 1965 | 1965 |
| XXV | **Kinderen baas** | Children Boss | Feb 7, 1966 | May 24, 1966 | 1966 |
| XXXVII | **Lieve Choco** | Sweet Choco | April 14, 1969 | Aug 2-3, 1969 | 1969 |

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# Hergé's Animal Sidekicks:
## The Adventures of Snowy and Jocko

Jennifer Marchant*

Although Hergé's work has been the subject of many books and journal articles, there has been relatively little focus (from Anglophone scholars, at least) on his animal sidekicks, Snowy and Jocko. Those scholars that do explore sidekicks give most of their attention to Snowy, Tintin's canine companion. Comics sidekicks, however, often resonate powerfully with readers.[1] Moreover, the nature and implications of the relationship between the sidekicks and the child protagonists remain underexplored. In this essay, I want to discuss how Hergé's sidekicks emphasize the protagonists' roles as colonizers of animals, younger children, and ethnic Others. Specifically, Tintin's relationship with Snowy heightens Tintin's paradoxical role as mature adult/eternal child, while Jo and Zette's relationship with Jocko describes colonization as a benevolent process for ethnic Others. However, the bulk of my essay explores Jocko and his relationship with Jo and Zette. I have two reasons for doing this. Firstly, as Jean-Marie Apostolidès observes, "Hergé's oeuvre forms a whole. Its power and richness cannot be fully appreciated without first comparing the cycle of *Tintin* to that of *Jo and Zette*" (46). Secondly, the Jo and Zette books reveal how Hergé revised a pre-existing character and storyline, giving us a glimpse into how he took part in ongoing cultural conversations about the relationship between humans and nonhuman, civilized and primitive, colonizers and colonized. What separates the groups? How do colonizers' descriptions of the colonized justify/question their domination? What role do children play in colonization?

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1. For example, Alain Saint-Ogan, a French artist whom Hergé greatly admired, created one such sidekick, Alfred the penguin (Assouline, 30). Alfred's popularity rivaled that of his human co-stars: Charles Lindbergh carried a toy Alfred with him on his transatlantic flight and one of the awards at the Angoulême comic festival was named "the Alfred" (*Lambiek Comiclopedia*).

## Snowy as White Man

In 1928, Abbot Norbert Wallez, publisher of *Le Vingtième Siècle* (and Hergé's father-in-law), noticed a couple of characters in one of Hergé's comic strips: a polite little boy and his white dog. He suggested that Hergé "use these two characters as the protagonists in a new story, the plot of which he would write himself" (Peeters 33). These characters would be the basis of Tintin, boy reporter, and Snowy, his faithful fox terrier. Snowy is a complex character that serves more than one function in the books. For example, Apostolidès discusses Snowy as Tintin's "opposite and complementary" at the same time ("Hergé" 48), and Pierre Assouline describes Snowy as "a real character" with strengths and weaknesses (21). Snowy also functions as a flawed character with whom readers, especially the youngest ones, can identify, as opposed to the almost perfect Tintin (Apostolidès, "Hergé", 49). In this section, however, I want to pursue Dipayan Mukherjee's claim that tame animals in the series "generally take over the characteristics of their owners" (216). Of particular interest for my purposes here, Snowy echoes Tintin's status as white European.[2]

Not only is Snowy literally white in color, but he identifies himself as ethnically white. In one adventure, he greets some dogs belonging to Native Americans: "OK, so I'm a paleface… have you redskins ever seen one before?" (Hergé, *America,* 16). Philippe Met also suggests that Snowy is meant to be seen as ethnically white. He observes that, in *Tintin in the Congo*, Snowy is continually attacked by African wildlife, and, in particular, these animals seem to focus on Snowy's tail. Met concludes that Snowy "can thus be seen as a slightly displaced figure of the white man being castrated and cannibalized by feral, flesh-eating beasts which themselves constitute a homologous displaced image—that of an alien, savage anthrophagous primitive people" (135-136). But, if Snowy represents the fears of white colonists, he also stands for their mission of punishing and reforming savages. When Tintin is attacked by a lion, Snowy leaps to the rescue, biting off the end of the lion's tail, "symbolically and metonymically [depraving it] of its virility and regality" (Met 134). Now the lion is terrified of Snowy, who takes the opportunity to lay down the law: "And don't you ever be wicked again!… If you are, I shan't hesitate to remove the rest of your tail!" (Hergé, *Congo*, 24). After Tintin and Snowy leave the Congo, we see Congolese dogs speaking admiringly of Snowy, while the humans prostrate themselves before a Tintin idol (62). (It's worth noting that the American and Congolese dogs are brown or grey, emphasizing their connections with non-white ethnic groups.) Although this scene is probably meant to be humorous, it emphasizes the Africans' "primitive" nature. Tintin and Snowy's intelligence and bravery, their ability to see through a manipulative witch

2. It may be significant that, though there is some debate about exactly when fox terriers emerged as a distinct breed (speculation ranges from middle of the eighteenth century to late in the nineteenth), there is no doubt they originate from England, one of the countries Hergé seems to have considered civilized, and one well-known for its imperialism.

doctor, and their knowledge of technology make them superhuman to the foolish, cowardly Africans.

But, if Snowy is colonizer, he is also colonized, both as animal and as child-figure: he is an anthropomorphized character, known by a human-imposed name, speaking and thinking in human language, and emanating tears and sweat drops. Rather than allow us to create the "significant otherness" that "cobbles together non-harmonious agencies and ways of living that are accountable both to their disparate inherited histories and to their barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures" (Haraway 7), such anthropomorphization merely ignores important species differences. Tintin also takes the role of animal-colonizer in ways many pet owners are familiar with: he forces an indignant Snowy to wear a collar and leash *(Flight 714,* 67-72) and punishes him for following natural dog-instincts such as chasing cats and looking for bones (see, for example, *The Seven Crystal Balls,* 71; and *The Black Island,* 78).

Human-like Snowy also "represents Tintin's younger brother, who imitates the elder and to whom Tintin reveals the secrets of the universe… He behaves less like a typical animal and more like a somewhat uneducated and awkward human being" (Apostolidès, *Metamorphoses*, 8). And, just as imperialist countries take it on themselves to control and "civilize" "primitive" ones, so adults try to instill their own values into children. As M. Daphne Kutzer notes, "Children are treated as colonial subjects of adult intentions, just as colonial subjects were treated as children by adult imperialists" (38). In the books, Tintin, the parent figure, is nearly always right, and Snowy, the child, ignores him at his peril. When he disregards Tintin's order to stay close, complaining, "He doesn't seem to realize I'm grown up! … What does he take me for? Granny's little lap-dog?", he immediately falls into a crevasse (Hergé, *Explorers*, 165). Naturally, he has to be rescued by Tintin.

As parent, Tintin also works to shape and enforce Snowy's moral code. While he often tries to guide humans in matters of right and wrong, he has more physical control over Snowy. When Captain Haddock gets drunk, Tintin threatens to clap him in irons, but never does it (Hergé, *Explorers*, 141). However, when *Snowy* gets drunk, Tintin hoists him up and spanks him (Hergé, *Island*, 106). On one occasion, when Snowy is in a moral dilemma, he has a vision of an angry Tintin brandishing lightning bolts if he makes the wrong decision (Hergé, *Scepter*, 188). In *Tintin in Tibet,* Snowy accidentally laps up whisky and then has a vision of a white angel and a red devil (149). Although they resemble Snowy in having dog-heads, they stand upright and have hands: the angel wears a flowing pastel blue robe while the devil is nude.[3] While such figures are often used in comics to express conflict between

3. Remembering the Garden of Eden story in the Bible, the clothed angel may be connected with Adam and Eve's shame when they eat the forbidden fruit of knowledge, which gives them a sense of right and wrong. They realize for the first time they are naked, and cover themselves with fig leaves (*New Oxford Annotated Bible,* Gen. 3.5-7). The devil-Snowy, on the other hand, has no morality, and no shame.

a person's good and bad sides, in this case there is added significance. The ability to recognize and choose between "right" and "wrong" is commonly supposed to be uniquely human (see, for example Ayala 9020; Bekoff 34; Korsgaard 118). The fact that both Snowy's "angel" and "devil" are part-human, part-dog suggests that Snowy is in the process of moral evolution, of becoming more civilized/human/adult.[4] "In the process" is significant here: Hergé makes it clear that Snowy has a way to go before he can be fully morally responsible. In spite of Tintin's lectures, Snowy continues to make wrong decisions. In the last completed album in the series, he gets drunk on some spilled whisky and Tintin pronounces him "hopeless" (Hergé, *Picaros*, 134).

Eric L. Tribunella observes that a common motif in children's literature is that the development of a close relationship between a child protagonist and an animal serves two functions. Firstly, the animal gives the protagonist "practice" in such adult relationships as marriage and parenting (160, 162). The child forges a trusting, physically and emotionally intimate bond in which s/he is responsible for most of the decisions (if not all). Tintin's relationship with Snowy can be seen as serving these functions. In his physical affection for Snowy, expressed through hugs, sharing a bed, accepting tongue-licks, and dancing with him, Tintin safely channels his sexuality. In caring for and educating Snowy as a parent, Tintin proves his maturity and responsibility. Tintin's deep affection for Snowy also reveals his more vulnerable, emotional side, which is a common function for sidekicks (see, for example, Grossack). One of the few occasions on which Tintin sheds tears is when he thinks Snowy has been murdered (*Flight 714*, 89).

A second motif Tribunella discusses is that the child character must give up the beloved animal "as a way of (re)forming social subjects that are properly gendered and sexualized" (152). He (or she) accepts that the huge loss of the animal is part of being a man/woman and invests his/her love in an appropriate human partner. I would like to suggest the *continued* presence of the animal sidekick might serve the opposite purpose: it can reassure readers that, though the protagonist may behave as an adult, s/he remains young. Snowy's constant presence and Tintin's high value for him suggests he will remain a "resolutely asexual" boy whose lack of family gives him complete freedom (Peeters 15).

In this case, Tintin's permanent liminal status may be even further enhanced by Snowy's ability to bridge the gap between "primitive" or "childlike" non-western cultures and "rational" European culture. When Tintin has been injured on a snowy mountain, Snowy is the one that goes to fetch help from a Tibetan monastery, in which monks have visions and levitate. When Captain Haddock

4. Hergé seems a bit ambivalent about whether this transformation is desirable. The angel exclaims, "You unhappy creature! It was whisky!…Alcohol! Dragging an animal down to the level of man!" (149). Snowy is losing his primal innocence, but, arguably, this gives him more agency in the human world.

sees this, his immediate reaction is, "Impossible! There must be a catch to it!" (*Tibet* 180), suggesting that he thinks everything should be explainable in terms of Western science. But, as the Grand Abbott explains, "many things occur here in Tibet which seem unbelievable to you men of the West" (Hergé, *Tibet*, 181). When Tintin is held prisoner by Incas, Snowy calls his attention to the (Western) newspaper article that will save their lives (Hergé, *Prisoners*, 182). In *Tintin and the Picaros,* Tintin has to convince the self-indulgent South American soldiers to eat the drugged stew that will cure them of drinking. When the soldiers spot Snowy, one says, "There's the dog… He belongs to the gringos. I'm going to give him some of that vitaminized stew… If he eats it, we will too." Ordered by Tintin, Snowy eats the stew and saves the revolution for the side backed by Tintin (180).

## Jocko, Hergé's Other Sidekick

Late in 1935, the editors of *Cœurs Vaillants,* the publication that had serial rights to Tintin in France, suggested that Hergé create another series, this one more geared for Catholic children: "They liked Tintin well enough, except that he had no family and didn't go to school. They wanted a series whose hero had a mother and a father, a little sister or brother, and household pets, a dog or a cat" (Assouline 26). So, in 1936, Hergé launched *The Adventures of Jo, Zette, and Jocko*, "the only series in which Hergé animated an entire French family" (Assouline 57).[5] Hergé may have created a complete family, but, if what the editors wanted was a stereotypical middle-class family, with the child protagonist under control of parents and teachers, they didn't get it. For one thing, although twins Jo and Zette Legrand do have parents, they are often separated from them and thus do much of their adventuring with only each other and their animal sidekick. In effect, they often occupy Tintin's adult-free status.[6] Neither do the children go to school or seem to concern themselves with study. Moreover, rather than giving them a dog or cat, Hergé gave them a pet "monkey", a chimpanzee-like primate called Jocko. As with *Tintin*, the series started as a weekly comic strip, and several adventures (*Stratoship H.22, Secret Ray,* and *Cobras)* were later colored and published in book form.

In some ways, Jocko seems similar to Snowy in that he reflects his human owners. He joins Jo and Zette in skiing, throwing snowballs, and playing pirates. He is also similar to the children in being generally good-natured. In *The Valley of the Cobras,* the Maharajah of Gopal tries to have the children and Jocko whipped because they pass him on their skis (1-3). However, when he tries to

5. Since earlier Hergé protagonists also have adult relatives (I'd like to thank Pascal Lefèvre for pointing this out), Assouline may mean that the family in *Jo, Zette, and Jocko* is the traditional unit of two married, heterosexual parents and their biological children.

6. In an interview, Hergé said, "[Tintin] never had any parents. They would be too much in the way. He would have to ask permission to go out each time. We would never have been done with all that" (qtd. in Apostolidès, *Metamorphoses*, 286, n. 7).

make amends, Jo, Zette, and Jocko are quick to forgive, and all four happily play trains together (17). In the same book, Jo, Zette, and Jocko show that they are all occasionally disobedient: Jo and Zette pursue a villain, ignoring their mother's calls (39), while Jocko chases a mongoose, in spite of Jo's attempts to stop him (1989, 49). As Tribunella might have predicted, he also allows his owners to prove their competence as parents, and he hugs them and sleeps on their beds, perhaps developing their nascent sexuality.

However, in at least one way Jocko's relationship with his family is different from Snowy's rapport with Tintin: if Snowy is colonized as animal and child, Jocko is colonized as animal, child, *and* ethnic Other. In *Visions of Caliban: On Chimpanzees and People,* Dale Peterson and Jane Goodall contend that there is a significant difference between people that keep domestic animals as pets and people that keep chimpanzees (and, by extension, any exotic animal). While people mainly have domestic pets "for companionship and affection", "chimpanzee owners often use their apes to help sustain personal themes or fantasies" (184). The theme of civilizing colonization appears in the Legrands' relationships to human ethnic Others, suggesting it is significant to them. For example, in *The Valley of the Cobras,* Monsieur Legrand spanks the adult, but childish Maharajah "to teach [him] some manners!" (16). Far from taking offense, the Maharajah immediately reforms, humbly begging Monsieur to come to India to design a bridge (18). In *Le "Manitoba" ne répond plus,* a group of cannibals become "quite friendly and nice" after being terrified by Jo and Zette's European technology (52, my translation).

Amanda M. Brian notes that Lothar Meggendorfer, whose books continued to be widely popular in Europe during the 1930s, made a distinction between domestic animals and "exotic" animals, "those nonnative to Europe and perceived as wild by his audience, like apes, elephants, and lions" (259). While domestic animal characters were meant to teach readers "obedience and affection," the exotic animals "primarily from Africa, were alternatively domesticated, caged, or killed, depending on their perceived abilities to become civilized" (259). She concludes that "only by taking wild animals out of Africa, as [Meggendorfer's human characters] did, could they be safely managed in civilized Europe" (270). Hergé, it seems, had a similar assumption.

In *Tintin in the Congo*—revised in 1946, ten years after the first creation of Jocko—we get a sense of how Hergé perceived wild "Jockos". In this album, a primate that resembles Jocko kidnaps Snowy. Tintin, disguised as another "monkey", is able to trade his pith helmet for his dog. But then the monkey demands Tintin's gun. "Not on your life!" says Tintin, who then adds "Anyway, this hat belongs to me!". After he snatches the helmet back, the monkey attempts to grab the gun, and Tintin says, "Take your paws off me!… D'you think I'm going to stand for this?" (18). The white fox terrier, the pith helmet, and the gun are all associated with Tintin's status as a "civilized" white European (Met 139). Although his anxiety when the monkey seizes Snowy could be at least partially because Tintin is attached

to Snowy as a companion, his outrage about the hat and gun suggests that he does not want the African/monkey to cross the boundary into European/human. Later, we find that his fear may be well-founded: Tintin tries to shoot an elephant, but only succeeds in wounding the animal. A monkey grabs his gun, fires, and hits the elephant squarely in the head, instantly killing it (41). The incident suggests that, given the opportunity, both Africans and primates may be rebellious and deadly.

In contrast, the Legrands' Jocko can be seen as a success story for European "civilization". It's notable that Hergé elides some of the hard facts about primates as pets. Peterson and Goodall observe that "[u]nlike our favored domestic animals, great apes are not easy to dominate and manipulate … They are powerful. They are intelligent and capable of deceit. And they don't particularly like to be dominated or manipulated" (145). According to Frans de Waal, lead biologist at the Yerkes National Primate Research Center, "A chimp in your home is like a time bomb. It may go off for a reason that we may never understand. I don't know any chimp relationship that has been harmonious. Usually these animals end up in a cage. They cannot be controlled". Yet, Jocko is never aggressive towards anyone except villains trying to harm his family. Even then, though these end up bruised and bedraggled, they don't suffer the kind of serious damage chimpanzees (or any large primate) is capable of—no fingers bitten off, no torn faces.

In her examination of imperialism in British children's fiction, Kutzer describes two common stereotypes regarding indigenous people: the noble savage and the humorous savage. Jocko seems to be an animal-version combining both patterns. Noble savages "tend to be more European in physiognomy than their fellow savage natives", they want to improve the lives of their people, "they are strong and silent, but respected by their fellow natives, and, significantly, by Europeans" (7). Moreover, noble savages don't bother with clothes or personal hygiene, "live closely with animals", and "are crafty and have skills that allow them to win over competitors. The appeal of the noble savage is a romantic appeal; the noble savage escapes the constraints of civilization, but retains some of the essential moral characteristics of the civilized" (7-8).

Jocko seldom wears any clothes, and his strength and agility in scaling walls and trees emphasize his freedom from such constraints. He is notably more "European" in looks than the black people that appear in the series. Like Jo, Zette, and the other Europeans, he has thin lips and dots for eyes, while people of color have hugely exaggerated lips and popping eyes. On more than one occasion, Jocko's jungle survival skills save the children and in two instances he acts as a leader to wild monkeys. He is intelligent and resourceful in India (when he is the only one to realize their native guide is up to no good and gets wild monkeys to save Jo from cobras [*Cobras*]), and in a tropical island inhabited by black people (when he leads wild monkeys in rescuing Jo and Zette from being cannibalized [*Le "Manitoba"*]). In New York, when Zette has been kidnapped, Jocko's animal-like abilities stand him in good stead, even though he's far from the jungle. First he follows Zette's

scent (*New York*). After he recognizes and attacks one of the kidnappers, he bites the man, agilely climbs up and down a drainpipe in the pursuit, and finally jumps onto the escape car's rear bumper.

But India, much of the tropics, and America are ones that Hergé seems to have considered "uncivilized" on some level. The Indian people are childlike in their superstitions (which are debunked by the French family) and their shameless greed. The cannibals—besides being cannibals—are easily intimidated by European technology (they bow in worship before a submarine vehicle). And America seems full of gangsters and greedy capitalists, eager to exploit others. Even the law-abiding citizens have barbaric tendencies, as seen when a worker in a meat plant mentions that his job is "bringing in the dogs and cats and rats they use to make salami" (*America* 54). According to Tintinologist Michael Farr, "The reader comes away from Tintin's first three adventures, to Russia, Africa, and America, with the firm conviction that there is no place like home [Europe]" (33). I think this applies equally to the Jo, Zette, and Jocko books.

Jocko does not completely fit Kutzer's description of the noble savage. Although he is respected by his fellow monkeys, the Legrands seem to regard him with affectionate tolerance and amusement, rather than respect. This is because he also embodies qualities of the other native stereotype Kutzer discusses, the "humorous savage". While this character may be intelligent and well-educated, s/he can never quite fit with the white colonizers, and much of the humor "is linked to his impossible attempts to be part of the colonizing class, not a part of colonized Others to which he belongs" (18). We see this aspect of Jocko most strongly when the family is in Europe and he decides to play detective, as he has seen Jo and Zette do.

In *Mr. Pump's Legacy,* Zette has been kidnapped (again), and Jocko decides to find her (Hergé, *Le "Manitoba"*, 26-34). Although his attempts to do this are successful in America, they are ridiculous in France, perhaps because, instead of using his animal abilities, he tries to act like a human. First, he tosses a match in the air, and follows the direction in which it points—until he gets beaten up by a stray cat. He then follows a shooting star, and finally tries spinning himself in a circle with his eyes shut. While doing this, he's hit by a car. It turns out that Zette, who has freed herself, is in the car, and rescues Jocko. But, when she joins her family, Jocko boasts, "It was me. I found her!" (Hergé, *Le "Manitoba"*, 25-27). This episode suggests that, while Jocko may be good at surviving in primitive societies, he *needs* human protection and guidance to function in a civilized and technologically advanced setting. It is fitting that, though Jo and Zette are grateful when Jocko rescues them, they also refer to him as "silly" (*Cobras* 24). If, as Met suggests, Snowy's coat color and the attacks on his tail symbolize a white man's fear of castration by the primitive Other, Jocko's black fur and lack of tail may suggest a safely disempowered black man incapable of navigating through Western civilization.

The Legrands are unique among Hergé's characters in having a pet "monkey". Yet, contemporary European readers would have been aware of "Jocko" as both a species name and as a stock character with a long history—and this history offers further insight into the Legrands' relationship with Jocko. Count de Buffon's *Histoire naturelle,* published in the second half of the eighteenth century, includes a picture of an ape standing upright and leaning on a stick. Buffon describes the animal's capacity to imitate humans, even to the point of "conducting himself like a well-mannered [gentleman]" at a tea party (qtd. in Snigurowicz 51). According to Amy Hughes, "le jocko", the term Buffon used for the animal,

> was widely adopted and disseminated by other naturalists and *Histoire naturelle* profoundly influenced western understandings of animals, especially the uncanny similarities between men and apes. It also inspired both creative writers and dramatists. In the early nineteenth century, anthropomorphized primates began appearing in fiction and performance throughout Europe (16).

One of the most popular of these texts was *Jocko, anecdote détachée des lettres inédites sur l'instinct des animaux* [*Jocko, an anecdote from the unpublished letters on the animal extinct*] (1824) by Charles de Pougens, in which a European colonialist is adopted by a loving, noble, and self-sacrificing orangutan. By the mid-nineteenth century, versions of the affectionate and helpful ape had appeared in any number of plays, dances, minstrel turns, and freak-shows (Hughes 18). According to Goodall, "In show business, Jocko was an old friend and familiar, who might stage his return in any guise and be confident of a warm reception" (57).[7]

Jocko undergoes various metamorphoses in different productions: sometimes female, sometimes male, sometimes earnest and sometimes mischievous. However, at least one quality remains consistent: Jocko is grateful to her/his European owner for having rescued her/him, and devotes her/himself to him. Diana Snigurowicz suggests that a large part of Jocko's appeal was that s/he reassured the nineteenth-century audience about the Great Chain of Being—the belief that God had not only created all life, but a "natural order" of hierarchy. Jocko's devotion to her/his owner could not only justify human superiority over other animals, but by extension, European imperialism and exploitation of people of color: "As the plot of *Jocko* illustrated, the figures of the "Good/Bad Savage" and the "Good/Bad Servant" could be metaphorically transposed onto the figure of the "Good/Bad Monkey" (51). Matthew G. Stannard suggests that, even up to World War II, some Belgian textbooks taught young readers that Belgian presence ("civilized, solid, and secure") was necessary to advance the Congolese people "who supposedly were

7. I do not know if Hergé was aware of this, but the black lawn jockeys at one time popular in the U.S. were known as "jockos". Supposedly created and named by George Washington to commemorate a faithful slave boy named "Jocko", the figures generally suggested nostalgia for the era of slavery (although on at least one occasion, a lawn jockey statue was used as a signpost for escaping slaves) (Kunkle).

cannibals when the Belgians arrived and still were *barbares* (barbarians), *sauvages* (savages), and *primitives* (primitives) according to colonialists and even many missionaries" (154). A 1958 Belgian educational film connects African pygmies with chimpanzees, while another in the same year intersperses pictures of people between segments about the flora and fauna (232-233), suggesting that the people are just part of the natural world.

It seems likely, then, that Hergé's contemporary European readers approached a fictional primate named Jocko with various expectations: Jocko would be affectionate, loyal, and properly humble in his relationship with his European master. Such a portrayal of a nonhuman primate might help reinforce and justify the widespread perception of African people as inferior to Europeans, dependent upon them for protection and guidance. Certainly, Hergé himself admitted that, during the 1930s, he shared the common European perception of Africans: "I only knew things about these countries that people said at the time: 'Africans were great big children… Thank goodness for them that we were there!' Etc. And I portrayed these Africans according to such criteria, in the purely paternalistic spirit which existed then in Belgium" (qtd. in Farr 22).

Such an association between nonhuman primates and African people in Hergé's work is further supported by similarities in the way he drew and characterized both parties. Rachael Langford charges Hergé with making African people resemble the generic primate that appears in *Tintin in the Congo*, "in terms of colouring, depiction of physiogamy and its reliance on gesture to communicate" (85). In *Le "Manitoba" ne répond plus,* the black people still resemble Hergé's Congolese primates: both have staring, white-rimmed eyes and protruding faces. However, Jocko and the wild chimpanzees he befriends look halfway between these people and Europeans in physiology. Their muzzles stick out a bit, but not to the extent of the black people's lips, and their eyes are represented as black dots—as are Jo's, Zette's and those of the other Europeans. Jocko's speech, too, is part-way between that of the Africans and that of the Europeans. The Africans use pidgin French. For example, Coco, Tintin's "boy", tells him about a white villain: "White mister come and beat little black boy… Coco, he afraid" (Hergé, *Congo*, 14). When Jocko is frightened, he is like Coco in his helpless self-pity and reference to himself in third person. Marooned on an iceberg, he laments, "Jo!… Zette! Jocko is hungry!…Jocko is starving to death!" (Hergé, *New York*, 16). In contrast, Snowy always refers to himself in the first person. Still, Jocko maintains correct use of verbs and tense, suggesting his superiority to the Africans. It's as if Hergé has shifted chimpanzees further up the traditional evolutionary ladder that placed white humans at the top, while leaving people of color in the same place he had them in his first books.

Mukherjee describes how *The Black Island* shows "the process of domestication" via Ranko, the gorilla originally belonging to the villains, who use him to hunt and attack intruders. However, after "a burlesque turn of events, the natural violence

of the animal is not only completely domesticated but also the animal is made to look pathetic with a leg broken." The story ends with Ranko becoming "a good "pet" within the walls of a European zoo" (217), and bidding a tearful farewell to Tintin, his enemy turned rescuer and friend. At the point the Jo, Zette, and Jocko books start, the Legrands seem to already consider Jocko a more or less good pet. He is occasionally disobedient, but never violent (except to the Legrands' enemies). However, in *L'Éruption du Karamako,* Jocko gets a taste of what it's like to be "tamed".

Jocko has witnessed Zette's kidnapping and tries to lead the police to find her. But when he fails, they call an animal control officer. When he struggles, one of the men threatens, "If it continues, I'll take it down!" (Hergé, *L'Éruption*, 27, my translation). Jocko ends up in a cage marked "Dangerous Animal", where he stays until "adopted" by an organ grinder, who stuffs him into a duffle bag and carries him off to a broken-down hovel. The next scenes show a miserable-looking Jocko, dressed in a red soldier-boy jacket and hat, holding his new master's collection cup to a couple of children, while the man plays the organ (Hergé, *L'Éruption*, 28). The episode reminds Jocko and the readers that, without the protection of the Legrands, he is subject to the restraints and humiliations imposed on captive wild animals. He becomes an object for human entertainment or use, with the threat of physical violence and/or confinement if he doesn't cooperate.

Perhaps because Jo and Zette are prepubescent, Hergé seems to put less emphasis on their relationship with Jocko than he does on the Tintin-Snowy relationship. Jo and Zette's sidekick allows them to prove their maturity and responsibility as caretakers, but they have less need to demonstrate that they will never grow up. Tintin, on the other hand, "has just gone through puberty" (Apostolidès, *Metamorphoses*, 47) and so Hergé relies heavily on Snowy to mark Tintin as both mature *and* eternally youthful. Thus, although the twins are clearly attached to Jocko, they don't seem to value him as highly as Tintin does Snowy; they never risk their lives for Jocko, as Tintin does for Snowy. Although grieved when he is lost in an Antarctic storm, they agree that they can't take the time to find him, and are quite cheerful two days later, when they are taken to radio their parents (Hergé, *New York,* 15-21).

## Snowy's revenge and Jocko's voice

It is impossible to deny the strong current of imperialism and racism throughout Hergé's books. However, it is only fair to acknowledge that he also tries to challenge this stance (Roy) and that the *Tintin* albums reflect their times and context (*Tintin* started in a very Catholic magazine for children before moving on to the magazine, *Tintin*, in 1946). In *The Blue Lotus,* Tintin debunks stereotypes the "stupid Europeans" have about the Chinese (173). In *Tintin in America,* he criticizes the white exploitation of American Indians. While I do not think these

gestures mean we should disregard the imperialist ideology discernible in *Tintin*, I think they are worthy of discussion. With regard to the animal sidekicks, Snowy and Jocko reinforce imperialist beliefs when we look at them as thinly-disguised representations of humans. However, when we consider them as *animals,* we can see a few subversive elements. And, since animals, like humans of color, are the victims of colonial efforts to control and domesticate the Other (Armstrong 414, Mukherjee 215, Wolfe 43), these small subversions also challenge imperialism.

Steve Baker suggests that part of our pleasure in talking animal stories is the animal's vengeance on human characters. In identifying both with the attacking animal and (guiltily) with the humans that get their just deserts, the reader becomes part of the collective "us" that includes all those that do not fit into the dominant culture: "women, children, 'unruly men,' and—if they could only understand—animals too" (156). Snowy sometimes seems to indulge in such revenge. (In fact, Snowy's satisfaction may have a double function, since he is both animal *and* younger child.) He takes a wicked pleasure in watching adult humans fail, even (or especially) Tintin. In *The Castafiore Emerald,* Tintin is so busy speculating about whom he heard falling downstairs that he treads on the same rickety step and falls himself. "You wondered who fell downstairs? Now you know!" says a smirking Snowy (46). In *Tintin in Tibet,* Snowy gleefully watches Captain Haddock struggling to cross a rickety bridge, and keeps up a commentary, "Will he [fall]? Won't he? He will… No… pity!" When the captain decides to crawl instead of walk across, Snowy sniffs, "Not worth watching now…" (148).

In contrast to Snowy, Jocko is rarely, if ever, critical of his human companions. The closest he seems to get is in *The Valley of the Cobras* when the family is on a ship and he calls Jo and Zette "fair weather sailors": "The first little roll and they bolt for shelter in the cabin!" But immediately after he says this, he slips on the tilting deck and is nearly drowned by a wave (25). A chastened Jocko joins the children in the cabin, having learned his lesson (26). However, there are two ways in which we see Jocko challenge the hierarchy that puts humans above animals. The first is through voice. In the conclusion of *L'Éruption du Karamoko,* Jo and Zette are being interviewed about their adventure when Jocko seizes the microphone and climbs to the top of a flagpole, literally as well as metaphorically asserting his voice. From his perch, and out of reach of humans, he broadcasts, "Woou!… Chong wow ndjongh couack! Tchupp? Youp!" Hearing him over the radio, a group of Jocko-type primates in a French zoo leap around their cage, smiling, and calling, "Woorah!" (50). Jocko's determination to speak and the reaction of his fellow primates suggest he isn't just making excited noises: rather, he seems to have a specific message and wants to send it to others of his kind. Hergé thus suggests that animals may have languages and cultures of their own, not merely ones copied from humans (a position which has found some scientific support). Hergé may further acknowledge Jocko's "human-like" capacity for culture in the books' subtitle: "The Adventures of Jo, Zette, and Jocko." Although the order of

names suggests that the humans are more important (and the boy more important than the girl), Jocko *is* included as a member of the team. In contrast, Snowy gets no billing in the Tintin books, which are subtitled, "The Adventures of Tintin". Perhaps Snowy, as domestic animal, seems more an extension of his owner than does Jocko.

The second way in which Jocko questions the human-animal hierarchy is through visual subjectivity. Mukherjee notes that, in the Tintin series, there is only one instance when we see from an animal's perspective: in *Tintin in Tibet,* we see from over the yeti's shoulder as he watches his human friend leaving. Mukherjee suggests that the yeti is awarded this subjectivity on grounds of his display of human emotions: "It is the Yeti's possession of human emotions [in caring for a sick human] which finally entitles it to the subjective position" (218). However, this isn't necessarily the case for Jocko. In *Destination New York*, we see Jo and Zette across people's heads, as they are raised by an enthusiastic crowd. In the next panel, we see Jocko running across heads to greet the children, so presumably the first panel is showing us what Jocko sees and the second how he responds (47). One could argue that, in this instance, he's granted subjectivity because of his love for Jo and Zette. But there are at least two other instances when we see from over Jocko's shoulder. In *Le "Manitoba" ne répond plus,* Jocko is exploring a submarine and we see him from behind as he peers around a corner at an approaching, possibly dangerous, man (12). In *Mr. Pump's Legacy,* Jocko is carried off by a hot-air balloon. Again, we see him from behind, as he floats towards a weathervane (which he grabs in the next panel) (9). On both these occasions, Hergé seems to be emphasizing Jocko as a character experiencing a suspenseful moment, rather than showing his affection for humans.

## Conclusions

Jocko and Snowy give us a glimpse into the wide range of functions animal sidekicks serve juvenile protagonists, even within one artist's oeuvre. Hergé's sidekicks demonstrate the young protagonists' maturity, but also their emotional vulnerability (in spite of their supreme confidence and self-control). We often credit animals with the ability to accurately judge people, and further believe that "animals never lie". John Berger, for example, claims that animals, unhampered by language, can see humans as they can never see themselves or each other (3). Thus, Snowy's and Jocko's deep loyalty to Tintin, Jo, and Zette emphasize these characters' worth. It also suggests their superiority to ordinary people, since none of the other characters has such a devoted pet. At the same time, both sidekicks emphasize the protagonists' roles as leaders and authority figures.

Jocko, in particular, is molded from a colonialist tradition, one that has been revised for a child audience. In de Pougens' original novel, Jocko's primary relationship is with an adult and she dies in serving him (1824). In the hugely

popular ballet based on the book, *Jocko the Brazilian Monkey* (1826), Jocko rescues his owner's child, but this is motivated by devotion to the adult ("Danina"). In contrast, Hergé's Jocko interacts almost solely with Jo and Zette, rather than their parents. He follows the children, risks his life to save them, and looks to them for comfort and protection. This suggests that children can be effective colonists (further emphasized when Jo and Zette tame the cannibals). Moreover, by situating his Jocko in a visually attractive world, whose precise outlines and bright pastel colors suggest order and happiness (Screech 27-8), Hergé implies that benevolent colonization by Europeans is justifiable and beneficial to all.

As a child, I was transfixed by the picture on the back of some *Tintin* albums. Tintin displays a sign listing all the album titles, while Snowy and Captain Haddock sit beside him. They are in the midst of a bright green meadow beside the sea, and the background is populated with characters and artifacts from Hergé's books. These include Jo, Zette, and Jocko, who are walking hand in hand; Calculus; the Thompsons; and Quick and Flupke (two of Hergé's early characters). Overhead, is a bright blue sky with white clouds. To me, this seemed an Eden-like landscape, in which everyone comes together happily, regardless of differences: a place where humans and animals, friends and enemies, are part of the same community. I did not understand the underlying imperialism in the picture (although in retrospect it seems glaringly obvious). Tintin has an elephant's tusk and a pair of African statues at his feet, and a Chinese lamp hanging over his head. The background includes a carved idol of Captain Haddock's ancestor, American Indian tipis, as well as Jocko, the pet chimpanzee. Such collecting of exotic souvenirs highlights the series' preoccupation to explore and study non-European cultures, which, as Edward W. Said suggests, can be seen as an attempt "to dominate [them], to have authority over [them]" (40). The tusk and idol, in particular, emphasize this wish for control.

In a sense, this picture, with its apparent harmony and implicit imperialism, serves as an analogy for the protagonist-animal sidekick relationship in the *Tintin* and *Jo, Zette, and Jocko* books. These relationships are idyllic at first glance. Human youngsters and animals are strongly attached and cooperate to have adventures out of the reach of adult authority. A closer look reveals the extent to which the books emphasize the colonization of Others, whether they are animals or humans. Looking even more deeply, however, one can see a few signs of resistance on the part of the colonized. For example, the children Quick and Flupke are gleefully aiming a slingshot at Captain Haddock's whisky bottle; the parrot, who is chained to a perch in *The Castafiore Emerald* is free and sitting above the human characters; Jocko tows Jo and Zette along behind him, suggesting that, on this occasion, at least, he knows where they're going better than they do. Beautiful, troubling, largely reactionary, slightly subversive: this is the world of Hergé's animal sidekicks.

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# Queered Relationships

# (Super) Horsing Around:
## The Significance of Comet in *Supergirl*

Olivia Hicks

### Introduction

Supergirl, the Man of Steel's cousin, first appeared in *Action Comics* #252 in 1959, remaining in the comic for ten years before leaving to headline *Adventure Comics*. Her self-titled stories in *Action Comics* can be divided into two distinct parts, each with their own anxieties. From issue #252 to 284, not only must she foster a secret identity, but she must also, at Superman's command, keep the existence of Supergirl a secret from the world until she has proven that she can use her powers appropriately. As Supergirl works in secret, Superman claims credit for her actions.[1] These stories are characterized by an increasingly strenuous performance of feminine mundanity and can be read as an allegory for the wider marginalization faced by women in the mid-twentieth century (see Link). From issue #285 onwards, Supergirl has been revealed to the world, and the comics are concerned with Supergirl's status as a celebrity; casting her as an enviable ideal of teenage girlhood, complete with adoring female friends, cute pets, and a wide array of fantastical beaux. However, hanging over this tableau of idealized adolescence is the threat of the woman Supergirl is going to turn into; a woman who threatens to be superior to all the men she encounters. It is in this second period that Supergirl acquires her most significant companion: Comet the Super-Steed of Steel (also known as Super-Horse). Whereas Streaky the Super-Cat, Supergirl's other pet, and Krypto the Super Dog, who occasionally guest stars, are used for comedic purposes, Comet is treated seriously, and his appearances are cast as thrilling, dramatic and, occasionally, tragic. Comet is far more than a super-pet; like Supergirl he has a public super persona, and a secret identity as a "normal" stallion. In addition to

1. An example is "The Day Supergirl Revealed Herself!" (*Action Comics* #265, July 1960), where Supergirl, disguised as an ordinary teenager, trails a fleeing group of robbers and reports their location back to Superman. When the caught criminals ask Superman how he discovered the hideout, he replies "That's *my* secret! It'll give you something to think about during your long term prison terms!" (Binder *et al.* 194).

this, not only is he a centaur who was cursed to become a horse, but further magic allows him to become a human every time a comet is in Earth's orbit. Blending the lines between human and animal, Comet is able to occasionally court Supergirl in his human form of Bronco Bill.

Simultaneously an animal companion and species-shifting love interest, how should we read the character of Comet and his relationship with Supergirl? Miriam Adelman and Jorge Knijnik, editors of *Gender and Equestrian Sport,* argued that although associations of the horse with masculine riders has, at times, marginalized the figure of the horsewoman, since the mid-twentieth century horses have become "feminized" in popular culture, leading to a growth in works prioritizing the female experience with horses, ranging from "fiction to journalism and self-help genres" (Adelman and Knijnik 1-2).

There have been multiple academic readings of both the horse as a figure in girls' popular culture, and of horse-girl relationships. For psychoanalyst Anna Freud, a girl's "horse-craze" could alternatively be read as "primitive autoerotic desires", "identification with the caretaking mother", "penis envy" or "her phallic sublimations" (Freud 20). In education studies scholar Ellen Singleton's reading of early twentieth-century girls' juvenile equine fiction, the horse is coded as a heterosexual male ally, who protects the female rider's femininity, preventing her exploits from being deemed too masculine. By "befriending the horse, [the author removes] some of the female character's need to personally demonstrate strength or endurance by handing it over to a large, willing and powerful ally" (Singleton 108, my insertion in parentheses). In this way, the horse works to solve "the problem of how to combine the physicality implied in adventure with the femininity of the character around whom the story revolved" (97-98). The horse has also been depicted by society as a transitional stage, where the horse stands in for the girl's eventual heterosexual and human partner. Literature and feminist studies scholar Natalie C. Hansen notes that "Girls are given license to be horse-crazy as long as this passion is seen as a training ground for future 'proper' male love objects. In order to 'mature,' girls must give up horses for boys" (100). Photographer and academic Deborah Bright proposes an alternative reading of horse-love that draws on Teresa De Lauretis' theories of female fetishism. She asserts that the horse should be seen, not as a phallic substitute, but as "the female body itself as a desiring and desirable object" (8). In a society which seeks to control women's "physicality, power and presence", women can embrace these attributes through the fetishization of the horse's power (9). She concludes that "Horse-craziness, it seems to me, is nothing less than a form of self-love" (8-9). Finally, more than viewing horses as a fetish object for women to utilize, Hansen sees horses and their female riders becoming one, new, cross-species identity, which transgresses the arbitrary social boundaries of gender, and creates a new "livable body" that does not require women and girls to be reduced to objects for male use (115, 117).

Arguing for one, "correct" reading of Comet within *Supergirl* is a fraught activity; especially as throughout the comics Comet takes on different roles dependent on the story's demands. Whilst acknowledging the polymorphic nature of Super-Horse, and the resulting conflicts and tensions these roles create, this chapter will argue for a reading of Comet as Supergirl's doppelgänger, and, constructing him as a subject, will reject Freudian readings of the horse as an objectified fetish. Rather, this chapter will locate its reading of Comet in relation to the work of Hansen, and argue that Supergirl and Comet's relationship creates a new body, but one that, due to Comet's active participation in the relationship, denies traditional hierarchies of human/animal, words/images, adult/child and male/female.

## "The Super-Steed of Steel!": a brief history of Comet the Super-Horse

By Comet's first appearance in *Adventure Comics* #293 (February 1962), most of Supergirl's core mythology had been established. The first period of Supergirl's adventures in *Action Comics* was over: she had gained her first super-pet Streaky; her alter-ego, the orphan Linda Lee, had been adopted by the Danvers family, and Superman had revealed her existence to the world in *Action Comics* #285 (February 1962). Supergirl was enjoying an idealized adolescence, juggling a series of boyfriends, including Jerro the Merman, and Dick Malverne, an ordinary teenage boy. Perhaps to make his mark on the Supergirl mythos, Leo Dorfman, who took over from Jerry Siegel on writing duties with *Action Comics* #292, immediately introduced Comet to the *Supergirl* stories (although a "preview" of Comet had appeared in the aforementioned *Adventure Comics* story). Trina Robbins identifies Comet as the single most appealing element for the comic's core audience of young girls:

> Supergirl was very clearly intended for young girls, and her stories contained all the right elements. She acquired a super-powered cat named Streaky and, best of all, a beautiful telepathic white superhorse, Comet, both designed by [Jim] Mooney. A 1964 Supergirl story, called "The Day Super-Horse Became Human," must have catered to the fantasies of thousands of horse-loving girls throughout America (107).

Comet's desirability is grounded, not merely in his horse body, but in his ability to become human and romance Supergirl; his appeal, according to Robbins, is specifically rooted in his role as a cross-species love interest.

And yet for all Comet's memorability, he is used sparingly by Dorfman; his major appearances are his introduction in *Action Comics* #292-294 (September 1962-November 1962); his reintroduction in *Action Comics* #300-302 (May 1963-July 1963) and the aforementioned "The Day Super-Horse Became Human" in *Action Comics* #311 (April 1964). Despite his infrequent appearances, his stories would be reprinted in Supergirl-themed 80-page giants (comics which collected

earlier material), such as *Action Comics* #334 (March 1966), #347 (March 1967), and *Adventure Comics* #390 (April 1970), emphasizing his continued relevance to Supergirl as a character. Henry Jenkins describes one-off, self-contained stories as being the norm in superhero comics prior to the 1970s (20). Under writers Siegel and Dorfman, *Supergirl* deviated from this standard. From *Action Comics* #278 (July 1961) onwards, *Supergirl* increasingly relied on multi-part stories that take typically three issues to resolve. The issues of *Action Comics* in which Comet stars lead naturally onto each other, and rather than reading as self-contained stories, they work together as an extended, complete narrative. *Action Comics* #292-294 and *Action Comics* #300-302 are essentially one adventure, divided temporarily by a four-issue story arc which introduces Lena Luthor, who becomes, despite her relation to Lex Luthor, Supergirl's best friend, and a stand-alone story about a super-baby. Issue #311 operates as a coda, restating the key elements and dramatic potential of Comet as he shifts into a more minor supporting role.

The first arc, in issues #292-294, introduces Comet, details his and Supergirl's first meeting, and relates his origin story: Comet was originally a centaur named Biron who was transformed accidentally by the witch Circe into a super-horse with invulnerability, telepathy, flight, immortality and super strength. His origin draws heavily on Greek mythology and fairytales, featuring witches, wizards, potions, transformations and curses. The arc ends with Comet losing his powers and memories when he unwittingly eats a magical water lily. The second arc, in issues #300 to #302, sees Comet regain his powers and memories and re-join Supergirl's fight against crime. Crucially, it is in this arc that he gains the ability (again, through magic) to become a non-powered human whenever a comet passes through Earth's orbit. He uses his human alter ego Bronco Bill to court Supergirl without revealing his true identity of Comet. Issue #311 essentially restates all of Comet's main plot points and narrative tensions; there is even a repetition of Comet's origin story. The issue therefore functions as a summation of Comet's character, or as a coda for the stories which have preceded it. As these issues represent the only major Comet stories of Supergirl's time in *Action Comics* (as opposed to a story where Comet appears in a minor supporting role), they will provide the focus for this chapter.

## "As the fantastic telepathic conversation continues": talking animals in *Supergirl*

Animals in *Supergirl* occupy a strange, shifting space. The text generally evidences a Cartesian worldview, in which animals "lacking language, or the capacity to interpret signs, [resemble] nothing so much as the technological artefacts of emerging and mechanical science" (Blake *et al.* 1). Animals are, for the most part, unknowable objects. If humans are differentiated in a Cartesian worldview by the "essential traits" of "language, rationality, consciousness, free will", the comics destabilize this concept of humanity by drawing on the medium's visual potential

and *showing* us, via thought balloons, what animals are thinking (2). For the most part, in order for an animal such as Streaky, Krypto or Comet (although he is only an animal by magical accident) to be depicted as thinking, they must have access to superpowers. Whenever Streaky and Comet (in his horse form) are depowered, they immediately lose any ability to communicate with Supergirl. It is important to note that though non-powered animals are unable to communicate with super-powered humans, non-powered humans can communicate with super-powered animals, further emphasizing the hierarchy of humans over animals.

This logic of superpowers being the bridge to humanity is not, however, exercised rigorously by the comic. In "Supergirl's Super Pet!" (*Action Comics* #261, February 1960), Streaky gains superpowers for the first time by coming into contact with X-Kryptonite. Even before he manifests any superpowers, we are aware of his change by his sudden thought, "Something smells… good!" (Binder *et al.* 138). Prior to this point, he had only communicated in "meows". Streaky goes on to interact with various other animals. The neighborhood cats remain voiceless objects, which Streaky pities: "Aw-www, look at those skinny-alley cats! They look half-starved, poor *things*!" [emphasis added] (139). The cats do not, or cannot reply to him, and give no indication that they recognize Streaky as the one who dispenses milk for them. On the next page, however, Streaky encounters a dog who not only *thinks,* "Well, well! Look who's here! A runty cat wearing a fancy cape! I don't like dudes!", but also *speaks,* "C'mon down ya coward!" (140). Although the non-powered dog speaking emphasizes the lack of logic the *Supergirl* comic at times possesses, writer Jerry Siegel's use of slang for the dog introduces a class element into the world of talking animals, thus retaining and reinforcing hierarchies. Even if non-powered animals can talk at times, they are depicted as "common", whereas Streaky, with his powers, is depicted thinking and talking in "proper" English. Streaky, for his part, loses his voice when he loses his powers. The reader is privileged to see, in the final panel, an insight into his dreams of being a Super-Cat, but this is expressed through *pictures*, rather than words, which blends the usually distinct "image" and "text" zones of the comics page (69). The devolution from Streaky thinking in words (evidence of humanity) when he is super-powered to thinking in pictures (evidence of animality) when he is non-powered echoes the traditional hierarchy of words and images in Western culture, and suggests that images are a lower form of expression in *Supergirl,* and a less significant indicator of humanity. Comics and picture books are also connected with childhood; at the time of this story's publication, the comics industry expected a regular reader turnover as children were expected to grow out of comics and graduate onto more literary media (Jenkins 20). The presence of this visual world, filled with talking animals, creates a distinctly childlike world for Supergirl, a teenager who is expected to mature into adulthood. This tension between the image and text zones as a divide between animality and humanity, childhood and adulthood, creates a tension with Supergirl's construction as a young lady on the threshold of adulthood.

It should be noted that these pictorial thought balloons are not exclusive to animals; Supergirl has a series of visual thought balloons featuring single images of Super-Horse. This emphasizes her fixation with him (Siegel *et al.* 134, 138). That Comet appears so heavily (and visually) in Supergirl's thoughts is also part of his power as Supergirl's doppelgänger, as it is through "the visual image that the double has power or holds sway" (Ruddell 3). The doppelgänger is, for German Literature scholar Andrew J. Webber "above all, a figure of visual compulsion" (3). Comet's visual presence also further contributes to the tension between childhood/adulthood in Supergirl's life.

For the super-pets, humanity can be lost as easily as it can be gained. Despite Comet being a centaur-turned-horse, and having always possessed language, rational thinking and free will, when he suffers amnesia and the loss of his powers, as in "The Mutiny of Super-Horse!" *Action Comics* #294 (November 1962), he immediately loses the ability to talk with Supergirl, and his consequent actions are unintelligible to her. His actions elicit the surprised responses of "What's this?", "I don't get it!", and "I don't understand!" from Supergirl (Siegel *et al.* 163-165). Without his memory, Comet is a beast that cannot be understood by rational beings. When Comet is in possession of his memories, his relationship with animals is similar to Streaky's. He understands horses; in his human form of Bronco Bill he comments that "Riding this bucking horse is child's play! I know every move my horse is going to make instinctively!" (249). Supergirl admiringly claims, "he's almost part of the horse!" (251). Importantly though, he does not communicate with them. He uses a herd of wild horses as a cover when he comes to Earth but expresses no kinship with them or sympathy for them: "Arriving on Earth, I joined a herd of wild horses. […] Like *Supergirl* I hid my secret identity! When the horse herd I joined with was captured, I let them capture me too" (151). They are merely objects to be used by Comet as he sees fit, emphasizing his superiority and humanity.

Although Comet is a character that slips between human and animal, he cannot merely be considered an animal, which, in the *Supergirl* universe, would render him little more than an object. He expresses agency, and his thoughts are, more often than not, well-known to both Supergirl and the audience. He has an active role in their relationship; it is Comet who initiates their relationship by sending Supergirl dreams of a super-horse telepathically, and he chooses to keep his secret identity of Bronco Bill from her. To this end, Freudian theories revolving around Comet as either an object of auto-eroticism, a maternal object, phallic substitute or object for Supergirl's phallic sublimations are unhelpful, as Comet is a *subject* who expresses agency. Supergirl cannot simply take from Comet what she wants—Comet and Supergirl have a working and romantic *relationship*. Comet occupies instead a new identity, which can slip between binary considerations of human and animal.

The comics' logic is that humans and animals are separate, but that superpowers humanize animals and help them to bridge that divide. This logic is already

subversive of the traditional human/animal power hierarchies, but the *slips* in the comics' logic (as evidenced by the talking dog in "Supergirl's Super Pet!") only further emphasize the animals' destabilizing power. As Steve Baker notes, "the animal story's invitation to pleasure is invariably an invitation to subversive pleasure" (159). The subversive identity that the animal possesses is powerful enough to destabilize, not only the traditional structures of the comic which work to divide text and image zones, but also to destabilize the patriarchal order which governs Supergirl's world, and divides it into hierarchies of human/animal, and, as we shall see, male/female and childhood/adulthood.

## "But I'm *too young*": children and animals

Talking animals are inherently linked with ideas of childhood in Western culture. Baker notes that "received wisdom has it that the tendency to like, to care for and to identify with animals is essentially a childhood phenomenon, or, as it might often be more condescendingly expressed, a childish thing" (123). Tess Cosslett argues that the association of children with talking animal stories is a phenomenon of the Romantic period, where talking animals were considered more suitable to children, by virtue of the fact that adults know that animals cannot converse: "The child, by contrast, has still to learn these markers and rules, and exists in a space of play in which boundaries could potentially be transgressed" (476). Although Supergirl exists in a transitional state, she is still "too old" to be considered a child, and thus the figure of Super-Horse has transgressive appeal, as he encourages the bending of the rules, markers and boundaries of adulthood, which Supergirl is being socialized into by her family and peers.

Although visually Supergirl changes little, the character ages throughout her appearances in *Action Comics*, and she experiences significant markers of adulthood. The character is roughly 14 when she first lands on Earth, has her 16th birthday in *Action Comics* #270 (November 1960), and in 1964, it is decided that Supergirl is officially an adult; she begins to attend college, and Lena Luthor, her best friend, is old enough to be married.[2] In the period in which Comet is introduced, Supergirl is yet to experience this final marker of adulthood, and her transitional age is a source of anxiety in the comic. After running a competition for readers to decide on a new hairstyle for Linda Lee (prior to this point Supergirl's alter-ego had always worn distinctive pigtails), in *Action Comics* #279 (August 1961) her step-father, Fred Danvers, broaches the subject of a new haircut. "Linda, about your hair… er… You're too grown-up to wear pigtails any more [*sic*]! That's strictly kid stuff, and you're a lovely young lady! Tomorrow we're going to visit a beauty parlor, and there'll be some changes made!" Supergirl can only privately think "!" Within the comic, this is due to her fear that a hairdresser will discover

2. See "The Great Supergirl Double-Cross!" in *Action Comics* #317 (October 1964) and "Supergirl Goes to College!" in *Action Comics* #318 (November 1964), collected in Siegel *et al.*

her pigtails are a wig, but one cannot help but read the single, anxious exclamation mark (which is not explained until the next panel) as also signaling her distress at becoming an adult (Binder *et al.* 479). Words, the signifier of rational humanity, completely desert Supergirl in this moment, and she is reduced to a single visual signifier. Another marker of Supergirl approaching adulthood occurs five issues later in *Action Comics* #284 when Jerro the Merman proposes to her. Supergirl is drawn visibly shaken by artist Jim Mooney, and replies "*Gasp!* This is so sudden!" (Siegel *et al.* 29). Supergirl, deciding she needs time to think things over, leaves Jerro waiting for no less than five issues, whereupon she refuses, stating "But I'm *too young* for… marriage… [emphasis in original]" (116). Supergirl, at the time of Comet's debut, is in an uneasy transitional state and is attempting to resist the efforts of those around her to initiate her more fully into adulthood. This encourages us to view Comet as a subversive element in Supergirl's world, which has particular power because she is herself not yet an adult. If horses are seen as something girls must grow out of so that they progress onto heterosexual relationships with men, the emergence of a super-horse that becomes a permanent fixture at Supergirl's side creates a constant tension with Dorfman's efforts to show Supergirl being socialized into adulthood.

## Super-Horse as Super Love Interest

The most obvious feature of Supergirl's and Comet's relationship is the romantic element. As a love interest, Comet is clearly coded as a heterosexual white male; his whiteness and maleness, already grounded in his form of a white stallion, is only further emphasized when he transforms into the blond rodeo star Bronco Bill.

Singleton argued for the horse to be read as a male-coded shield for strenuous female activity in juvenile equine fiction; however, Comet is better understood as a potential boyfriend than as male-coded cover (97-98). Using Comet as a cover for Supergirl's super physicality would be redundant by this point in the comics. Not only has Supergirl been publicly announced to the world prior to Comet's appearance, but the reader is well aware of Supergirl's extraordinary physical abilities. Comics studies scholar Alex Link observes that, although Supergirl works to uphold patriarchal power structures, by letting men take credit for the work she does in secret, the reader is left in no doubt of her ability. Supergirl "lays the artifice bare for the reader", providing them with a "window on the everyday workings of gender and power" (1179-1180). Janice Radway argues that successful romance novels work to "elicit and then deflect protest about the character of patriarchal social relations" (157). By reading Comet as a love interest, his flaws become part of *Supergirl's* ongoing exploration, and uneasy acceptance of, the injustice of patriarchal power structures.

Crucially, Comet figures as a love interest in both his human and horse forms. "The Mutiny of Super-Horse!" (*Action Comics* #294, November 1962) is a typical

romance plot, where the main male figure is replaced by a horse within the story. Comet has become a movie star, and is paired with the actress Liz Gaynor, a clear reference to Elizabeth Taylor. Taylor starred in the horse-centered *National Velvet* (1944, dir. Clarence Brown), which, in having Taylor pose as a male jockey, also played with gender-roles. Perhaps in reference to Taylor's later, more overtly adult and sexual roles in films such as *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958, dir. Richard Brooks) and *Butterfield 8* (1960, dir. Daniel Mann), Gaynor is depicted not as a fresh-faced child star, but as a serious competitor for Comet's affections.[3] Prior to meeting Gaynor, Supergirl, who has been following Gaynor and Comet's cinematic partnership, thinks "Gosh, how I envy Liz Gaynor! Not because she's Hollywood's most beautiful screen goddess, but because she'll be working with Comet! Sigh!" (Siegel *et al.* 158). When Supergirl, who has been brought to the film set as a consultant, meets Gaynor, it does little to assuage her fears:

> LIZ: What do you think of our animal star, Supergirl? Of course, he has no powers like the real super-horse, but we've become very good friends!
>
> SUPERGIRL: So I see, Miss Gaynor! [*thinks*] And Comet seems to be enjoying the friendship! I don't blame him! She's very pretty! (159).

Supergirl is asked by the film's director to provide special effects for Comet's super-feats; she pretends to use her super-breath to send Comet flying through the air, and she uses heat-vision to melt the spears that are thrown at Comet, to create an "illusion" of invulnerability (159-160, Comet is, of course, invulnerable to spears). She openly gains credit for work which Comet could do, if not for his secret identity. This is an important parallel and reversal of earlier issues of Supergirl, where she would, in secret, perform feats that the men around her would take credit for.[4] The work continues for Supergirl while the crew is on break, with Supergirl now performing super femininity; cooking hot dogs and cooling drinks for the film crew with her heat vision and freeze breath. However, Supergirl's dutiful performance of domesticity means nothing for Comet, who is distracted by the glamorous Gaynor. Supergirl is devastated, thinking "*Gulp!* While I was busy preparing lunch, Liz Gaynor has been spending her time with Comet! I must admit she's pretty… as pretty as those water lilies Comet is eating!". Later, a double

3. Romance comics were filled with tales of men (or women, for that matter), being temporarily bewitched by another, more sexual or exciting romantic partner, before eventually finding their way home to the more domestic main character, who, of course forgives them. Some examples of this story type would be "I was a Waterfront Girl!" (*Love Letters #3)*, "Stay Away from Married Men" (*Romantic Secrets #33*) and "Thrill Crazy!" (*Love Journal #11*—all reprinted in *Weird Love*: *That's the Way I Like It!*) and "The Perfect Cowboy!" (*Real West Romances #4;* reprinted in *Young Romance: The Best of Simon and Kirby's Romance Comics*).

4. In addition to the previously referenced "The Day Supergirl Revealed Herself!", a young would-be (male) magician is able to perform his tricks with the behind-the-scenes help of Supergirl in "The Secret of the Super Orphan!" (*Action Comics #253*, June 1959, collected in Binder *et al.*). He does not credit Supergirl.

crisis arises when Supergirl, having come into contact with green kryptonite, is drowning in quicksand, and Gaynor is attacked by an alligator. This is framed as a test of Comet's "friendship", although it's clear from Supergirl's intense jealousy of Gaynor's looks that it is really a test of his love. Supergirl desperately thinks "Choke! It's a test of *Super-Horse's* friendship! Now I'll find out once and for all whether he prefers Liz Gaynor to me, his dearest friend!" (163). However, the waterlilies Comet ate produced temporary amnesia, powerlessness and thus, animality, and as a result, he chooses Gaynor over Supergirl. Supergirl saves herself, and once she realizes Comet is suffering from amnesia, she relinquishes him to Gaynor. Privately, Supergirl bitterly opines "I guess Liz Gaynor is his best friend now! Gulp! But to her, he's just another possession, like a diamond bracelet or a sportscar!" (166). Happily, when Comet's powers and memories return, he once again proves his loyalty and devotion to Supergirl by re-joining her crime-fighting mission. It is noteworthy though that one of the main reasons Supergirl objects to Gaynor and Comet's "friendship" is because Gaynor only sees Comet as a possession, an *object*. Supergirl's appreciation of Comet, on the other hand, goes beyond the mere object status accorded to animals in Western society (Noske vii).

Comet's amnesia and depowering is important, not merely because it excuses his leaving Supergirl to die, but because it works to undermine the patriarchal assumptions of the text. Comet is aggressively promoted as superior to Supergirl, because of course he is a male and a potential romantic love interest, and Supergirl spends much of her time in *Action Comics* actively seeking out the approval of patriarchal figures, often constructing a façade of helpless femininity in order to garner it. As she privately tells the reader in "The Supergirl of Tomorrow!": "Even if I still had my superpowers, I wouldn't overtake [Dick Malverne in a swimming race]! Men *enjoy* feeling superior to women!" (Binder *et al.* 521). In this toxic climate, it is of little surprise that Dorfman attempts to cast Comet as her superior. In issue #300, Comet's powers "[match] those of even the mighty *Supergirl!*" (231). By the next issue, however, Comet is described as "a mighty stallion whose superpowers were even greater than those of *Supergirl* herself!" (242). That Comet, a man, cannot for long be considered a subordinate to the female star of the comic, shows how deeply ingrained in the comic's, and the superhero world's, patriarchal prejudices are.

Although Comet withholds his identity of Bronco Bill from Supergirl, and within the comic the narration attempts to cast him as superior to Supergirl, I would argue that Supergirl and Comet complement, and ultimately mirror each other. Considering that for almost three years of Supergirl's publication she was called upon to be Superman's secret weapon, and men took credit for her actions, Comet is Supergirl's secret weapon and she takes credit for his actions. In Supergirl's second dream about Comet, he secretly saves a downed submarine, allowing Supergirl, who is out in public as Linda Danvers, to protect her secret identity. Credit for Comet's act goes to Superman and Supergirl (137-138). As previously mentioned, when

Supergirl works as a consultant on the set of Comet's film, she takes the credit for providing Comet with powers. Comet dramatically saves Supergirl's life when they both go on an adventure to planet Zerox, and the very next issue Supergirl saves Bronco Bill from a rampaging bull, leaving Comet to remark that "What a strange fate! I saved *her* life on *Zerox* and now she saves *mine!*" (250). Finally, attention has to be drawn to Comet's frequent bouts of powerlessness and amnesia. Across the seven issues in which Comet features prominently, he suffers from amnesia and is depowered in three of them (in issues #294, 300 and 311) and falls under the influence of a villain three times (issues #300, 302 and 311; this doesn't count the time he jilts Supergirl's friendship for Gaynor). Out of seven issues, there are only three where he operates at full capacity throughout. Narratively, this serves a purpose, as it introduces tension into conflicts that, if Comet was at full-strength, he and Supergirl would find easy to defeat. Simultaneously, it undermines his potential as a truly dominating patriarchal figure and Supergirl's frequent rescues of Comet establish them as an equal partnership.

## Super-Horse as Supergirl

More than a traditional rider/horse partnership, or a heterosexual romance, I would argue that Comet and Supergirl are two halves of the same identity; they are doppelgängers of each other. The Romantic poet Percy Shelley used the image of the doppelgänger in his drama *Prometheus Unbound* (first published 1820), arguing that there were "two worlds of life and death", and describing the doppelgänger as residing in the second world until "death unite [the two halves] and they part no more" (qtd. in Ranald and Ranald 7). Supergirl and Comet reside in two separate worlds; Supergirl in the world of forced adulthood, words, humanity and femininity, and Comet, as a talking animal, in the world of childhood, pictures, animality and masculinity. The two exaggerated gendered identities are particularly crucial for discussion of the characters as doppelgängers. Supergirl, who uses her super-powers to cook dinner for all-male film crews, is laboring under a hyper-feminine identity, just as Comet, who becomes Bronco Bill in his human form, labors under a hyper-masculine identity. Film studies scholar Caroline Ruddell argues that when a single identity has two parts, one male-gendered and the other female-gendered, it is "reminiscent of Carl Jung's concept of integration, however, whereby the feminine and masculine parts of the psyche are integrated to form a more 'whole' being" (85).

The idea that Comet and Supergirl are doppelgängers is introduced at the beginning of the first Super-Horse arc, when Supergirl watches a Wonder Horse movie in *Action Comics* #292. Supergirl clearly and immediately identifies herself with the idea of a wonder, or super, horse. Watching a cowboy movie she thinks to herself "That's the famous wonder horse, *Firebrand!* He's carrying that cowboy star across a chasm as easily as I carried our family car across that broken bridge!" (Siegel

*et al.* 134). Supergirl instantly responds to the horse. In *A Natural History of Love*, Deborah Ackerman quotes a clinical psychologist as saying that for prepubescent girls, the horse is an "ideal representation of the self, before the self is identified with the world of men, or sexuality between men and women. The girl becomes free and strong and wild and sexual and powerful" (206). This paints the horse entirely in a glorified, positive light, whereas Comet is depowered too often within the comics to be an unproblematized ideal version of Supergirl. Supergirl's kinship with first Firebrand, and later Comet, is based on both the positive attributes of the horse and the servile, exploited nature of the animal. She recognizes that the cowboy is the "star" or the spectacle, but that it is the horse that is doing the work, which cannot but speak to Supergirl, who has endured years of exploitation at the hands of her cousin Superman.

Work that examines the relationship between girls and horses often focuses on the horse being an object of freedom and power which the girl wishes to possess.[5] However, Supergirl already possesses all the power and might of Comet (barring, of course, his immortality, immunity to Kryptonite and occasional shape-shifting abilities), and similarly, she has powers which Comet does not possess. Supergirl embraces this kinship not simply because he is a powerful being, but because she empathizes with the more negative aspects of a show horse's existence. Claude Lévi-Strauss pinpointed racehorses as holding a specific place in society. He saw ordinary horses as holding a place in society similar to cattle, but racehorses were differentiated because of their isolated existence, broken by performances (206). Comet, who is isolated by his fellow horses because of his humanity, and comes out of this isolation to perform stunts, fits into the space that Lévi-Strauss carves out for the racehorse. Lévi-Strauss described racehorses as "metaphorical inhuman beings", deciding that "racehorses, like birds, form a series disjoined from human society, but like cattle, lacking in intrinsic sociability" (206-207). Further evidence for Comet's isolated state can be found in *Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane* #92 (May 1969) when Lois Lane is temporarily transformed into a "super-filly" but, despite both super-horses possessing their full powers and telepathy, Comet and Lois are unable to communicate with each other (Dorfman and Swan 29). Supergirl, who performs a heightened version of 1950s and 1960s girlhood, exists in a similar isolation. She lives amongst people but is kept apart from them by the double bind of her secret identity and the societal expectations of femininity which forbid her from revealing her true abilities. She is not able to form her own society within this isolation—her friends must either be kept at arms' length as learning her true identity would put them in danger (Lena Luthor), or, in the case of the Legion of Superheroes, who live in the future, they are separated from her by the

5. A notable exception is Natalie C. Hansen's "Horse-Crazy Girls: Alternative Embodiments and Socialities" where she parallels the domestication of horses and the sexualization of My Little Pony toys with the sexualization of girls.

time period in which they reside. Rather, Supergirl must be content with brief moments of spectacle and performance.

Not a woman, and not quite a child still, Supergirl is a natural companion for Comet, as animals, women and children all exist within patriarchal society as "others". Animals are othered because they are not humans. Women are othered because they are not men. Children are othered because they are not adults. Fantasy and science-fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin summarized the condition thus: "In literature as in 'real life', women, children and animals are the obscure matter upon which Civilization erects itself, phallologically" (10). Or, Supergirl and the super-pets are the obscure matter upon which Superman erects himself as an omnipotent, omnipresent law-enforcer.

More than Comet being someone that Supergirl shares an affinity with, not only does his blonde hair mean that he bears more of a familial resemblance with Supergirl than Superman, but if the act of riding a horse creates a new, "girl-horse" body, then Comet *is* Supergirl (114-115). The two characters are doppelgängers who occupy paralleling worlds of female/male, and human/animal and, to a lesser extent, word/picture, as Comet straddles the animal world, with its visual forms of communication, and the human world, in which language is a signifier of rationality. Together, they navigate the boundaries of childhood and adulthood; Supergirl by virtue of her transitional teenage state, and Comet by virtue of being a "talking animal", with its associations of childhood. Just as Supergirl problematizes the femininity of Linda Danvers with her activeness, so Comet's horse form, for all its male coding, problematizes his human masculinity. He cannot ever claim Supergirl in a traditional heterosexual sense, because he cannot reveal that he is actually her horse. Similarly Linda Danvers cannot claim Bronco Bill as a romantic partner because she cannot reveal her secret identity of Supergirl. As the form of Bronco Bill means that Comet is temporarily without powers, he has to be saved by Supergirl from rampaging bulls and, when his horse form falls under the control of the evil magician Vostar in "The Day Super-Horse Went Wild!" (*Action Comics* #301), he has to transform into a non-powered human to rid himself of Vostar's influence, and masquerade as a magician in order to warn Supergirl that Comet is under Vostar's control. Comet performs masculinity in much the same way Supergirl performs femininity. His hyper-masculine role as a rodeo star is compensation for his temporary powerlessness. In a further challenge to his masculinity, his role as a magician earns him the derision of Dick Malverne (Dick calls him "corny" and "phoney"), in a similar way to how Linda Danvers is overlooked by Dick in favor of Supergirl and Lena Luthor in "The Girl who was Supergirl's Double!" (*Action Comics* #296, January 1963, Siegel *et al.* 285). In the opening splash page of "The Day Super-Horse Became Human!" Bronco Bill and Supergirl are depicted in a romantic kiss that that has them both thinking not only words but *pictures*. The comic's use of thought words and thought images shows

them transcending borders of human/animal, and, momentarily, overcoming problematized masculine/feminine identities that kept them apart.

Reading Supergirl and Comet as doppelgängers moves their love affair, with its undeniably sexual element, into a masturbatory context, becoming the "form of self-love" which Bright describes horse-craziness as (8). This is most clearly seen in Supergirl's initial reaction to watching Wonder Horse on screen, and her subsequent Super-Horse inspired dreams. In the theatre, Supergirl is depicted in the grip of delight and joy, as (pun intended?) "the movie reaches its climax" (Siegel 134). Trying to go to sleep that night Supergirl is still infatuated with the animal: "I keep thinking about *Firebrand!* Oh, wouldn't it be exciting if I could have a Wonder Horse *for my own*? The fun we could have together! Just thinking about it gives me goose flesh! I hope I can fall asleep tonight!" (134). This begins the series of telepathic dreams that, we later learn, are sent by Comet. Although Supergirl initially is drawn to Wonder Horse, it is Comet who projects the dreams, making him an active participant, rather than merely the passive object of Supergirl's desires. There is an air of unease about the dreams within the comic; the first dream is described as "Sure enough, Linda's restless sleep is disturbed by a strange dream…" (134). The dream then ends with Supergirl hugging Comet as he nuzzles her, which, considering how their relationship develops, could be read as a romantic lovers' embrace. The dreams are consistently described as "weird" or "strange" and her fixation on a super-stallion as an "obsession" by either Supergirl or the narration.[6] And yet although the dreams are "restless", Mooney depicts Supergirl awakening from them in various states of ecstasy, suggesting that the unease with which the dreams are discussed by Supergirl and the narrator are because the dreams, which consist of Super-Horse saving Supergirl and the Super-Pets from various scrapes, are, if not inappropriate in nature or particularly subversive to the traditional hierarchies of Supergirl's world, *inspiring* an inappropriate or subversive reaction in Supergirl, suggesting that her response is, in fact, a sexual one. Eventually Supergirl's unease at her own responses to the dream (which again suggests that the dreams are sexual in nature, as nothing untoward or particularly nightmarish happens in the dreams, which all end happily), leads to her decision that the constant horse dreams are getting out of hand: "I've got to find some way of getting that imaginary horse out of my mind!" (140).

Supergirl initially (and mistakenly) views her horse love as a phase. It is one that distracts her from Dick Malverne when they are supposed to be studying for a lesson (137). It is a phase that she attempts to supplant by focusing instead on Streaky the Super-cat before going to sleep (139). It is significant that Supergirl, already a character anxious about her position as a teenager, is unable to concentrate on Dick, the symbol of future adult heterosexual romance, and is unable to replace

6. The dreams are described as "weird" and "strange" thrice each, and her horse-love is described as an "obsession" twice prior to her meeting Comet (see Siegel *et al.* 134-138, 141).

Comet with the non-sexual and non-threatening figure of Streaky. It is one that even sees Supergirl crossing the human/animal divide, as we see a picture of Comet (rather than words) appearing in her thoughts (138). Comet speaks explicitly to the transitional state she holds in society. Eventually Supergirl, still convinced her horse-love is a phase, decides to go to a dude ranch on holiday to rid herself of her obsession. It is here though, that Supergirl meets Comet, and their romance moves from dreams into reality, with the two separate female and male identities coming together to create a "whole" identity. If doppelgängers must eventually join together in death, Supergirl and Comet come together as rider and horse in both dreams and reality in a metaphorical *petite mort*. Although Supergirl is perfectly capable of flying by herself, riding Comet is presented as a unique and exciting state of play, such as in *Action Comics* #356, where Supergirl jumps on Comet's back with the order "Let's go *Comet*! Give me a super-ride I'll never forget!", to which Comet privately responds "*Supergirl* seems to be in a playful mood…" (Bates and Mooney 22) and meeting in the flesh, their identities become whole as they embark on adventures together.

Hansen argues that the girl-horse body should be read as queer, as an alternative "for how to love, how to relate, how to be human, [opening] possibilities for cross-species affections and partnerships, not as derivative forms of human affection and partnership, but as constitutive of other ways of being non-human" (118, my insertion in parentheses). The new way of being that Supergirl enjoys with Comet, the powerful body they possess, that moves beyond binary ideas of gender, is one which is *deliberately* situated in Supergirl's transitional age. Rather than forcing Supergirl to grow up and accept heterosexual femininity, Supergirl is able, with Comet, to reside in a juvenile state that is *superior* to adulthood. When Comet, disguised as Mysto the Magician, warns Supergirl that "a four-footed friend" of hers is in danger from "a sinister shadow! Is it a fish? A man? Perhaps it is both!", Dick Malverne, who is listening, cannot understand Mysto's cryptic message (Siegel *et al.* 265). He watches Supergirl and Mysto with an air of scornful smugness, but Supergirl, understanding the message, is able to stop Vostar and save the day. The story proves to both Supergirl and the reader that the irrational, childish act of listening to a fortune teller was the correct and right thing to do.

When Comet recovers from his first attack of amnesia in "The Return of Superhorse!" he relates his origin to a farmer and a small girl. The small girl replies "that was a lovely story, Comet!" (240). Supergirl privately tells the reader "*Chuckle!* What *Comet* told them was the *actual* story of his origin! Of course they believe it's just a fairytale! They don't know it was the rocket which brought me to earth, which helped free him from that magic aura!" (240). Comet and Supergirl's story represents a point of fantasticalness that even a small child rejects as too childish. Supergirl's statement is doubly ironic when one considers that Comet's origin deliberately draws on fairytales, folklores and myths in order to make a modern day romantic fairytale for its young female readership. The comic thus creates and

celebrates a space that is willfully, even gleefully childish. And it this space away from the logic, rationality and *humanity* of adulthood that Supergirl and Comet occupy and celebrate, becoming a powerful transgressor of species and gender boundaries.

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# A Girl and Her Dinosaur:
## The Queerness of Childhood in *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur*

Nicole Eschen Solis

In *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* by Amy Reeder and Brandon Montclare with art by Natacha Bustos, the familiar child-animal pairings from children's literature take a queer turn. This all-ages comic published by Marvel Comics challenges hetero-normatively gendered assumptions about childhood by pairing Lunella Lafayette (aka "Moon Girl") with a psychically bonded Tyrannosaurus Rex, Devil Dinosaur. In this comic, a reimagining of Jack Kirby's *Devil Dinosaur*, Lunella Lafayette is a nine-year-old African-American girl in New York City. She is known as "Moon Girl" among her peers because of her love for science and her spacey lack of attention in class. While she is clearly depicted as a child in stature, costuming, and her relationship to school and parents, her intelligence and freedom of movement give her the agency of an adult. She occupies the in-betweenness of a tomboy on the verge of puberty, but also of the queer child; she's not yet sexual, but coded as separate from her peers. The trans-temporal relationship between Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur illuminates the possibility for queer feeling and queer reading in an all-ages comic that resists addressing sexuality directly.

Characterizing Moon Girl as queer is admittedly problematic, since she neither claims a sexual identity nor expresses explicit desire. She occupies the realm of childhood that adults prefer to imagine as innocent and pre-sexual, but her explicit rejections of heterosexuality throughout the comic evoke what Kathryn Bond Stockton describes as sideways growth. Stockton argues that queer children challenge "the vertical, forward-motion metaphor of growing up" (11) that culminates in sexual maturity and heterosexual reproduction. She argues that intelligence, racial differences and relationships with animals are three common tropes in narratives of childhood that mark a child as queer, all of which apply to Lunella Lafayette. To the extent that queerness describes "an array of subjectivities, intimacies, beings, and spaces located outside of the heteronormative" (Chen 104), the queerness of this comic derives from Lunella's rejection of normative

temporalities of growing up. The affective pull of her bond with Devil Dinosaur creates a trans-species embodiment through which she resists the narrative compulsions toward heteronormative maturity.

Children occupy a problematic place in queer theory, serving as symbols of the "reproductive futurism" which theorists such as Lee Edelman identify as hostile to queer subjects that resist normative markers of maturity and adulthood such as marriage and children. Growing up has been configured as "slow unfolding which, unhelpfully, has been relentlessly figured as vertical movement upward (hence, 'growing up') toward full stature, marriage, work, reproduction, and the loss of childishness" (Stockton 4) while "queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (Halberstam, *Queer Time*, 1). This linear notion of time and the progress narrative of childhood is undercut by Lunella's precocious mental abilities and her deliberate resistance to bodily change. She is simultaneously a child playing with dinosaurs and roller skates and a scientist whose mental abilities exceed those of previous superhero scientists such as Reed Richards and Bruce Banner. As "the smartest there is", she looks to the future while she resists her parents' efforts to contain her in the safety of school, home, and "normal" childhood.

In addition to the queer temporalities of the comic, Lunella's queerness also arises from the instability of her physical body. When Lunella hatches from an egg, reborn with the activation of her Inhuman gene, she discovers that her superpower is transcendence of her physical body. Lunella and Devil Dinosaur exchange minds seemingly randomly, trapping Lunella's consciousness in the powerful body of Devil Dinosuar, while an uncontrollable and uncommunicative dinosaur wreaks havoc with her body. As a young girl who occasionally occupies the body of a (male) prehistoric beast, Lunella crosses all expectations of gender and rejects classifications of sexuality. In this crossing of the "animacy heirarchy, which conceptually arranges human life, disabled life, animal life, plant life, and forms of nonliving material in orders of value and priority" (Chen 13), *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* challenges the "racialized and sexualized means of conceptual and affective mediation between human and inhuman" (Chen 10). Though *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* is an all-ages comic that appeals to young readers by celebrating a precocious young girl with an interest in science, it also disrupts heteronormative narratives of growing up with its trans-temporal crossings and queer desires. While Moon Girl's sexual or romantic interests might not be explicit, the comic allies her with queerness by situating her in-between times, spaces, and even bodies.

Lunella Lafayette is not the first or only girl in comics who bonds with a dinosaur. Gert Yorke in *Runaways*, Jessica in *Terrible Lizard*, and Kate Kristopher in *Shutter* all share friendships and psychic bonds with similarly bipedal and carnivorous dinosaurs. While these other female characters are older and explicitly heterosexual within their narratives, their relationships with their respective dinosaurs resemble Lunella's in the ways the human-dinosaur bond allows them to

exceed their physical and social limitations as girls. In each case, friendship and a psychic bond with a giant prehistoric reptile allows the girl to move more freely in a hostile world. These trans-species affections place each girl in a present that is both futuristic and prehistoric at once, transgressing the expectations that confine girls in normative social roles. As such, *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* tells the story of a child-animal relationship that evokes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition of "queer" as "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't* be made) to signify monolithically" (Sedgwick 8). Lunella's relationship with Devil Dinosaur places her in the possibilities and gaps between childhood and maturity, past and future, and masculinity and femininity.

## Of Dinosaurs and Children

At the beginning of *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur*, nine-year-old Lunella Lafayette exists between childhood and adulthood. She knows that she carries an Inhuman gene that could trigger unknown superpowers at any time. She lives in fear of what she will become, frantically attempting to interrupt the maturing process before she becomes what she knows she must. This sense of maturity as an impending disaster echoes the language with which young tomboys and queer children frequently fear the onset of puberty and the transformation into mature adults confined by compulsory heterosexuality and the pressure to be cisgendered.

The activation of Lunella's Inhuman gene is described with the language of puberty, and Lunella's fear of change evokes queer temporalities of extended childhood. She asserts, "I've got to stop it from happening. I don't want to change. The change is what scares me more than anything" (Montclare, Reeder, and Bustos, *Moon Girl*, vol. 1). While Lunella is precociously intelligent, she fears the changes that will begin to usher her into adulthood, so the comic places her in a complicated state of knowing what's coming while protecting her childish immaturity. This wades right into debates in children's literature over protecting children from knowledge and particularly knowledge of sexuality. Queer theories of childhood explicitly argue against such constructions of childhood innocence, which erase the inherent queernesses of children. Kathryn Bond Stockton argues that "In spite of Anglo-American cultures, over several centuries, thinking that the child can be a carefully controlled embodiment of noncomplication (increasingly protected from labor, sex, and painful understanding), the child has gotten thick with complication. Even as idea… Innocence is queerer than we ever thought it could be" (Stockton 5). Lunella's precocious intelligence, potential superpowers, and bond with a big red dinosaur complicate her desire to maintain an image of childhood innocence.

Lunella's rejection of adult femininity combines with her intelligence to queer the narrative conventions that expect girls to grow up and be interpellated into femininity and compulsory heterosexuality. Halberstam argues "If adolescence for boys represents a rite of passage… and an ascension to some version (however attenuated) of social power, for girls adolescence is a lesson in restraint, punishment, and repression" (Halberstam, "Bondage", 194). In Lunella's case, both school and home are sites of restraint and repression. Her science teacher belittles her as "Little-Miss-Know-It-All" and her parents try to protect her by insisting "we're going to have you under lock and key, young lady" (Montclare, Reeder, and Bustos, *Moon Girl*, vol. 1). These adult figures restrain and shame Lunella for her intelligence and her determination to take action, trying to deny the very characteristics that make her a superhero. Montclare, Reeder, and Bustos show Lunella's disinterest in femininity by illustrating the social distance between Lunella and the older girls at her school who are applying makeup and playing with matches when Lunella walks into the women's restroom. Lunella cluelessly admonishes the older girls "safety first", causing them to turn on Lunella and tease her, throwing lit matches at her much like the Killer Folk threatened Devil Dinosaur with fire in Kirby's Devil Dinosaur origin story (Kirby 14). Lunella resists the older girls by growling and acting like a dinosaur, deliberately transgressing the expectations for a young girl or even properly human social behavior. Her anti-social, dinosaur-like behavior moves her down on Chen's animacy hierarcy, but it allows for her to physically take up space and assert herself in a scene that might otherwise make her the victim of bullying. By (in this case deliberately) blurring the lines between herself and Devil Dinosaur, Lunella enacts a queer refusal of post-pubescent femininity.

Devil Dinosaur's presence in Lunella's life creates what Stockton calls the "interval of animal" (Stockton 89-116) through which the queer child delays and defers the expectations of adulthood. Unlike more common animal relations, however, the dinosaur's presence in itself disrupts the order of everyday life. As Ursula K. Heise argues in relationship to *Jurassic Park*, "dinosaurs in a late-twentieth-century setting are figures of excess rather than lack; they […] exceed their environment and break all its bounds" (Heise 62). Similarly, Devil Dinosaur serves as a figure of excess in Lunella's life and in towering over her, chasing or carrying her around New York City, he disrupts the social norms and expectations of girlhood with a monstrous, excessive embodiment.

Throughout *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur*, Lunella's relationship with Devil Dinosaur is coded in the language of queerness. Their relationship is characterized as isolated and isolating, a secret that must be kept from Moon Girl's peers and her parents; "We're in it together. But it's just the two of us alone. Sometimes I think no one else will understand" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 2). She hides Devil Dinosaur from her parents, fearing that "They don't know… something might be wrong with me. I might not even be their daughter anymore" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 2). This language echoes narratives of closeting. The affective bond

between the girl and her dinosaur is a cross-species intimacy that goes beyond traditional human-animal relationships in both its cross-temporal nature and its transgression of the limits of Lunella's body and mind.

## Beyond a Boy and his Dog

One of the most familiar human-animal relationships in children's literature is the relationship between a boy and his dog. Classic novels such as *Old Yeller* and *Where the Red Fern* Grows feature adolescent boys who grow to manhood by bonding with, raising, and suffering the loss of a beloved dog. By resignifying the tropes of representation common to stories of boys and their dogs, *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* draws on the love and familiarity with which human-dog relationships have been depicted in popular culture, but gives it new meaning in its trans-temporal, trans-species bonding.

The relationship between a boy and his dog is a familiar trope in children's literature, serving as an affective bond to be supplanted by heterosexual maturity. Eric Tribunella argues that "the narrative of the boy and his dog exemplifies a culturally widespread disciplinary device that involves promoting intense affectional attachments and then demanding their sacrifice as a way of (re)forming social subjects that are properly gendered and sexualized […] The relationship between a boy and his dog, characterized by emotional and physical intimacy and providing possibilities of great pleasure for the child, represents a form of childhood sexuality" (Tribunella, "A Boy", 152) that must be disavowed as a part of the process of maturing. *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* echoes many of these tropes familiar from children's literature. Devil Dinosaur substitutes for the dog as "a transitional moment from parental attachments of early youth to the explicitly romantic and sexualized attachments of adolescence and adulthood" (Tribunella, "A Boy", 156), but unlike the boys in the coming-of-age adventure stories that Tribunella analyzes, Lunella fails to disavow the relationship with Devil Dinosaur.

Much like dogs in children's literature, Devil Dinosaur serves as a companion through the transitional spaces between her parents' protection and the dangers of adulthood. When we are first introduced to Lunella, she is late to school and engages in a frantic race on roller skates to make it to class on time. The chaotic nature of her passage through the streets of New York City is depicted through irregular panels and her distorted body as she hurriedly traverses the distance from home to school. She sneaks out alone at night to search for alien artifacts that will help her fight the activation of her Inhuman gene and its connotations of puberty, but in doing so she seems weak and vulnerable, dwarfed by the buildings that surround her. In contrast, when Devil Dinosaur arrives, he first carries her through the streets in his mouth. Though this initially seems chaotic and scary, he holds her delicately and securely and carries her above the chaos caused by his stomping feet. He places her above the fray on a lamppost when the Killer Folk attack and hides

her behind his tail when she tries to join him in a battle with The Hulk (Montclare, Reeder, and Bustos, *Moon Girl*, vol. 1). The size and power of Devil Dinosaur gives Lunella the freedom to move in the city, day or night without fear, and when she is separated from him she is reduced to childish confinement in her home or school. Their separation is framed in the language of parental supervision and normativity, but rather than the loss or renunciation of the beloved animal characteristic of dogs in literature, Lunella repeatedly returns to Devil Dinosaur. It is only when they are reunited that Lunella is happy and free.

The serial nature of comics themselves delay and defer many of the constrictions of narrative structure, allowing Lunella space to resist some of the pressures of impending maturity. If in Freudian psychoanalysis, as Paul Kelleher argues, "the *form* of narrative development and the *norm* of heterosexual maturation […] reflect and reinforce one another's ideological designs" (Kelleher 155), the comic's deferral of narrative completion creates space for the deferral of compulsory heterosexuality, particularly for the queerly coded girl. While the comic repeatedly attempts to separate Moon Girl from Devil Dinosaur, those narrative requirements for Lunella to grow up and renounce her childhood dinosaur friend are undone when the characters are reunited in subsequent issues. At the end of issue four, Hulk separates Lunella from Devil Dinosaur and leads him off in chains, but "It didn't take [her] two minutes to find where they were keeping him" (Montclare, Reeder, and Bustos, *Moon Girl*, vol. 1) and by the end of issue five they are reunited. Similarly, Lunella returns Devil Dinosaur to the Valley of Flame in issue 23. In a heartbreaking break-up scene in which Lunella is trying to do what's right, she tells him "I don't want you around anymore! We're through" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 4). They remain separated for an entire story arc, until Lunella admits that she was wrong in issue 29 and brings him back just in time to save the world (again). He greets her with a big kiss reminiscent of Clifford the Big Red Dog. Throughout their separations, the language of a romantic break-up persists; When Devil Dinosaur returns to Lunella, the compulsion toward narrative completion through the renunciation of childhood animal friends in favor of age-appropriate romantic interests is once again deferred.

Visually, *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* frequently echoes the imagery of Clifford the Big Red Dog, particularly in the ways in which Lunella rides Devil Dinosaur just behind his head, much like Emily Elizabeth rides Clifford. Like Clifford, Devil Dinosaur's excessive size interferes with his attempts to fit into the role of a traditional pet, leaving accidental holes in walls (Bridwell 85) and smashing police cars (174). Devil Dinosaur is frequently referred to as "Big Red" and even jokingly "Clifford", but the clearest parallel between the big red dinosaur and the beloved picture book character comes when the school catches fire and Devil Dinosaur allows the children to escape down his back, just like Clifford does in "Clifford's Good Deeds" (147). These deliberate citations of *Clifford*, one of the few popular children's books in which a girl rather than a boy is paired with a dog,

highlight Tribunella's claim that "dog stories with girl protagonists" shift from external life-and-death threats to more domestic, internal struggles (Tribunella, *Melancholia*, 42). Though Lunella and Devil Dinosaur are decidedly facing life and death and struggling for the fate of the planet, the psychological stakes of the comic revolve around resistance to disciplining and feminizing discourses that try to deny Lunella's freedom and intelligence. When Lunella is reunited with Devil Dinosaur after a separation, he licks her just like Clifford licks Emily Elizabeth after she leaves him to go on a family vacation (Bridwell 117). The queer valence of the excessive tongue fully engulfing the body of the small girl replaces the boy and his dog with lesbian pleasures of queer adulthood.

Lunella consistently describes Devil Dinosaur as a "friend" in resistance to those who mock her by calling him her "boyfriend", but this language evokes the secret friendships through which a queer child might hide a relationship that exceeds the bounds of acceptable homosociality rather than the societally approved friendship between a boy and a dog. Devil Dinosaur must be kept secret, hidden from her parents even while Lunella's classmates seem to know and accept her secret identity as Moon Girl. While dogs are frequently paired with boys in children's literature, they are also strongly associated with lesbians in adult literature. Kathryn Bond Stockton argues that the dogs in *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Nightwood*, and *The Well of Loneliness* "[offer] girls—here young-women-who-are-not-seeking-men—what they can't easily or otherwise discover: a lateral community that understands, affirms, and offers sorrow for unsupported choices" (Stockton 101). Likewise, Devil Dinosaur provides an understanding community for Lunella when she doesn't fit in with her peers and an alternative to normative social relationships.

The queerness of Lunella's relationship with Devil Dinosaur comes to the fore when his presence intrudes in her relationships with her peers. Initally, she rejects him when he complicates her human relationships. When he tries to protect her from Kid Kree, she yells at him, "What's wrong with you?! You're acting all weird! I'm warning you, Big Red—you better be on your best behavior" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 2). This appears to reconcile Devil Dinosaur to the appropriate place in the narrative of growing up, allowing him to be repudiated and replaced by a heterosexual partner, but the comic makes it clear that Devil Dinosaur's behavior toward Kid Kree doesn't really bother Lunella. Rather, her censure of the dinosaur is a continuation of her resentment of his behavior in front of an older girl that bothers her. She admonishes him to be on his best behavior "not like you were with Ms. Marvel" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 2). The tension between Devil Dinosaur as proto-erotic love object and Kid Kree as the teasing boy who becomes the appropriate heterosexual object of mature desire, is disrupted by Lunella's own queer desires.

The cross-species intimacy between Lunella and Devil Dinosaur queers the human-animal relationship between the boy and his dog. While the dog is the ideal companion for a growing boy, the transgressive size of a Tyrannosaurus Rex queers

the normative pairings of traditional companion species. Though *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* repeatedly codes Devil Dinosaur as a dog-like companion, particularly in the references to Clifford the Big Red Dog, his excessive size and physical presence intrude into the human world, disrupting rather than facilitating human relationships for Moon Girl. Her repeated refusal to reject him demonstrates her refusal to be subsumed into the heterosexual matrix.

## Queer Temporalities and Lesbian Drag

At the end of the first arc of *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur*, Lunella stands up to her parents' attempts to confine her into a "normal" childhood. She refuses to let her mother walk her to and from school, asserting, "I'm going to be home late" and joining a newly rescued Devil Dinosaur in driving the Killer Folk out of Manhattan. In this moment of triumph, Lunella asserts "I am the boss of my own body", just before the Terrigen Cloud that will trigger her Inhuman gene seeps up to engulf her. Her last words before this symbolic coming of age are "I didn't have time." The transformation that has been constructed throughout the comic as a symbolic puberty overtakes her, confining her to an egg from which she will emerge at the beginning of the next volume. Devil Dinosaur finds the egg and carries it back to Lunella's basement lab, curling up around it to guard and nurture the new Lunella into her new Inhuman form. Though Devil Dinosaur is ostensibly male, the nurturing with which he protects the egg connotes mothering and femininity. The egg perpetuates the recurring trope of confinement; Lunella's parents and teachers repeatedly attempt to confine her to the domestic sphere, into what Elizabeth Freeman defines as chromonormativity, "the interlocking temporal schemes necessary for genealogies of descent and for the mundane workings of domestic life" (Freeman xxiii) that "organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" (Freeman 3). Constantly late for school and late for meals in order to spend more time with Devil Dinosaur, Lunella resists these temporalities of domestic life.

Once Lunella's Inhuman gene is activated and she emerges from her egg, she's both relieved and dismayed to find that she appears physically the same "no orange skin. No horns. No scales. No tail. No heat vision. No transformation. No change." Much like a queer teen who feels utterly transformed by an early sexual experience, the language of secrets and double identities perpetuates the narrative of queerness, asserting "They don't know […] something might be wrong with me. I might not even be their daughter anymore" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 2). The language of secrets and disavowal perpetuates the narrative of queerness, in which Lunella sneaks out at night to be with Devil Dinosaur after her parents go to sleep.

Eventually, readers learn that Lunella's superpower allows her to exchange bodies with Devil Dinosaur, but she does not yet have the power to control these exchanges. At moments of stress and when the moon is full, the smartest girl in

the world inhabits a large, stomping, inarticulate monster rampaging through the streets of New York or, more often, her science class. This queering of Moon Girl's bodily autonomy allows her to exchange brains for brawn and control for chaos, exceeding the limits of her body and roaming the city at will, but this manifests as Lunella losing self-control, growling and raging in the middle of her science class. The loss of bodily control, emotional outbursts, and embarrassment evokes the awkwardness of puberty, with the perpetual feeling "whatever's happening, I'm sure it's all very embarrassing" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 2). Echoing previous superhero stories such as Peter Parker as Spiderman and Kamala Khan as Ms. Marvel, *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* creates parallels between developing superpowers and growing up, but Lunella's youth, lack of control, and partnership with Devil Dinosaur complicate and defer her successful adoption of a mature superhero persona.

## Beyond the Love Triangle

Queer characters disrupt traditional narratives, particularly as silences or omissions within the narrative drive toward heterosexual coupling. Part of what codes Lunella as queer is her utter refusal of narratives of heterosexual normativity. Her complete disinterest when Kid Kree declares his love for her both confines her to the temporality of the pre-sexual child and suggests a resistance to heterosexuality that codes her as queer. Her initial response to his declaration of love is "gross", reinforcing readers' assumption of the asexuality of children and emphasizing the character's social immaturity. She asserts that "There is no 'us,' Marvin. There's me. There's also you… but you just take away from me" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 2). This is a very mature response to an unwanted declaration of love, but also a refusal of compulsory heterosexuality. Lunella refuses to be interpellated by the declaration of heterosexual love, allowing her to remain in a period of presumed childhood innocence, uninterested in romantic relationships and free from a normative femininity in which masculine aggression signifies affection.

Lunella herself rejects the entire paradigm by disrupting Kid Kree's declarations of affection. While Kid Kree uses the language of romance, telling Lunella's mother "I assure you my intentions are honorable" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 2) and goes down on his knee in a symbolic proposal as he declares his love. Lunella responds by silencing him. He attempts to inscribe her within a narrative of heterosexual childhood in which a boy teases and chases a girl until realizing he actually loves her, but she refuses this problematic heterosexual socialization. While he goes down on one knee, she pulls away in horror and violently disrupts the image of him in a heart, throwing her hand over his mouth and threatening to "sic my T. Rex on you." She dismisses his declaration of love with looks of horror, silencing him by asserting "not another word about that… that… that… stuff." While her refusal is sure and commanding, she stumbles over the language of

heterosexuality, unable to even verbalize the words of the heterosexual romance that Kid Kree is trying to impose on her. Devil Dinosaur offers her an alternative solution to this troubling heterosexualization; he serves as both a physical threat and a rival to Kid Kree's romantic overtures.

Devil Dinosaur complicates the possibility of romantic pairing for Lunella, whether heterosexual or homosexual. Kid Kree recognizes Devil Dinosaur as a rival for Lunella's affection, asserting "The Hell Beast is Jealous! But no force in the known universe will come between Kid Kree and his woman" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 2). By imagining the relationship with the male dinosaur as the only possible rival for Lunella's affections, Kid Kree tries to force her into an imagined love triangle, trying to confine Lunella into heterosexual narratives. He also claims her as "his woman", despite the fact that she is neither his, nor a grown woman. She refuses both the sexualization and his possession by refocusing on childhood pursuits by claiming that "all that matters to me is winning the first Lego League competition" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 2). This assertion of childhood innocence and the use of toys as a defense against compulsory heterosexuality allows Lunella to sidestep the implication that her relationship with Devil Dinosaur substitutes for adult heterosexuality.

In contrast to her certainty in rejecting Kid Kree, Lunella's interest in Ms. Marvel leaves her hesitating and uncertain in a way that suggests a crush. When Kamala Khan arrives to help Moon Girl, Lunella stumbles over her words, sweats and stammers, reminding herself to "Be cool. Be cool" and accusing Devil Dinosaur of "Growling and snorting! You've been embarrassing me in front of my friend all night" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 2). Unlike Lunella's silencing and refusal of the perceived love triangle with Kid Kree and her ability to command the dinosaur in response to him, she's embarrassed by her big red dinosaur in front of the older girl whom she admires. When Kid Kree declares his love, Lunella remains present in her body and in control of her mind, but when Lunella wants to develop a "friendship" with Ms. Marvel, she loses control of herself and Devil Dinosaur takes over. In her interactions with Ms. Marvel, Lunella appears small and nervous, unlike in other social situations. When she realizes "If my mind is here in this giant-sized walking disaster… then Devil Dinosaur's mind is in my body. He's with Ms. Marvel. She's going to think he's me," she panics and runs to find her body and the girl she was trying to impress because "Devil Dinosaur is the only doofus who can make a bigger fool of me than me" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 2). While Devil Dinosaur controls her body, she eats the Avengers communicator that serves as her only link to Ms. Marvel, thwarting the possibility that she can explain her situation and thus silencing and deferring her potential queer attachment.

Devil Dinosaur serves as a third party disrupting both heterosexual and homosocial relationships for Lunella, but in the heterosexual relationship, Lunella remains in control of both herself and the dinosaur, allowing her to reject Kid

Kree definitively. In contrast, Lunella loses control of herself around Ms. Marvel and Devil Dinosaur takes over her body, turning into a growling and stomping monster and leaving her confined to a hospital bed for observation. Her queer desires are powerful, excessive and perhaps even prehistoric, leaving Lunella unable to control her own body as she becomes a raging dinosaur. While it is possible to read Lunella's affection for Ms. Marvel as a fangirl crush and to imagine her refusal of Kid Kree as that of a presexual child, queer readers will recognize the awkward confusion and embarrassment in the face of older female superheroes as an indication of proto-queer affections.

## Queering the King of Comics

Moon Girl's liminal status between childhood and adulthood is exacerbated by her relationship with Devil Dinosaur. A red Tyrannosaurus Rex with flaming eyes, Montclare, Reeder, and Bustos' Devil Dinosaur reimagines Jack Kirby's Devil Dinosaur as a prehistoric animal from "The Valley of Flame. Ages Ago" transported through time and space by alien technology. *Devil Dinosaur* was created by Jack Kirby in 1978 for Marvel Comics as a deliberate attempt to appeal to a younger audience; "Jack had created it on demand, the demand being for a comic that a network might buy for a Saturday morning cartoon series…[it] didn't sell to a network, but Jack had great fun while it lasted" (Evanier 203). Kirby's series lasted nine issues from April to December 1978 and has received minimal scholarly attention. Charles Hatfield argues that Kirby's work after his return to Marvel in the mid-1970s was "criticized by fans (and reportedly by members of Marvel's editorial staff) for [its] outmodedness and labored scripting" (Hatfield 244, my insertion in parentheses), but otherwise barely mentions Devil Dinosaur in his monograph on Kirby's work. *Devil Dinosaur*'s attempt to market to children and compete with cartoons such as *Thundarr the Barbarian* is already a queer failure in its attempts to capture the campy excesses of Kirby's previous cartoon projects.

The return of Devil Dinosaur at a time when "graphically most of the new comics have little in common with Kirby […] but the sheer throbbing excess of the comic book project appears still very much in thrall to Kirby's apocalyptic sense of scope and possibility" (Hatfield 251) has its own queer resonances. Hatfield's masculine language of throbbing excess perfectly captures the spirit of a young boy's wish-fulfillment in Kirby's work and in the history of mainstream superhero comics. Kirby's *Devil Dinosaur* is a young boy's adventure, echoing the postapocalyptic *Kamandi, The Last Boy on Earth* as a fantasy "in which boyhood heroism, half-civilized, half-savage, is the only bulwark against humanity's complete ruin" (Hatfield 17). Reeder, Montclare, and Bustos resignify Kirby's tropes of boyhood heroism by replacing the prehistoric Moon Boy with futuristic Moon Girl. While replacing a male protagonist with a female one isn't necessarily queer, *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* accumulates queer resonances by adapting

Kirby's fantasies of male power and the technological sublime to the story of a precocious modern heroine.

Comics are particularly well-suited to the trans-historical disruptions of time and space called for by theories of queer temporality. The representation of time spatially in comics means that "both past and future are real and visible all around us. Wherever your eyes are focused, that's now. But at the same time, your eyes take in the surrounding landscape of past and future" (McCloud 104). The complex temporalities of comics include the time within panels and the time between panels as well as the time unfolding in readers' heads. This manifests in the mainstream superhero comic as "an expanding array of queer figures, worldviews, and social relationships while engaging innovative experiments in the organization of the comic book page to articulate the 'gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances' of social identity to the *formal* gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances of comic book visuality" (Fawaz 33). Within even a single panel, the image of Lunella riding a dinosaur while piloting a drone or fighting a robot conjures the simultaneity of past, present, and future on the page. The visual juxtaposition of past and present combined with the narrative focus on futurity in Marvel's superhero comics place *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* at the nexus of potential temporalities. This comic gives Moon Girl the opportunity to travel across time, space, and dimension, easily moving from modern New York City to a 1980s mall to the prehistoric Valley of Flame. These are fantasies of childhood freedom through which the child escapes the confinement of the family structure and the linear narratives of growing up, as the comic itself allows readers to transcend the limits of the panel and even the page.

## Animating Afrofuturism

As a young African-American girl, Lunella Lafayette's place in comics and children's literature rebukes a past dominated by white superheroes and serves as an optimistic vanguard of a more diverse future. Mark Dery coined the term Afrofuturism to refer to "speculative fiction that treats African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of a technologically and a prosthetically enhanced future" (Dery 8). While the genre now exceeds these limits to encompass art, literature, film, music, and comics from across the African diaspora in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this definition highlights the instability of the black body in Afrofuturist fictions through the use of technology and prosthetics. By transcending the limits of the human body, including imagining futures in which the races and sexes are transformed, "gaining control over biological nature is a familiar feature of Afrofuturist speculation" (Kilgore 244). De Witt Douglas Kilgore's reading of Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* Trilogy highlights the blending of human and animal DNA as one sign of the novel's queerness by

imagining a future that "breaks with our investment in a humanity defined over and against the animal and, therefore, over and against nature" (Kilgore 246). This concept, blending technological futurism with a critical awareness of race and a deconstruction of white supremacist and heteronormative ideals situates Lunella Lafayette's transcendence of the limitations of her own embodiment firmly in the context of Afrofuturism.

Lunella's queer Afrofuturism derives from her optimistic, forward-thinking embrace of a trans-human technological future, but also the ways in which her transcendence of the human body is nevertheless rooted in the identity of a young African-American girl. With spring-loaded roller-skates and a propeller that pops out of her backpack, Lunella's aesthetic references the joyful futurism of 1970s disco combined with 1980s children's cartoons such as *Inspector Gadget*. Visually, Bustos pays tribute to Kirby's contributions to comics through the juxtaposition of the prehistoric and the technological and through the dynamic art in which Devil Dinosaur towers over and behind the characters to create a sense of motion. The echoes of Kirby's art resonate most strongly in *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* in the trans-temporal juxtaposition of "mythic archaism and sleek futurism" (Hatfield 164). Combined with the specificity of a young gifted black girl, such as the panel in which Lunella's mother insists on braiding her hair so that she will look "respectable" while Lunella is tinkering with an invention that will save the world (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 3), African-American cultural experiences combine with an optimistic imagining of a future in which Lunella's intelligence and technological skill allow her to transcend the racism and sexism of the present.

Pairing Lunella with a prehistoric dinosaur might initially seem like a problematic racialized trope that equates the African-American girl with her cave-boy predecessor, drawing on a history of representations that equate non-normative humans with animals (see Chen). However, although Devil Dinosaur drags Lunella back to an impossible imagined past in which humans and dinosaurs exist side-by-side, he also anchors the young African-American girl as a symbol of progressive futurism and thus queers the impulse towards uncritical trans-human and trans-racial optimism. Amandine H. Faucheux defines queer Afrofuturism as "texts in which race is inextricably tied to gender and sexuality in such a way that it is impossible to talk about one without always already signifying the other" (Faucheux 565). By analyzing the intersections of race and sexuality in how we imagine the future, "Afrofuturism and black queer theory are concomitant projects that subvert the paradigm of normalcy established by white hegemony and heteropatriarchy" (Faucheux 576). Lunella embodies these queer Afrofuturist tendencies by offering a revision to the comics that have come before her. *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* opens the possibility of reading Lunella as queer, but more importantly Lunella's bond with Devil Dinosaur allows her to transcend and subvert a society that tells her that she is just a small African-American girl who can't go out at night and who is too young to fight galactic villains. By pairing with Devil Dinosaur, she

transcends the limits of her own body and her own social role and in doing so, she fights to protect her school, her family, and the planet in a way that few young African-American girls are permitted to do.

When Lunella tries to control her transformation into Devil Dinosaur, she falls into a dream of her future in which she is a young adult who lives in a moon base and directs a team of Marvel superheroes. Her prophetic vision is interrupted both by Devil Dinosaur's growl and the ringing of the school bell dragging her back to a present in which she is always a little bit late (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 3). The trans-temporality through which Lunella is always looking forward and being pulled backward at the same time is characterized by her combination of futuristic gadgets and prehistoric partner. While Lunella may or may not be explicitly queer, the way in which Devil Dinosaur drags her backwards across time echoes the ways Elizabeth Freeman argues that lesbianism can serve "as a productive obstacle to progress, a usefully distorting pull backwards and a necessary pressure on the present tense" (Freeman 64). He pulls her away from the rigid heterotemporality (Freeman 28) of her family life and her futuristic focus on science and progress, allowing her an escape from the pressures of hetero- and chrono-normativity. In doing so, this comic offers young readers a future in which white heteropatriarchy and the powers of normativity are dissolving and a young black girl and a prehistoric dinosaur can lead all of Marvel's smartest superheroes in saving the world.

## Imagining Queer Futurity

In *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz calls for "a stepping out of time and place, leaving the here and now of straight time for a then and there that might be queer futurity" (Muñoz 185). Throughout *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur*, Lunella Lafayette is ambivalent about her place in between childhood and adulthood but also in between genders and sexualities in the ways that she moves back and forth between girl and dinosaur. Her partnership with Devil Dinosaur allows Lunella to combine a childish refusal of adult sexuality with adult intelligence and mobility. By "growing sideways" and resisting the temporalities of adulthood, she becomes a symbol for young readers of a possible future beyond the structures of heterosexuality and white supremacy. The bond between Lunella Lafayette and Devil Dinosaur allows her to resist the romanticization of childhood and transcend the limits and expectations of a young African-American girl. In doing so, it allows us to imagine a queer futurity for Moon Girl and for Marvel Comics.

In *Feeling Backward*, Heather Love argues that "whether understood as throwbacks to an earlier stage of human development or as children who refuse to grow up, queers have been seen across the twentieth century as a backward race. Perverse, immature, sterile, and melancholic: even when they provoke fears about the future, they somehow also recall the past" (Love 6). As Lunella Lafayette is caught between

human and dinosaur bodies, moving between futuristic, science-loving youth and temporally displaced T. Rex, she is in an inherently queer disruption to compulsory heterosexuality. She moves between the rational, planning, forward-thinking young girl who believes "what's the point of engineering if it doesn't make the world a better place" (Montclare *et al.*, *Moon Girl*, vol. 2) and a physically powerful dinosaur motivated by fear and physical needs. If "the future is queerness's domain […] Queerness is that thing that lets us feel this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (Muñoz 1), *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* opens up the possibilities for that queer future in comics. By moving between two bodies and identities, Lunella disrupts the heteronormative temporality of her world and works to create a vibrant and inclusive future in which children, young girls particularly, are not limited by expectations of gender, sexuality, or the size and power of their bodies. Her trans-species and trans-temporal transformation moves her beyond the binaries of human and animal, male and female, and past and future and thus suggests the possibility for a world without those limits.

In comics such as *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* and other recent Marvel titles like *Shuri*, the future is intelligent young black women whose age and race are no longer barriers to their opportunities. Lunella Lafayette and the rest of the "All-New, All-Different" superheroes of Marvel's newer generation such as Amadeus Cho as the Hulk, Miles Morales as Spiderman, Riri Williams as Ironheart, Kamala Khan as Ms. Marvel, and America Chavez reconfigure what the future looks like by offering alternatives to the excesses of white heterosexual masculinity and femininity in previous generations of superhero comics. Who can blame Lunella for being a bit starstruck when confronted with the popularity and the cultural change offered up by the appearances of Ms. Marvel and Ironheart? These characters are forging a newer, queerer future for Marvel comics by embracing racial and sexual difference and imagining possibilities for superheroes with a wider range of bodies and identities than we may have seen in the past.

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# Childhood under Threat

# "Winner Take All!":
## Children, Animals and Mourning in Kirby's *Kamandi*

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*For Leona, Amelia Earhart and Conchita,*
*our second generation.*

Jack Kirby's "The Gift!" *(Kamandi* Vol. 1 #16, Apr. 1974) opens with a harrowing scene. The young blond hero, Kamandi, prowls the catacombs beneath a post-apocalyptic Washington, DC. Grim-faced, shirtless, clutching a rifle, he wonders, "*What* kind of place is this?"[1] At his approach, in the splash page's foreground, we see gnarled, grasping human hands (in the distinctive blocky, angular style of Kirby's 1970s work),[2] looking as if about to seize the "Last Boy on Earth" (1).

Turning the page, the suspense breaks, revealing a sorry spectacle. In a double-sized spread, Kamandi stands before a set of cages holding a mass of half-naked *homo sapiens,* limbs and heads spilling out of the bars,[3] grabbing at food and ladling water out of buckets, their expressions frantic, dulled, tormented, grotesque. These pathetic creatures' only utterances: cries of "Grraaar!" and "Yowr!" Kamandi has stumbled on a research lab, in a world where, except for him, all humans have lost their reason, intelligence, and dominant place in the natural order. A sign cruelly reinforces the point: "Experimental Animals/Bio Chemical Research Section/ Unauthorized Persons Not Admitted" (2-3). When the desperate beast-people snatch at Kamandi, he yells at them in contempt, "*Stop* pawing at me, you mindless idiots! It's *not* my fault you're here!" (4).

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1. All comics emphases in original unless otherwise indicated.
2. A seminal figure in superhero comics, Jack Kirby (1917-1994) co-created Captain America, the Fantastic Four and many other characters, and, with Stan Lee, inaugurated the so-called Marvel Silver Age of comics in the early 1960s.
3. The cage bars parallel the comics grid itself (left uncolored, they have the same hue as gutters, or the conventionally white space between panels), foreshadowing the modular page compositions Kirby uses at the end of the story, when the humanimals make good their escape.

Reacting in characteristic fashion—angrily, violently—Kamandi reveals himself as the child he is. Yet, despite his frequent tantrums in front of the humans and human-animal hybrids he often encounters, the youth notably develops a tender fondness towards Kliklak, a gigantic grasshopper (of average animal intelligence) which in the series' second year briefly serves as his companion and mount. In a storyline which culminates with Kliklak's mortal wounding and mercy killing at Kamandi's hand, Kirby draws a stark contrast between his hero's response to most therioanthromorphs (human-animal hybrids) in his insane world (many of which, admittedly, want to kill him) and this "normal" inarticulate beast. In so doing, the artist constructs a vision of childhood, maturity and the place of animals, centered on the experience of trauma.

## The "Feral Tale" and the Limits of Hybridity

Conceived as DC comics' response to the original *Planet of the Apes* film series,[4] Kirby's *Kamandi: The Last Boy on Earth* (Vol. 1, 1972-1978)[5] posited a post-apocalyptic scenario of inversion, in which anthropomorphized animals of various sorts become the intelligent top species, with humanity cast as their cattle, pets and as seen above, research subjects.[6] "Men are just *animals* now," Kamandi says, in one of many such laments. "Herded—hunted and sold—by the very beasts they *once* mastered" *(Kamandi* #12, Dec. 1973, 2).

The title became one of Kirby's most sentimentally and morally invested; along with fantastic and satirical elements such as hyper-intelligent dolphins, the genius dog-man Dr. Canus, nuclear-powered androids, giant bees and Watergate-worshipping apes, the series made mankind's mistreatment of other life forms and the natural world a consistent theme. In story after story, the adolescent Kamandi explores an American continent drastically altered after some unexplained catastrophe, with little purpose besides seeking out other reasoning humans like him, while traversing various rival animal-man nation-states whose conflicts meld the futuristic (ray guns, genetic science) with the historical (gladiatorial games,

4. According to Ronin, DC Comics editor Carmine Infantino suggested the concept to Kirby, given the films' popularity in the early 1970s (167). *Kamandi* debuted between the fourth and fifth films in the *Apes* series, though Kirby may never have seen any of them before launching his own work about a world where animals have displaced humans (Hatfield 2017).

5. Kirby's longest-running series at DC, he wrote and drew it from 1972 to 1976 (other writers/artists took it over afterwards). *Kamandi* formed part of Kirby's unprecedented, auteurist slate of titles for Marvel's rival publisher (he had left Marvel in some acrimony in 1970, after decades there). By the mid-1970s, Kirby would return to Marvel.

6. Some critiqued Kirby's flipping of the human-animal hierarchy and other details as too derivative of *The Planet of the Apes,* a 1963 novel by French author Pierre Boulle adapted into a US film in 1968. We can trace Kirby's human-animal reversal trope further, though, at least to Jonathan Swift's satirical 1726 novel *Gulliver's Travels,* in which the hero visits the land of the Houyhnhnms, a race of intelligent horses who have domesticated the brutish, humanoid Yahoos.

cargo cults). As Charles Hatfield notes, such an adversarial vision of nature entwines "imaginary geography and Kirby's envisionment of wild boyhood", which is essentially Romantic, "combin[ing] androgynous beauty with a ferine scrappiness" ("Kirby's Post-apocalyptic Child"). The sullen orphan (his grandfather murdered by wolf-men) fights to survive in a world where environment and child mirror each other in their disordered, out-of-control condition, with natural splendor countered by constant eruptions of savagery and death; as Hatfield aptly puts it, *"the boy entails the setting"* (ibid, emphasis in original).[7]

While others mention Kamandi's constant "shock and awe" existence in an "Earth A.D." (i.e., "After Disaster"),[8] the insights put forth by Hatfield and Craig Fischer (who sees the hero's plight as that of "a disposable animal") pursue most productively the question of Kamandi's dual identity as child/beast.

Indeed, as argued by Hatfield, *Kamandi* represents a late twentieth-century century manifestation of the feral tale, described by Kenneth Kidd as "a literary but still folkloric narrative of animal-human or cross-cultural encounter, in which animals figure prominently" (*Making* 3). A discursive frame to both "dramatiz[e] but also manag[e] the 'wildness' of boys" (1), the feral tale troubles the line between human and nonhuman in its figuration of "the white middle class male's perilous passage from nature to culture […] from boyhood to manhood" (7) in tales ranging from Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), to the pulp series *Bomba the Jungle Boy* (1926-1938) by Edward Stratemeyer (writing as Roy Rockwood),[9] to

7. Such an Aryan youth figure had preoccupied Kirby's imagination for decades. Hatfield (2017) compares the golden-tressed Kamandi to the artist's similar Serifan of *The Forever People* (DC, 1971-72); Angel of *Boys' Ranch* (Harvey, 1950-51); and *Tuk, Caveboy* (Timely, 1941), as well to his long list of rambunctious boy heroes, including the Newsboy Legion, Boy Commandoes and, from the period when Kirby had returned to Marvel, *Moon Boy and Devil Dinosaur* (1978). Also deserving mention: Kirby's sole autobiographical comics work, "Street Code", about his brutal working-class upbringing in New York's pre-war lower East Side (first published in 1990). Kirby seems to have recycled ideas from previous works (published and unpublished) for the series, such as the comic strip proposal *Kamandi of the Animals* from the 1950s (Ronin 165) and "The Last Enemy!" *(Alarming Tales* No. 1, September 1957). Kirby's original pitch art shows an older, shorter-haired adventurer and the possible title *Kamandi of Earth: Planet of the Future Beasts* (Morrow 28).

8. Blogger Alex Cox, for example, opines that "[the series] looks a little childish and exceedingly violent", with the boy hero presenting "a pretty blank slate. Even visually, there's not much going on there; he wears cutoffs and boots, and his only accessories are a gun and a holster".

9. Stratemeyer describes Bomba as having the "body of a boy and the heart of a hero!" (quoted in Kidd: 107), a tag line which would suit Kamandi. He too has an athletic physique, and battles savage headhunters and cannibals as volcanoes erupt and rivers flood. DC published a *Bomba the Jungle Boy* comics series, in part based on the novels, from 1967-68, written by George Kashdan and Dennis O'Neil, with art by Leo Sommers and others. Other near-immediate precursors to Kamandi include the DC prehistoric series *Anthro* ("the first boy," 1968-1969), and Marvel's golden-tressed Ka-Zar (a.k.a. Kevin Plunder, debuted in *X-Men* #10, March, 1965), a reiteration of a Golden Age jungle hero.

Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), which signals a "recuperation of the feral boy as a normative subject" in children's literature (6).

Significantly, Kidd traces the modern manifestation of the feral tale, which tends to represent animals as both threatening and nurturing (8-9), to psychoanalysis' interest in feral children. Bruno Bettelheim, for example, strongly linked pre-pubescents and animals (Baker 123) and saw in the feral tale a bridge between extreme trauma as exhibited by Holocaust survivors and the behavior of emotionally disturbed and autistic children (131). Zoe Jaques further argues that, given "the ontological instability of separating human and animal" (11) in a post-Darwin era, the terms "child" and "animal" come off as similarly reductive (26). These approaches partake of what Jacqueline Rose calls childhood's teleologically-inflected construction as a mere formative stage leading to a rational and coherent adult mind, rather than an identity in its own right (13). Michael Chaney concludes, "the device of animal representation becomes in itself a signifier of children—those cultural primitives among us for whom Western theology's insistence on the subject-object disparity between man (Adam) and animal does not apply" (48).

In sum, the feral tale authorizes a blurring between animals and children often effected in comics through visual-verbal interspecies blendings, or as Mark Heimermann calls them, "hybrid bodies in a hybrid form (word-image)" (238). While most commonly seen in what Paul Wells dubs the "bestial ambivalence" of theriomorphic and therianthropic figures (72), e.g. "funny animals", we see a striking and more subtle instance in a later chapter of Kirby's narrative, "The Gift". Our boy hero, now incarcerated in the same research lab as the brutes encountered previously, becomes an object of fascination for Professor Hanuman,[10] a gorilla-man seeking to enhance the intelligence of "dumb animals" (i.e. humans) through a serum known as Cortexin.

During an artillery bombardment by the gorillas' arch enemies the tigers, Kamandi manages to escape the collapsing prison along with several inmates (or "micro minds," as he derisively calls them). They imbibe spilled Cortexin in the water they wade through as they flee, and immediately show signs of elevated intelligence. Kirby counterpoints these vignettes of dawning higher-order awareness with excerpts from the diary of Dr. Michael Grant, a pre-disaster human scientist from which Professor Hanuman draws inspiration for his animal experiments. In the story's climax, the professor marvels at the animals' feats, to the accompaniment of Dr. Grant's narration from beyond the grave:

> I saw an animal curb its fear and successfully elude capture by guards. An animal halted his headlong flight to help another who was injured … There seemed no end to it. A female escaped because a fellow animal sacrificed his safety for her!

10. The name recalls the Hindu monkey god Hanuman, a hero of the Indian epic *The Ramayana.*

> Animals of wonder! Animals of nobility! And the most magnificent was Whiz Kid! He'd picked up a fallen weapon and used it to defend himself! (19).

These scenes of past-present melding make for quite the heady mixture: Grant's diary passages (presented in text boxes as visual "shots" of his cursive handwriting) refer to the chimps of his prelapsarian experiments, which we are given to understand led to the super-intelligent fauna which now populate the series' North American continent. But the concurrent images show Kamandi and his fellow *homo sapiens* escaping, negotiating the battlefield, fending off gorilla soldiers, already exhibiting signs of impressive intellect. Multiple strata of story map the then onto the now, literalizing the adage "history doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes",[11] with the "most magnificent" Kamandi now taking on the role of "Whiz Kid", the smartest chimp who leads his fellow prisoners to freedom. Comics' imagetext strategies thus enact not only an uncanny mirroring of current and historical events, but a blurring of animal/human/child identities as well, which is suggestive of Heimermann's "hybrid bodies in a hybrid form". In "The Gift," Kirby's "feral tale" approach ultimately suggests that the various species may not differ much from each other at all.[12]

That said, as Chaney argues about animal representation in comics:

> There is a limit to all of this hybridity […] which seizes the animal, not surprisingly, at the vanishing point of the human, but not the other way around. The primacy of human speech and mobility makes the primacy of animal appearance secondary, perhaps even inconsequential. If you look just like a horse, but walk around, wear a cowboy hat, a badge, and carry a side arm, you are more of a sheriff than a hybrid of any kind (47).

From talking animals in *Krazy Kat* to *Fritz the Kat* to *Kamandi,* cartoonists superficially reinscribe species distinction only "to finally celebrate and naturalize the superiority of the human (as defined by the Enlightenment) as well as the insuperable difference separating the human from the non-human" (Chaney 47). Chaney here isolates the use and emptying-out of the animal image for aesthetic and/or political ends, a process described by, among others, John Berger. Discussing the anthropomorphic works of J.J. Grandville, Berger in his seminal 1977 essay "Why Look at Animals?" concludes: "These animals have become prisoners of a human/social situation into which they have been press-ganged […] they have dogs [*sic*] faces but what they are suffering is imprisonment *like men*" (19, emphasis in original). Hence, Kirby's multifarious animal-people (intelligent dolphins and killer whales, dog-men, tiger-men, gorilla-men, etc.) in essence fulfill the anthropomorphic

11. While often traced to Mark Twain, the quote is of unknown origin. See https://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/01/12/history-rhymes/.

12. For an elaboration of that thesis, and an attentive analysis of focalization between human and human-animal hybrid perspectives in *Kamandi,* see Fischer.

function which I have elsewhere called "ani-drag";[13] they wear their animality like an elaborate mask. As Wells characterizes the strategy, "Animal metamorphosis … privileges cross-species engagement, cross-dressing, gender-shifting and the performance of identity as a method by which unreal settings and impossible situations may be used as a vehicle to play with contemporary issues" (Wells 66)—though as he drily understates: "the animal might be evacuated" (83-84).

But while certainly true of figures such as the father-substitute Dr. Canus, not all animals in *Kamandi* participate in Berger's "pressganging." Beasts of burden, including horses, oxen and mutated fauna such as giant bees do not gain supranormal intelligence from swallowing Cortexin or through any other AD means. They remain dumb, speechless animals—arbitrarily so. It seems that enough fans expressed puzzlement at the distinction[14] that Kirby felt compelled to take up the subject himself in a 1974 letters column.[15] He wrote:

> [W]hy, in the world of Kamandi, do I discriminate among the animals, giving some the intelligence of Man and others less sentient awareness? Why must the stately horse serve as transportation for a smelly, old gorilla? Why must the bird remain a beautiful dum-dum? …
>
> To my mind, the hooved animals and our feathered friends would have to undergo changes too extreme in nature to reach a civilized statehood. It would pain me to know that a wonderful animal like the horse had endured a millennium of back-aches in order to sit in a chair and drink his coffee at the television set. I would crack up and roll on the floor if a sincere and intelligent turkey were to run for congress (*Kamandi* Vol. 1, No. 17, May, 1974, np).

Aside from Kirby's odd sentiments on what constitutes "changes too extreme" to allow for certain animals to be portrayed with human-like intellects—given that he makes the hooded business titan and slaveowner Mr. Sacker a snake—the explanation falls rather short as plausible "science". This despite the fact that Kirby bases his premise on "a variety of authoritative articles written by qualified men who have speculated on the form life must take in order to acquire intelligence as we know it." (Apparently none of those men was Jonathan Swift—see footnote 6.) Rather, it seems obvious that—as in *The Planet of the Apes*—animals of conventional intelligence in *Kamandi* are there to serve such vital narrative functions as conveyance, threat, labor and food. Not "pressganged" or "evacuated", their animality not rendered "inconsequential", these beasts in a sense remain free to be what they are. One of these creatures in particular would come to play a central role in one of the series' most heart-wrenching episodes.

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13. See Alaniz "'The Most Famous *Dog* in History'".

14. See for example reader Karl G. Heinemann's critique in the letters page to *Kamandi* #12 (Dec. 1973), in which he calls out Kirby's precluding of intelligent horses from the milieu.

15. He facetiously cites as his reason for penning the column: "Continuous drumbeating by maudlin partisans of specific species, such as horses, cows, chickens and wombats …" (ellipsis in original).

## "Winner Take All!"

In "Winner Take All!" (*Kamandi* #14, Feb. 1974), Kirby addresses the subject of animal-human ethics in particularly stark terms: the protagonist finds himself competing in a perversely gladiatorial "Sacker's Sweepstakes" race, with raucous crowds of ani-men placing wagers on the outcome and cheering on their champions. In a sickening reversal typical of the series, Kamandi confronts impossible odds, reduced to the bare life of a beast (not unlike those "micro-minds" in Professor Hanuman's laboratory), total slave to a higher species, compelled to perform against his fellow humans. His role differs little from that of a dog forced to fight another dog.

Kamandi's opponent: Bull Bantam, another loutish semi-articulate astride a fearsome buffalo, who barks such scintillating dialogue as "Me stomp you *deep* into ground!" (11). The "beater of women", equal parts odious and pugnacious, sparks Kamandi's ire for his ill-treatment of Spirit (sister of our hero's lost love, Flower). When the bully's comeuppance finally arrives, it does so on the racetrack, as the enraged boy beats the larger man to a pulp with his bare hands, sputtering, "I've just been *aching* to pay you off! Stupid—arrogant—pampered—brutal little *tyrant!*" (12). Their final melee unfolds over two pages (one of them a nine-panel grid) as Kamandi, his face a rictus of fury, pummels the villain senseless to a cascade of "Pow"/"Bam!" sound effects (up to three per panel) and explosive power lines. The scene's savage dynamism (blurred fists flying, blond hair aswirl) underscores Kirby's "violent, conflictual understanding of story" (Hatfield, *Hand of Fire,* 8), as well as what Glen Gold sees as the "underlying rage" which fueled so much of Kirby's art (67).[16]

Speaking of which, one aspect of that art in particular drives the scene's propulsive energy: the veteran Kirby's oft-remarked "blocky" 1970s expressionism, described by Hatfield as "angular modernist severity bordering on the grotesque" (73) which redraws the balance between "pictorial realism and cartoon stylization" (72). Disdained by some,[17] this style—precisely through its mannerist excess—is largely what makes *Kamandi* work so well as children's fantasy. What Alexi Worth

16. The scene comes off as so raw and brutal, in fact, that it nearly gives the lie to Kirby's remarks in a 2002 interview: "Speaking for myself, I know there's violence, but I like to show violence in a graceful way, a dramatic way, but never in its true way. I just don't like to look at it that way. There is something stupid in violence as violence" (13).

17. Worth compares Kirby to Willem de Kooning, Steve Wheeler and Frank Stella, though as Hatfield notes, the artist's eccentricities and deviations from both major publishers' house styles came to repel many comics fans (76). Jonathan Lethem goes so far as to call late Kirby "a kind of autistic primitivist genius" (8), not the only critic to label the cartoonist a sort of outsider artist. Lethem further describes his childhood friend Karl's incensed reaction to 70s Kirby: "[he] sucked because he didn't draw the human body right. Karl was embarrassed by the clunkiness, the raw and ragged dynamism, the lack of fingernails or other fine detail" (15). Here seems as good a place as any to admit that I myself, growing up in the 1970s, shared Karl's opinion on late Kirby.

calls a Blakean "forcefully wrong presentation of human anatomy" (70), enhanced in no small measure by breathless dialogue and triple exclamation points, abets an ingenuous mood that readily marries the surreal to the prosaic, the "innocent" to the harrowing, talking dolphins to tragedy and death. Its oddness somehow evokes a child's horror at the appalling violence and instability of the world, along with awe at its fundamental beauty; a naïve sublime.[18] Kirby's art here, with bodies abstracted to graphic essences and pure kineticism, expressions distorted to absolutes, makes *Kamandi's* otherwise over-the-top subject matter ("The Human Gophers of Ohio!") uniquely engaging. Among other things, the series demonstrates the inextricability of graphic narrative's content and form.

Kirby's art further augments an effect isolated by comics writer Gerard Jones pertaining to how young readers process representations of trauma and loss. Discussing violence with a teen fan at a 1994 comics convention, Jones has a revelation about the true appeal of his work to this audience:

> I'd seen fight scenes as a necessary evil to induce kids to read the more valuable contents of my stories—but now I'd made the most meaningful contact with a reader of my career *through* the fights. The characters, plots and themes mattered, but the truly affecting, truly transformative element of the story was the violence itself. The violence had helped a timid adolescent tap into her own bottled-up emotionality and discover a feeling of personal power (5, emphasis in original).

For Jones comic-book violence functions as recuperative, therapeutic—even, troublingly, adaptive. It certainly does so for Kamandi himself (and, possibly, his readers) after repeated trauma, bodily injury and psychic strain. And what unnatural shocks his flesh has been heir to: by this point in the series, Kamandi has lost his dear grandfather and entire family; his love interest Flower; numerous friends and allies in the unforgiving hellscape of Earth AD, with new comrades Dr. Canus, Ben Boxer and Prince Tuftan to replace them—a mirror to Kirby's life "defined by conflict and, paradoxically, by camaraderie" (Hatfield 6). We therefore need not begrudge Kamandi (and vicariously, his fans) the emotional outlet of throttling his enemies. The boy's momentary—and bloody—victory over Bantam balances the scales just enough to restore his self-worth. Trembling, sinews taut, towering over his defeated foe, the boy even feels sympathy for the bully: "But it *isn't* all your fault! The Sacker's company *made* you what you are!" (12).

But violence in this series always takes place within a larger social context—which Kirby makes brutally manifest almost immediately after his hero's triumph. The final panel on this same page (the largest, full-width) shows a diminished Kamandi in long shot, Bantam prostrate before him, and the racetrack stadium crowd wildly cheering, *"The 'long shot' wins!" "Yahooo!"* (12). In "zooming out"

18. On a somewhat related note, see Hatfield 2012, Chapter Four for a discussion of what he calls Kirby's "Technological Sublime."

from the previous panels' tighter shots, Kirby effects a devastating deflation by exposing the battle royale for what it always was: mass entertainment and a gambling opportunity. Incensed, Kamandi hurls abuse at the throng—but by the next panel has given up. "What's the use," he muses, walking away, "to *them—I* am the animal" (13). In short, victory means nothing to a slave.

But something the sullen Kamandi does care about lies broken nearby: his beloved mount Kliklak. In the next few pages, "Winner Take All!" shows the full consequences of violence in Kirby's world, as Kamandi faces a problem he cannot beat with his fists.

Introduced in "The Devil" *(Kamandi* #11, Nov. 1973), the gigantic green grasshopper Kliklak terrifies the leopard-men pirates who captured him in the wild, but it befriends our blond hero, who at this point has also become the property of Mr. Sacker. With only four legs and behaving more like a skittish horse,[19] the giant insect allows itself to be saddled by Kamandi, who schemes to ride it away to freedom. "I thought you were going to gobble me up at first. But, you turned out to be real *friendly!"* he says, patting the goliath. "I'll call you *Kliklak*—okay?" ("The Devil and Mr. Sacker," *Kamandi* #12, Dec. 1973, 5). The creature's only utterance thereby becomes its name.

In David Herman's scale of animal representation in comics, Kliklak (along with horses, bees, and cattle in the series) lands somewhere on the "Umwelt exploration" side of the spectrum, with its emphasis on "the lived, phenomenal worlds of non-human animals themselves" and how these "reshape humans' own modes of encounter" (167). Though not an intelligent anthromorph like Tuftan or Professor Hanuman, Kliklak does have a personality: nervous, rambunctious, frolicsome. In his first interaction with Kamandi, he nearly destroys the boy's hideout by leaping and crashing through it—only to playfully bump the boy's backside to continue the "game" (6). He ranks among Kirby's most odd, endearing creations.[20]

But by "Winner Take All," which opens in *medias res,* Kliklak has already suffered grievous injuries in the "Sacker's Sweepstakes" race through bombardment and heavy gunfire. Further battered by Bantam's charging buffalo, he lies dying on the battlefield as the humans settle their score. Turning angrily from the rowdy crowd, a bruised Kamandi at last takes note of his wounded friend. The sad truth quickly crystallizes, despite the boy's denials: Kliklak cannot be saved.

When Sacker's leopard-men deem the animal's injuries too severe for veterinary aid, they move to shoot him. *"No! No! Wait—!"* Kamandi cries, pleading to spare his friend (13). "Kliklak's *trying* to get up! *There!* You *see?"* But soon, even he must admit there is no hope: "He's in *terrible* pain—he's *suffering*—a-and I *can't* help him". Remarkably, a leopard-man answers: "Yes you *can*.—I'll give you my

19. Kirby explains his reasons for this mutation and Kliklak's more "horse-like" herd behavior in the aforementioned column from *Kamandi* #17.

20. Of all Kirby's animal characters, perhaps only the *Inhumans'* Lockjaw has greater charm.

*rifle*" (14). This astonishing act of trust (Kamandi could use the weapon against them), along with the leopards calling Kliklak "he" (rather than "it" or "devil," as before) and even referring to the insect as "your friend", cements the notion of the animal's status as a near-equal, deserving of a merciful end. Kirby here presents a rare moment of community between humans and enemy animal-men in the series, authorized by the solemnity of death. The leopard even instructs Kamandi to aim for a soft spot between the eyes for a quick kill. "I-It'll take *all* the guts I have to do this—but it's the *only* thing left to do—" the boy mutters, taking the rifle. *"Goodbye,* Kliklak—I'll *try* to make this as quick and painless as I can—!" He aims, fires—and it is over (14).

Throughout this maudlin scene, Kirby reinforces both its tragic mood and radical portrait of transpecies empathy through composition and layout. Let us focus on the climactic six-panel grid on page 14. Panels one and two: Kamandi's initial panic is signaled through his posture and fearful eyes—rarely would he ever appear more like a scared, helpless child. He strokes the giant's head, as it struggles weakly on the ground. Here he tells the leopards Kliklak is trying to get up.

But as we shift to the next tier,[21] we see the start of a transformation over the next four panels. Now the depth of Kliklak's suffering finally dawns on Kamandi; panel three shows his face in extreme close-up, half of it cut off, the closest shot of the page. With deep scratches on his cheek, jaw set, he now looks man-like, steadfast, determined. The frightened kid has vanished. In the fourth panel, where he takes the rifle, he looks grim, eyes narrowed, gaze fixed on Kliklak, whose head juts out in the foreground. In the penultimate frame, as he hoists the weapon to shoot, Kamandi resembles an automaton, his eyes jet-black and empty, doll-like. Kirby accentuates the "robot" effect by making Kamandi's arms unusually rigid; the barrel swings into position with a semi-circular motion line, like some mechanical device. All the same, the stiff posture somehow only makes Kamandi appear more haunted, driven. In sum, the page masterfully represents the phases of grief, from denial to acceptance—and on to euthanasia.

Beyond that, Kirby reinforces the pathos of the scene throughout the last four panels by depicting Kamandi and the leopard-men frontally and looking slightly down. The boy aims the rifle in our general direction, with the shot itself, in close-up, going off down and to the side. Such bending of the fourth wall secures an intimacy with the reader, a connection based on (with no exaggeration) the universal human encounter with death. The scene, like few others in the Kirby corpus, devastates and wounds.

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21. In shifting the gaze from one tier to another, our eyes traverse nearly the width of a page, from right to left, what we might term the "hyper-tier". Artists can capitalize on that momentary interruption and resuturing back into narrative to introduce changes, contrasts, shifts in tone or action, as Kirby does here. I have elsewhere commented on a more severe break from the action, the page-turn (or "hyper-gutter") along similar principles. See Alaniz, "'In the Empire of the Senses'".

This makes what follows all the more risible. "Winner Take All's" final part, "The Last Mile!", opens with a splash page and the series' customary chapter introduction: "The echo of Kamandi's shot *fades* in the tragic air, and with its passing, a strange but noble heart *stops* in mid-beat. Kliklak suffers no more. Here, in this distant land, he's found peace only in death" (15).

As Kamandi grieves over Kliklak's dead body in the foreground, we see the sweepstakes' award ceremony go into full swing, complete with parade float ("Sacker's Salutes its Prize-Winning Animals!"), brass band, balloons and motorcycles (15).[22] Scantily clad women bear the victor "Sacker's crown of champion," fresh clothes and the ultimate jackpot, a "delicious yum yum layer cake." The ludicrous spectacle[23] only heightens the hero's gloom, expressed in the bottom tier through a dead-eyed stare once more directed at the reader (16).

Despite the leopard-men's advice that he cheer up and enjoy "Happy Time", the "sulking animal" refuses all blandishments. Kamandi recalls historical microfilms of victorious thoroughbred horses similarly rewarded with floral wreathes, concluding, "This is the same!—The *same!*" (16).[24] When Spirit appears to present herself as another of his trophies, he goes berserk, screaming, "*We're people!!* Get that? You *can't* give us away as prizes!" (17); the outburst earns him a rifle butt to the head, and unconsciousness.

In short, the demise of Kliklak leads to a full-blown existential crisis. The giant insect, far from a mere servant or interchangeable mount, registers in Kamandi's conscience as an equal partner in his struggle to survive; his loss plunges the boy into deep despair. Kliklak goes down bravely in battle as a comrade, similarly to how Homer describes the death of Pedasus, a battle horse slain in much the same manner as fallen human warriors during the siege of Troy. As Berger notes of the poet's treatment of Pedasus and his master in death: "Both are equally transparent in Homer's eyes, there is no more refraction in one case than the other" (9).

Certainly the portrait of Kliklak, a minor supporting character who goes in and out of the hero's life in four issues of an ongoing series, will not equal Kamandi's in psychological depth and sophistication, all the more so because the creature cannot speak. Yet Kirby's decision to render the animal as animal while still allowing for readers to sympathize with its suffering and death opens a space for what Herman calls "narrativity constituted on different grounds", that of nonhuman life's imagined engagement with the world (178). Unlike with the

22. The image recalls a scene from the cult film *Harold and Maude* (directed by Hal Ashby, USA, 1971), in which a funeral procession bears the coffin out of a church in full view of roaring parade.

23. The comics book's facing page contains a gaudily-illustrated full-page ad for "Karate Judo Jiu Jitsu Savate: The *Total* Defense System" (n.p., emphasis in original), which only adds to the absurdity.

24. Not the only point in the series in which Kamandi is explicitly likened to an animal. At the end of the contest, he sarcastically asks, "What do I win? – A box of *dog biscuits?*" (13).

killing of countless nameless ani-men in *Kamandi,* Kliklak's death moves in part because we are allowed to experience it with him (to the extent, as noted, of having the merciful rifle pointed in our direction).

But of course, as also noted, Kliklak's dying matters because it matters to Kamandi, through whom all events in the series are focalized. Kirby demonstrates this most subtly, through composition, just before the actual death scene. Let us return to the large panel which punctuates the ending of Kamandi and Bantam's battle on page 12. Kirby signals the stakes for his boy hero by positioning him in the exact center of the frame, back to us, confronting the cheering crowd. Various story elements radiate out from him: his foe lies face-down on the track to the left, the buffalo strides away to the right. We see a portion of Kliklak's green head in the foreground. It appears as the largest object, reflecting the ethical dilemma at hand (should we spare our loved ones needless pain, even if it means killing them?); Kamandi's back turned foreshadows that he will indeed have to consign his friend to death and somehow move on. Here as in so many other episodes, the series yokes science fiction and melodrama to Levinasian contemplations of the Other.

The death/killing of a beloved animal represents for some a troubling trope in children's literature, in its most reductive form a sort of way station on the road to growing up. Kamandi's killing of Kliklak to spare him further suffering finds precedent in Fred Gipson's *Old Yeller,* a 1956 novel for children in which the adolescent hero Travis shoots the eponymous family dog, who has contracted rabies. The film adaptation of *Old Yeller* (d. Robert Stevenson, USA, 1957) further popularized the sad death scene, injecting treacly pathos onto the spare description of its source:

> It came clear to me then that Mama was right. We couldn't take the risk. And from everything I had heard, I knew that there was very little chance of Old Yeller's escaping the sickness. It was going to kill something inside me to do it, but I knew then that I had to shoot my big yeller dog.
>
> Once I knew for sure I had it to do, I don't think I really felt anything. I was just numb all over, like a dead man walking. […]
>
> I reloaded my gun and called Old Yeller back from the house. I stuck the muzzle of the gun against his head and pulled the trigger (177).

Apart from the striking parallels with the slaying of Kliklak,[25] this laconic passage, from near the end of the novel, exemplifies a familiar (albeit problematic) boy's rite of passage in US culture. So maintain more than a few children's literature scholars: drawing on John Bowlby, Sigmund Freud and Judith Butler, Eric Tribunella sees Old Yeller's death as key to Travis' gender formation, whereby the boy must "purchase" heterosexuality at the expense of "actually murder[ing] his

25. Other precursors to Kliklak's killing in children's literature include the slaying of a deer in Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' *The Yearling* (1938) and Charles Alexander Eastman's *Indian Boyhood* (1902), in which the hero relinquishes his beloved dog to the Great Mystery.

beloved dog, which itself repeatedly suffers tremendous wounds while saving the boy he loves" (31). The logic of the story dictates that "[i]n killing the object of proto-erotic attachment Travis finally becomes a man" (37-38).

Related to the dead/wounded child trope (Kidd, "Auschwitz", 126), what Tribunella calls the "enabling injury" (xiv) of trauma produced by the child's encounter with the (often Darwinian)[26] violence of life acts as a sacrifice of sorts to the god of growing up; we see its Freudian premises in the emphasis on renunciation and suppression as the price of personal growth. As Tribunella starkly puts it:

> The striking recurrence of this pattern suggests that children's literature, and indeed American culture, relies on the contrived traumatization of children—both protagonists and readers—as a way of representing and promoting the process of becoming a mature adult. It is as if loss generates the escape velocity of youth (xi).

In short, he concludes of such messages as *Old Yeller's:* "to be mature is to be wounded" (xiv). The ethical pitfalls—if not outright sadism—of such a stance have prompted its critique as needlessly traumatizing and triggering. They moved Katharine Capshaw Smith, in a much-cited 2005 forum on the subject in *Children's Literature,* to read the "wounded child" trope, including the "kill what you love" scenario, as a perverse fantasy of adults, making of the innocent child trauma's ultimate victim *and* ultimate survivor, both fragile and strong (116).[27]

Kamandi's traumatizing loss of Kliklak thus stems from a long tradition of authorial barbarity aimed at child readers, to harden them against "extratextual realities" (Tribunella xii). That Kirby's boy hero, trapped in an ongoing bi-monthly series, suffers emotional and physical trauma of every sort on a regular basis, only makes us sense all the more strongly the fundamental perversity involved—as well as appreciate how it paves the way for some terrific melodrama and fantasy. It goes without saying, too, that within an issue Kamandi seems to have effectively forgotten Kliklak, so preoccupied is he with current shocks and dangers. (Here the sacrifice, perhaps, is to the god of serial production.)

I do want to suggest, however, that the death of Kliklak and Kamandi's concomitant grief bear other layers of meaning beyond that of the aforementioned children's literature trope, ones which speak directly to late twentieth/early twenty-first century environmental angst. I explore this notion further in my concluding section.

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26. Wells associates the "moral trauma associated with the kill" with "acceptance of the Darwinian order" (76).

27. See Butler for a catalogue of death in children's literature through the early 1970s. L. Gibson notes that the first books addressed specifically to the young, such as James Janeway's *A Token For Children* (1671), dealt with death (232). Indeed the trope of death has a long pedigree in children's literature, and even played a central role in defining the genre. So, incidentally have animals: http://publicdomainreview.org/2014/05/14/in-the-image-of-god-john-comenius-and-the-first-childrens-picture-book/.

## Conclusion: Kliklak's Gaze

> [I] feel that man's intellect hasn't actually collided with the insects. In other words, I feel that somehow there may be some kind of rapport that man has never had with insects, which he may find if he was on the same level in some way. That should be explored. Maybe the insect in his own size has some kind of intelligence we can't fathom because we're so damn big (Kirby, "Interview 1", 7).

If, for Kidd, the twentieth-century feral tale—"by turns heroic and melancholic"—is "fundamentally a story about maturation" (Kidd, *Making,* 11), then in the second decade of the twenty-first century we can say that graphic narrative has itself arrived at some sort of culminating "maturation" as well. Thanks to the burgeoning field of comics studies and an explosion of industry productions, we can no longer wholly subscribe to Charles Hatfield's 2007 view that "certain underlying beliefs—such as the idea that comics are specially 'children's' reading, or are automatically accessible to most child readers, or necessarily partake of the welcoming 'simplicity' of childhood—have yet to be seriously questioned or historicized" (8).

An examination of Kirby's *Kamandi: The Last Boy on Earth* only reminds that there was never anything *de rigeur* childish or simplistic about comics to begin with, even in their most commercialized "genre" incarnations. In this conclusion, then, I want to reflect on how a sophisticated visual-verbal text such as "Winner Take All!", while fulfilling some of the (fraught) expectations for young reader's literature of its era, also comments productively on such matters as trauma, mourning and mass extinctions that have purchase in our own era of climate change.

To begin, and hopefully without overly psychologizing Kirby, I want to speculate on Kliklak's personal significance for his creator. Glen David Gold, in an essay drawing on Kirby's experiences as an infantryman in World War II, calls him "a genius of trauma" (67). While growing up in New York's pre-war lower East Side had led to plenty of hard knocks,[28] Gold emphasizes how the artist's experiences in the European theater of war helped shape his mature vision. Private Jack Kirby landed at Omaha Beach in summer, 1944, some ten days after the Allied invasion, with the 11th Infantry, Company F. Here he both witnessed and committed mass killings that would forever influence his view of the world. Gold suggests part of the power in Kirby's wartime accounts to his family "came from him not being able to actually tell these stories," how he often talked around or changed key details, "meaning his eye continued to glance away" (74).

Kirby did tell interviewers one coherent narrative about what he called his "worst" wartime experience—notably, one involving an animal victim. On a scouting mission to a bombed-out, abandoned French town, Private Kirby enters

28. See Evanier, Chapter One, which reproduces Kirby's aforementioned 1983 autobiographical story about his childhood, "Street Code".

a damaged hotel with a charred front door. Inside, he discovers a badly injured dog which emerges from the rubble and confronts him, without growling or whimpering, with what seems a reproachful stare. As he told an interviewer:

> It was like he was saying, "You did this to me." Oh, I felt so guilty. I felt just terrible and so hurt, because to me it was like an accusation by a dumb creature that didn't care why I was there […] All he knew was that I was there and he was hurting … I lowered my rifle and it limped past me out of the wreckage and onto the road. He kept giving me these dirty looks, terrible dirty looks (qtd. in Gold 75).

I do not mean to reduce "Winner Take All!" to a mere expiation of its author's guilt, decades on, for a wartime dereliction of decency (why didn't Kirby put the animal out of its misery with his rifle, as does Kamandi?). But surely Kirby's "worst" war memory, of a grievously wounded animal's gaze, made its way in some fashion into the Kliklak storyline. Only here the hero can do the right thing—even if "it'll take *all* the guts I have to do this".[29]

But what precisely is it about the suffering of a "dumb creature" that could produce such a lasting, reverberating effect on an artist's work long after the encounter? Here I think we see most clearly that the depiction of Kliklak's death and Kamandi's grief overlaps with a central malaise of both the 1970s and our own age, an age of species extinctions on land, sea and forest.

In a series so focused on environmental degradation ("a great disaster has *changed* the world"),[30] launched a scant decade after the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) had made the nation more aware of ecological crisis, the putting down of a beloved animal readily takes on an added patina of melancholy for a dying planet. This becomes even more the case when the animal in question is a mutant, produced through unnatural processes (radiation) set in motion by man.

Though the term "Anthropocene" (denoting the age of human-caused mass extinctions, global pollution and climate change) would not come into prominent use until the early 2000s, [31] Kamandi's mourning for his friend resonates with our own time's anxieties over a very real unfolding "great disaster". (Once more, "the boy entails the setting.") We may read *Kamandi,* in fact, as a comics precursor

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29. Both Kirby's wartime experience and Kliklak's death eerily serve as variations on Isaak Babel's short story "The Death of Dolgushov", part of his 1926 *Red Cavalry* collection (based on his own reportage of the Polish-Soviet conflict in the wake of the 1917 revolution). In the piece, the Cossack soldier Afonka berates the intellectual (and Babel stand-in) Liutov for his failure to put a mortally injured comrade to death, to spare him from torture by the enemy. I have no idea if Kirby ever read this story.

30. "The Watergate Secrets!" *(Kamandi* #15, Mar. 1974, 1). Many of Kirby's *Kamandi* stories set the stage with some variant of this language.

31. For a brief history of the term, see Chakrabarty 209-210.

to modern-day cli-fi;[32] the famous cover and opening spread of the series' first issue (October 1972) show the hero on a raft, plying the waves of a New York City reclaimed by the Atlantic, Statue of Liberty bobbing in the background: "This is *not* the New York I saw in the micro-film library!" the boy marvels. *"The city is gone!*—Covered by the sea—!" (2-3). Kirby's postapocalyptic vision[33] incarnated an ecological dread just stirring in the early 1970s, which has blossomed since into an all-too recognizable alarm over a nature grown exceedingly precarious. Reading it in the age of the Sixth Mass Extinction (this one largely human-caused), Kliklak's death thus stands out from previous animal-killing narratives in children's literature as a late-twentieth-century metonym for a dying Earth.

That it can function so, I submit, has much to do with the rise of conceptual modes which emphasize the autonomy, individuality and self-worth of nonhuman beings vis-à-vis our own species. Writing on one of those modes, posthumanism, Bidisha Banerjee notes it "offers a questioning and reframing of human subjectivity based on the principles of community bonding which allows us to look at stranger-hood and otherness in new and challenging ways" (400). In short, Kliklak—whom, crucially, we read as a kind of nonhuman person and partner, not merely as a generic "beast"—represents an instance of what Jacques Derrida terms *l'animot,* a neologism signaling an "irreducible living multiplicity of mortals" (409). In his landmark 1997 lecture-turned-essay "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)", the great deconstructionist critiques an anthropocentric Western culture which counterposes the "general singular" of the animal to the presumptive heterogeneity of *homo sapiens* (408-409). To upend such thinking, Derrida posits *l'animot* (a play on both *animaux* ["animals"] and *mot* ["word]). He sees in the move an ethical imperative to restore a sense of respect, if not reverence, to creatures much abused due, first and foremost, to their lack of human language. He writes: "It would not be a matter of 'giving speech back' to animals but perhaps of acceding to a thinking, however fabulous and chimerical it might be, that thinks the absence of the name and of the word otherwise, as something other than privation" (416).

Certainly Private Kirby's nameless injured dog, with its accusing stare, communicated volumes to him without the need for words. Similarly, Kamandi's despair over Kliklak's death arises largely from his compassion for the animal's speechless suffering. Its capacity to express pain and the boy's sensitivity to it represent an instance of trans-species connection with repercussions for how readers (especially young readers) relate to the state of the natural world as they develop their social bonds. Tribunella, indeed, sees many episodes of animal/child encounters in children's literature as "exemplar[s] of a secure, successful, and a pleasurable attachment in contrast to the typically more embattled attachments"

32. For a recent discussion of cli-fi narratives in comics, see Smith.

33. In this case partly lifted from the famous image of the Statue of Liberty protruding from a beach in the future world of the 1968 *Planet of the Apes* film adaptation (see Hatfield 2017).

with fellow humans, especially adults (46). No wonder they experience the loss of the ideal "bestial relationship" so profoundly.

From Virginia Woolf's posthumous 1942 essay "The Death of the Moth", in which she recognizes her own death fears in an insect's mortal throes—"One could only watch the extraordinary efforts made by those tiny legs against an oncoming doom" (374)—to Michael McCarthy's 2015 book *The Moth Snowstorm,* an elegy for Woolf's selfsame English lepidoptera driven perilously towards extinction,[34] the dying animal points beyond itself. In turn, the mourning of nonhuman lives, even fantastic and fictional ones, further demonstrates their "affective power vis-à-vis the human observer in [their] material, observable form,"[35] as argued by George Ioannides in his discussion of the dead animal in cinema (108), and by Julia Schlosser on "the visual language of loss" and the dead animal in photography.[36] Even in vicarious settings such as that of "Winner Take All!", we "grieve with them not necessarily because they are humanized, but because they do transcend boundaries of kin and kind by becoming integral to our lives as social partners rather than as resources" (Weil 115).

Further, phrases such as "affective power" and "transcend boundaries" as they relate to representation signal yet another way in which animals point beyond themselves, to an extradiegetic quality which Steve Baker links to Derrida's concept of the supplement:

> [T]he visual language of the animal, however minimal or superficial the degree of its "animality," invariably works as a Derridean supplement to the narrative. It is apparently exterior to that narrative, but it disturbs the logic and consistency of the whole. It has the effect of bringing to light the disruptive potential of the story's animal content. It limits the extent to which the narrative can patrol and control its own boundaries (139).

To sum up, the animal body—already a form of narratival excess—takes on additional signifying layers when depicted as suffering, dying and dead, directing

34. McCarthy invokes the disappearance of moths in massive numbers from the English night as a sign of nature's decline over the last 50 years: "It had been the most powerful of all the manifestations of abundance, this blizzard of insects in the headlights of cars, this curious side effect of technology, this revelatory view of the natural world which was only made possible with the invention of the motor vehicle. It was extraordinary; yet even more extraordinary was the fact that it had ceased to exist" (105).

35. See Alaniz "'In The Empire of the Senses'" for a discussion of Jon Burt's actor network theory model of animal agency, a contrast to Ioannides' affect-driven approach.

36. In the catalogue preface to *Remembering Animals: Rituals, Artifacts and Narratives,* a 2018 photography exhibit she curated, Schlosser writes: "From overwhelmingly large issues like factory farming, animal experimentation and species extinction to the closer-at-home deaths of pets and road-killed animals, we're all faced with difficult choices regarding our relationships non-human animals every day" (v). As in the case of Kliklak, Anthropocene animal death blurs personal/global distinctions.

the reader both "outwardly" (connecting it with modern disquiet over global species collapse) and "inwardly" (to those great intimate zones of liminality: childhood, with which it shares its feral origins,[37] and the agony of mourning). Speechless, it nonetheless speaks "for" the dying world from which it emerged, and "to" the traumatized child who fitfully struggles to grasp the cataclysm of its passing. In saying goodbye to Kliklak, Kamandi parts not only with his "innocence," but with a portion of the wildness that constituted them both.

Whether such "shock" episodes in children's literature perform culturally beneficent work, contributing to the child reader's personal development as a "a kind of inoculation" against the "toxicity of loss" (Tribunella xii) seems a different sort of judgment call. But more expansively, I would say "dying animal" stories function as ground-level commentaries on crashing fauna populations which child readers—as the future of our species—will have to contend with.

"The boy entails the setting": in a world out of balance, unstable, gone ecologically insane, many feel they can only grieve—a helplessness not unlike Kamandi's on the Sacker's Sweepstakes racetrack, during "Happy Time". "Winner Take All!" tells us that in a dying world, with animals' lives at best mere commodities, the Kliklaks of the world are doomed. From that truth we can shield our kids for only so long.

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37. Such a linkage returns us to Kidd's feral child and to Heimermann's "conceptualization of children as grotesque, as creatures belonging to multiple worlds but fully belonging to none" (234).

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# "Once upon a time, there was a very bad rat…": Constructions of Childhood, Young People, Vermin and Comics

Mel Gibson

This chapter will analyze two graphic novels from contrasting genres, *The Tale of One Bad Rat* by Bryan Talbot (1996) and *Joe the Barbarian* (2011) by Grant Morrison and Sean Murphy. They have been popular with both young people and adults, and the former has been used in a bibliotherapeutic context with young people who have experienced the issues (abuse, grief, mourning) that the book discusses. Both graphic novels associate rats with their young protagonists as do other comics, graphic novels and children's books, like Philip Pullman's *I was a Rat!* (1999), which specifically connects the rat to boyhood. Other vermin, such as mice, also appear frequently. In relating the child or young person to animals often seen as vermin, or even presenting them as an animal of this type, the creators question a number of issues around the position of animals, children and young people and engage with social constructions of childhood.

Comics both for and featuring children and young people are largely created by adults, thus implying that comics are dependent on assumptions made by adults about young people as both audience and content. In effect, the comic forms part of adults' constructions of childhood, something linked to their anxieties, desires and memories, as I explore in my monograph (Gibson, *Remembered Reading*) about girlhood comics. In particular, the combination of child and animal might suggest an "othering" of the child, in that they are seen as not quite human or less than human (Jones). There is also scope to read the combination of child and animal as part of the long association of children and their cherished pets; this, however, also serves to link the animal and child together as other to the adult.

In exploring dominant social constructions of childhood, creators drawing parallels between children and vermin draw attention to specific young people seen as being somehow different, whether from their own perspective or that of adults or even peers, and how that relates to constructions of deficit and the child

as problematic. These graphic novels, consequently and often explicitly, recognize a number of dominant constructions as pivoting on deeply rooted tensions, including the construction of the child as victim, as powerless and as agentic.

These creators, as suggested above, relate their work implicitly, and in Talbot's case, explicitly, to the content of many children's books, as well as comics. In many picture books anthropomorphism ensures that a range of animals are often presented as children, from bears to owls, usually leading very human lives. Similarly, in novels for younger readers, animals are very commonly linked with children across a range of genres, from pony stories to fantasy. While the graphic novels considered here do have connections with books for children, and particularly with the fantasy genre, they use common tropes from children's literature in ways which serve to question and complicate them.

This chapter will first introduce the two graphic novels in more detail and outline how rats and young people are connected in the narratives. It will then trace their links with genre and journey before looking at constructions of the rat in relation to changing self-perceptions. After that I discuss the function of rats as confidants and how rats and young people are seen as problematic groups in order to explore how the graphic novels use the notion of advocacy by young people on behalf of animals and themselves regarding their rights, cultural construction and representation. The next section focuses specifically on Talbot's book and the use of the natural world and Romanticism, before moving on to look at imagination, creativity and the use of multiples and binaries. Finally, I look at the notion of the death of childhood, and how shifts of scale in the narratives contribute to a more nuanced understanding of rats and young people.

## Rats, young people, genre and journey

Talbot's protagonist, Helen, is accompanied on her physical and mental journey by several rats, who function as self-representations, as psychological metaphors, in a comparatively realistic graphic novel. Talbot also refers to Beatrix Potter's books, which, with their combination of anthropomorphism and subtle realism concerning the harshness of the natural world, are central to the significations evoked by the narrative.

Talbot centers on a dominant theme from the narratives found in the British girls' comic, that of the victim heroine, thus locating his graphic novel firmly and self-consciously within that genre while developing it further. In those earlier comics, overcoming suffering, often caused by the cruelty of relatives or peers, and finding happiness, a new home, or friends were key elements (Gibson, *Remembered Reading*). In Talbot's graphic novel Helen was sexually abused as a younger child and is in her teens at the start of the narrative, having found the courage to flee her home and her abusive father. Her journey takes her to London (in a chapter named "Town"), and finally, via a section called "Road" to the Lake District ("Country"),

where she comes to terms with her experiences. Like many fictions for young readers, as Peter Hollindale states, this graphic novel features a quest or journey that is both "life event and metaphor" (29). Whilst like the earlier narratives by being the story of a victim heroine who overcomes adversity, the representation of the theme stretches the generic envelope by focusing on the psychological aftermath of abuse and finding balance and peace. In addition, the use of the arts as part of the path to that resolution, specifically through the inspiration of Beatrix Potter's work, informs the narrative.

In *Joe the Barbarian*, childhood and the rat are also explicitly connected as the protagonist Joe has a pet rat called Jack. The two graphic novels share journey narratives focused primarily on addressing emotional trauma. However they differ in their central concerns as Joe is dealing with both bereavement and possible loss of the family home. At the start of the narrative, Joe and his mother are initially depicted on the way to the veterans' cemetery where his father is buried as part of a class visit. Joe is depicted as a grieving and angry teenager who on visiting his father's grave says "Hey, dad. You suck" (Morrison and Murphy 5).

Joe is also diabetic and perceived as "other" by some of his classmates who greet him with the comment "Hey, homo. What's up?" (Morrison and Murphy 7), which is patterned like Joe's comment about his father and mirrors his anger with his father and himself. The bullies' anger and comparative power is represented by the animal that accompanies them. Whilst Joe has his rat, the bullies have an aggressive dog. Significantly, they steal his candy and destroy his notebook where he draws and invents his own fantasy characters. Joe is introduced as very engaged with fantasy as a genre, continually drawing. Creative responses to trauma is a theme shared across both graphic novels.

*Joe the Barbarian* is a narrative that also takes place in several worlds, one a realist world of grieving, bullying and illness, the other a reflection of those found in some fantasy novels by being a quest across magical lands in search of a fabled item or solution. The two are interwoven. On the cemetery visit Joe is helped by other young people and one girl appears in both aspects of the narrative, anonymous in the cemetery, and called Zyxy in the fantasy world. Just like Potter's books are used as a structure in Talbot's graphic novel, high fantasy informs Morrison and Murphy's story.

## The rat as self, as other, as young person

Helen sees herself as a human who is a "bad rat", meaning that she is worse than other humans. Her emotional connection to actual rats is based on the way humans stereotype them as vermin, which is what she feels herself to be. Her interaction with other people is marked by this self-perception and by her fears that her "ratness", her experience of abuse which she feels renders her nonhuman, volatile and repulsive can be somehow recognized. Joe too sees himself as different,

but the narrative expresses this more in terms of vulnerability and weakness. His sense of himself as small and insignificant, without control, but needing to survive, contributes to his self-perception as rat. In both cases, other aspects of the construction of the rat have an impact upon the protagonists' views of themselves as the narrative progresses.

Helen's fears are realized when both she and her rat are "othered", as emphasized in an episode where Helen is talking to her rat when sitting on a London tube station platform (Fig. 1). A child and mother approach Helen, the child depicted as eager, initially, leaning forward to touch the "gerbil". However, they flee after realizing that the gerbil is a rat. Helen's response to the rat "That's right. Get back inside" (Talbot 4) suggests that the rat represents Helen's interiority, her internalized sense of difference, although ostensibly, in the image, the reference is simply a direction to the rat to get back inside Helen's jacket. The rat can be seen, in a way, as addressing self-perception in relation to abuse and the idea of being socially unacceptable.

Morrison uses the rat as a symbol of the child as "other" within conventional notions of childhood, as Talbot does, but also as "other" within the education system. Joe is depicted as having few friends, being located outside of the cultural mainstream in his school, and comparatively isolated. This is established in the initial scenes of the narrative, when Joe meets his peers at the location of a school trip, typically depicted as physically located apart from the others. It is clear that Jack the rat is a companion for a lonely young person, reflecting Joe's emotional state and social position through the negative connotations of the creature.

Parents have a major impact upon both narratives, despite their absence, encouraging the protagonists' engagement with the rat as representation of self and their emotional attachment to the actual animals. In Joe's case, it becomes apparent that his father's death has led to the possibility that Joe and his mother could lose their home. His mother, distracted and distraught, is trying to deal with real estate agents and is therefore absent when Joe's hypo occurs. In effect, he is powerless, isolated except for Jack, and lacks agency. This is explored further in the later chapters where a mourning queen (mirroring his mother) will not give Joe resources to fight for the fantasy kingdom (which stands for his home) for fear of the loss of more life. The act of breaking out from behind the walls of the castle in which she has locked herself, and entering into battle with Chakk (the fantasy equivalent of Jack) beside him, is about Joe coming to terms with his loss and changing his perception of self to that of, like the rat, a survivor.

Similarly, parental absence is important in Talbot's graphic novel: Helen's father only appears in flashback in the narrative until towards the end of the book. Although Helen can be conceptualized as agentic after her flight from her family and her rescue of the laboratory rat, in the flashbacks where she is a younger child she has only a bounded agency, one limited by adult views of childhood, which is

linked with the concept of children as a minority social group (James and James, *Constructing Childhood*; James, Jenks and Prout). The book indicates that as she ages, she has more capacity for agency, although it is only at the end that she can legally work and acquire full independence. Like Joe, she can only succeed with adult support (although in Joe's case this support takes the form of an adult sized fantasy rat).

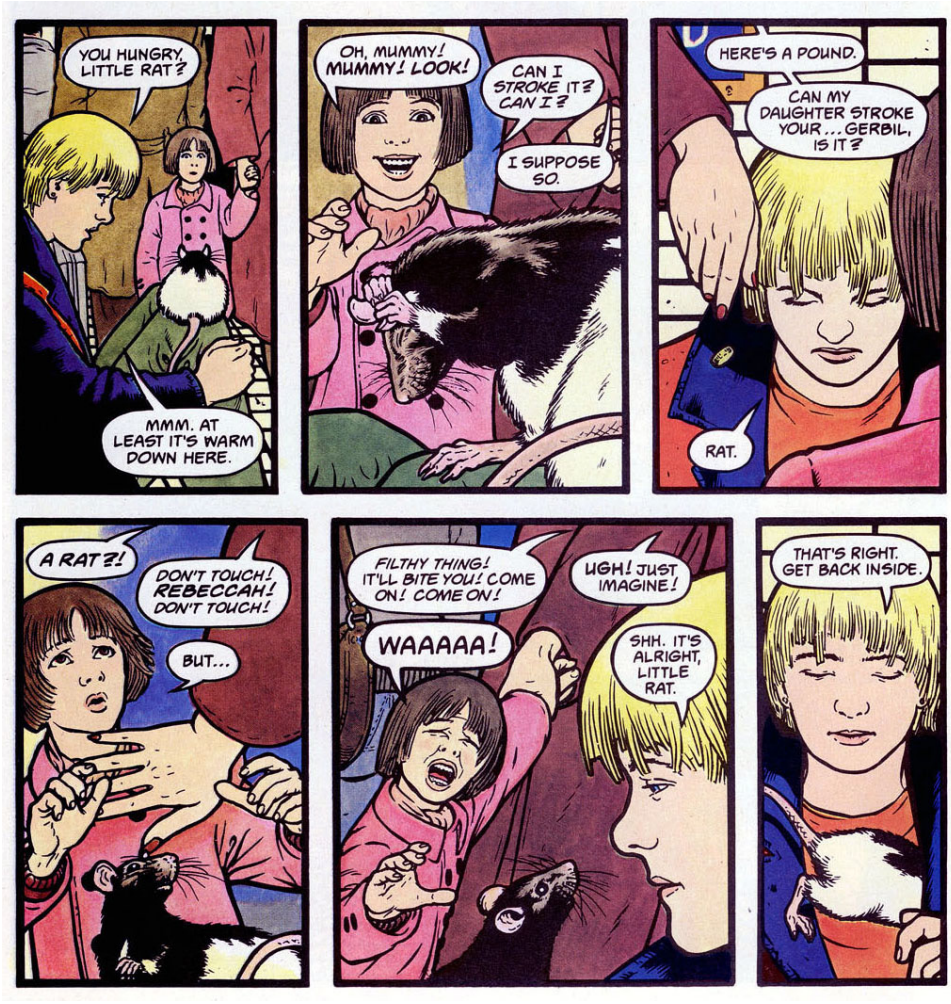


Fig. 1. That's right. Get back inside". © Bryan Talbot. Used by permission.

The rats in the books also serve a narrative function, enabling Helen and Joe to narrate their own story through talking to them. This applies to both the real animals and the giant fantasy versions. It is comparable to the use of dæmons by Pullman, who argued that they were useful in part because, "You often need more than one person in a scene to make it work", (27), and a protagonist in conversation

may be more engaging than a narrator's exposition. However, dæmons talk, unlike Helen's rats; her conversation with them are one-sided. In Joe's case, Jack the rat is also silent, reflecting his real-world status and the story itself as one of a child alone. However, Chakk speaks like a knight part of the time, and as an aggravated conscript in someone else's crisis for the rest of the time. This means that both conversations, in Pullman's terms, as well as the use of different styles of language are central to the fantasy element of *Joe the Barbarian*.

This idea of the rat as having a narrative function is useful in revealing the inner life of the human characters. This is perhaps more significant for Talbot's book since he chose to rely strictly on images and speech balloons, which necessitated a pared back approach to narration, including the use of gutters in black or white to indicate past and present, page layout to express emotion or action, and the use of color. Red, for instance acts as an indicator of danger. Such pared back articulation of meaning places a lot of emphasis on Helen's story being told by Helen herself.

In Morrison's book, having the fantasy version of the rat speak emphasizes the uneasiness of the animal/human relationship. The animal asserts individuality, even insisting on the usage of his version of his name (Morrison and Murphy, 42). This could be seen as reflecting Morrison's career-long engagement with animal rights and advocacy of the notion of creatures as potentially self-determining autonomous individuals. Yet, Chakk also offers reinforcement regarding Joe's determination, so functioning as a supportive inner voice and even sees off a monstrous dog threatening them in the fantasy world, whilst simultaneously dealing with an actual dog owned by the bullies in the real world. The rat, like the child, then, is constructed as complex and contradictory, even in relation to the rat's own role in narration.

I mentioned earlier that there are several rats connected with Helen's sense of self. The first rat of the narrative is an actual rat rescued by Helen from the biology lab at her school. Her determination to save this rat and release the others held in the lab shows a deep connection with other oppressed and abused beings. Talbot presents both child and animal as persecuted and disparaged by adult humans, experimented upon as if their feelings and thoughts do not matter. In doing so Talbot engages with the model of not only the child as victim but also the child as powerless due to their age, an acknowledgement of children's "minority group status" (James and James, *Key Concepts* 75). This is also reflected in Berry Mayall's discussion of the impact of generational position on agency and how this can lead to oppression by those with power. Thus the child and the rat are presented as having parallel experiences, the former due to age and the latter to species.

The rat as mirror of the perceived self is also used in the narrative for the recuperation of the animal's reputation. Having kept them as family pets, Talbot was aware of the cleverness and cleanliness of these animals, something at odds, of course, with the cultural perception of them as vermin. As Talbot's afterword

outlines "We'd had a pet rat ever since my son Alwyn had pestered us into getting him one" (Talbot, 112). Helen speaks on behalf of rats in various conversations throughout her journey, something which continually reinforces that she does not see them as vermin. The first references to rats as survivors and symbols of good luck (Talbot, 35-37) occur in Helen's conversation with Ben, and mark, additionally, her first attempts to assert, explain and justify herself as a person. Advocating for the rat, builds her capacity to advocate for herself, an essential element of the model of the child with rights or agentic child.

Joe also speaks out in support of rats in Morrison's book, again emphasizing their cleanliness and cleverness. This too is an assertion of Joe's self-worth, again an act of self-advocacy as well as advocacy for others. In addition, Chakk and Joe see themselves as cowards whilst also fighting against challenging odds, making them equals and survivors, and once more linking child and rat. In the fantasy world the rat is also a powerful figure, capable and organized, understanding and knowing about what Joe does not, and so Joe's advocacy can be read in relation to masculinity, as well as childhood. This rat can also be read, therefore, as father. The various cultural understandings of the rat are, therefore, used to reinforce complexity rather than stereotype. Helen's commitment to the rat goes further than advocacy, however, as her wish to care for it stops her from killing herself at the start of the book. In effect the rat becomes her family, and as a being more vulnerable than Helen feels she is, in need of protection. The rat can also be read in this book, consequently, as a child.

### Safety and the natural world

This section focuses almost entirely on Helen, in that whilst the rat stands in for the natural world in Morrison's book, Helen's narrative connects the child and health with nature and thus points to Romanticism, a dominant discourse around perceptions of childhood.

Helen's first act of trusting others is moving into a squat at the suggestion of Ben, an acquaintance, in the "Town" chapter. The squat can, to an extent, be seen to reflect Hollindale's suggestion that for the journeying child, "the safe are dangerous, the dangerous are safe" (42). However, that the squat and the city are not safe enough is made clear through the mirroring of Helen and the first rat, when, having fled from a man who had previously approached her for sex and who then accused her of theft, she returns to the squat to find that her rat had similarly been pursued by a predator, in this case a cat, which killed it. It is this moment that results in the transition into the second segment of the book where Helen hitchhikes north and connects with the natural world.

"Road" is characterized by meetings with strangers, some benign, some predatory. When Helen meets with people who treat her with kindness or courtesy, they are interested in or knowledgeable about rats, or linked to Potter's narratives, or

both. Understanding the rat, it is implied, is understanding the child, once more reiterating Talbot's views about the cultural position of the young. It is after an encounter with a gentleman who introduces her to Hindu philosophy which sees the rat as the "vanquisher of obstacles" (Talbot 53) that the second rat, an invisible giant one, appears, fulfilling the same narrative and emotional function as the first.

When Helen arrives in the Lake District, in the chapter "Country", the area is depicted as a natural place of healing. This is flagged up by the first character we are introduced to, who is called Mr. McGregor (Talbot 74) like the gardener in Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902). Additionally, the palette is suddenly dominated by calm blues, white and green. That this is where a resolution is reached evokes the notion of the child and nature as closely connected, which is a Romantic reading of childhood. Jean-Jacques Rousseau did not envisage, however, the child as ornamental and placid, but powerful, like the natural world and part of it. He saw both as superior to the adult, arguing "Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Maker of the world but degenerates once it gets into the hands of man" (11). These sentiments are emphasized in the opening page in the final section where Helen is both huge and central on the page (Talbot 73) and in the images where Helen takes pleasure in a rainstorm (87) and when she finally expresses her anger (97) making the natural scene shatter like glass at the force of her scream (fig 2). In this section, in comparison, the rat, previously a representation of the natural world in the city, is replaced by the larger rural space.

However, the rat does not disappear for good as Helen comes to acknowledge that that would mean losing a part of herself and so it becomes her imaginary companion, or a representation of imagination itself, no longer associated with victimhood. The rat becomes a positive representation of the self, instead of a denigrating one. As a consequence, the final page incorporates the fantasy rat into a re-imagination of an actual landscape which Helen is depicted painting with it beside her (Talbot 122), showing Helen's actualization of independence. She is an adult at peace with her child self and so can incorporate her past into her present. This can be seen as suggesting how fiction, as Nick Tucker and Nikki Gamble assert, can be a "support in helping [children] to develop coping strategies" (27). There are, Talbot implies through the narrative, more dynamic possibilities for the young person than simply waiting to be rescued.


Fig. 2. When Helen finally expresses her anger. © Bryan Talbot. Used by permission.

## Binaries, multiples and explaining us through our stories to ourselves

Of the multiple rats in Helen's narrative, the third appears at the end of the book when Helen imagines finding an unknown Potter manuscript. This book within the book, also entitled *The Tale of One Bad Rat*, further reinforces the links of rat and child in linking the rat protagonist's narrative within the manuscript to Helen's outside of it. That the protagonist is named Helen Barnrat, of course hammers this home. In this version of Helen's experience, where she explains herself to herself, the emphasis is on the issues caused by abuse, including her problems at school and the ways in which adults generally fail to support her. It also reflects her encounters with

predatory animal males, a fox and a cat, mirroring the larger book. The manuscript differs from the book it is within in that all of the characters are anthropomorphized rats, perhaps reflecting Helen's acceptance of herself at the end of the book as the same as those around her, rather than marked out as a separate kind of being. Of course, it also reflects Beatrix Potter's practices. The imagined book is one aspect of the graphic novel that, as I argue, shows how Helen's "knowledge of Beatrix Potter's life and work enables her to find ways of expressing her emotions and come to an understanding of her own situation" (Gibson, "'The Tale'" 251).

This use of both binaries, like town and country, for instance, and multiples, as in the multiple versions of the rats that exist in the text, is echoed throughout the graphic novel, as Talbot further emphasizes by reference to Potter's (1918) *The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse* which outlines the experience of the town and country mouse who visit each other's homes and end by expressing preference for their own life and location. It is also significant here that Potter notes, in the book, her inclination for a rural life, comparing herself to the country mouse. Talbot links Potter's choice and self-identification with the fictional Helen's, also accentuating the theme of the natural world as curative. Whilst Potter's original can be read as a message about "knowing your place" whether geographically or in terms of class position, a conservative viewpoint, the reading in Talbot's graphic novel is that one can find a place to develop and thrive as a person that is not where one originated from.

Morrison's narrative is also divided, but into two parallel worlds rather than ones in binary opposition; instead of a straightforward demarcation the narrative flips constantly between them. This begins when, stressed and anxious after the cemetery visit, Joe makes his way to his attic room and begins to talk to his rat, Jack. He soon experiences a shift into what appears to be another world. Across both worlds he asks, "Did I do something stupid?" (Morrison and Murphy 18). What the chapter title tells the reader is that this is a hypo, something triggered when blood sugar levels fall under a certain level. The earlier theft of Joe's candy by bullies, then, leads to acute danger, but also to the potential for change. The shifting between two worlds in an altered state enables Joe to think differently about his home and circumstances. The second world can be read as literal, or as a story Joe tells to himself, addressing in both cases his feelings about bereavement.

As suggested, Morrison's narrative is very knowing about tropes of fantasy, and at one point the character Smoot even says "It's not that I don't like Joe, but he's hardly the quest hero type" (Morrison and Murphy 110). As with much of Morrison's work, this book makes explicit underlying aspects of how narratives work. The title, of course, refers to the character Conan the Barbarian, which on the cover is juxtaposed with an image of Joe and Jack surrounded by toys, so undermining the heroic status of the original. There are also echoes of Stephen Donaldson's (1997) *Lord Foul's Bane* in the narrative, which similarly shifts between worlds, especially through the ill health of the protagonist. That the chapters each

begin with part of a map, as is typical of many fantasy novels, also serves to reinforce the genre. Fantasy, like Potter and her stories, acts as a creative thread which leads to resolution of internal and external crisis.

Another binary that is significant, is that of adult/child. According to its conceptualization in childhood studies (James and James, *Key Concepts*) this binary can be seen as positioning the child as lesser, emotional, powerless, linked to nature, chaotic and irrational. Consequently the child may be seen as potentially disruptive to a binary where adult masculinity is connected to rationality, power and order. Joe's destructive journey through the house can be read in the light of disrupting binaries and adult power, as it was his father's house and only his father knew if the family held the deeds. Joe emerges from house and narrative on the final page, in a full-page image, with Jack on his shoulder, triumphantly holding the hidden deeds aloft. In Talbot's graphic novel the disruption of adult power similarly relates to the emergence of the protagonist as agentic. As I write elsewhere, "Helen's journey and final arrival hinge … on issues of rights and agency, as well as a focus on the importance of self-acceptance as a way into being able to relate to others" (Gibson, "'The Tale'" 252).

## The loss or death of childhood

In both graphic novels there is, through Helen's love of Beatrix Potter and Joe's toys, a reference to a material childhood. The pet rat and love of fantasy, and the rescued rat and children's books are also, as suggested, linked with childhood. Yet, in both books, childhood is under threat, potentially leading to its loss, or the death of the protagonist. For example, as mentioned above, Helen contemplates suicide at the start of Talbot's book; her experiences have placed her, she feels, outside or beyond childhood, although the Potter books act as a slim thread which means her childhood is not wholly lost but can be reconfigured and recuperated. As Helen comes to terms with her experiences, she reads books for adults, buying them in the local bookshop, so making wider points about reading and healing. However, her final acceptance of herself comes through the fictional Potter manuscript, which helps her integrate her childhood experiences in a positive way.

Morrison, in locating the narrative largely within the family home, makes the materiality of childhood more dominant, especially through the focus on toys. The fantasy land that Joe finds himself in is one based around his pet and the toys and games of his childhood, something he fears he will lose in leaving his childhood home. This is represented in the way that the toys feature in the realistic aspect of the narrative, from teddy bears to toy tanks and soldiers (the latter reflecting his father). This is modified in the fantasy world by the use of dystopian or post-apocalyptic elements, for, as one of the toys explains "Playtown burns from Teddy Bear Alley to Stairbase Heights. And the drains are choked with guts and stuffing" (Morrison and Murphy 20). This potential loss of the materiality of childhood is

also linked to Joe's mortality. Known in this other world as "the dying boy", he is sent on his quest by his toys, accompanied by Chakk. In the real world he must make his way to the kitchen where there is food and soda, with Jack (who wakes him at various points) or perish.

These episodes in the graphic novels can be seen as relating to the concept of the death of childhood, as well as the actual possible death of children. Neil Postman argued that the death of childhood was caused through learning about adult secrets and lies via media such as television. Whilst media is not the focus here, in both graphic novels adult secrets and lies contribute to, or cause, the protagonists' trauma, effectively removing them from childhood. For Helen, as discussed above, this is through her father's abuse, his insistence on it being their secret and her mother's denial of that abuse. For Joe, the forthcoming loss of his home is linked to his father's death, as the existence of the deeds providing proof of ownership were kept secret.

Helen's confrontation with her father destroys the secrecy and lies and liberates her. At the end of Morrison's narrative, the idea that adult secrets may be discovered in a positive way is put forward by Joe's discovery of deeds to the house, which he only found after going into the basement, or in the fantasy world to the tomb of the iron knight, a figure that represents his father and Joe's creativity. The finding of his father's letter with the deed, which connects the two worlds, offers closure but also shows the importance of Joe's artwork, which inspired and entertained his father's military friends. Facing fears to overcome them, to be the survivor rat, and to take strength from the example of animals, are conflated in the narrative.

## Shifts of scale, mutual protection and understanding

In Morrison's narrative, in the fantasy world the rat and boy are constantly connected, with the gigantic rat often holding or shielding the boy. The difference of scale is reversed and, indeed, made larger in comparison to the rat and boy in the house, although the rat is as likely to help Joe in either world.

There are similar shifts of scale in relation to Helen, for, after the death of the "real" rat, she is accompanied by a giant invisible rat on the remainder of her journey. This also refers to another narrative, the film *Harvey* (Henry Koster, 1950), where a giant invisible rabbit, described in the film as a pooka, a type of spirit, or ghost, who may be a hallucination, representation of conscience or an actual creature acts as a companion and support. This film is explicitly referred to in a comment by Helen (Talbot 107). The imaginary companion is a trope in both comics and other media (especially in connection to children?), and so familiar, but the reference is specific. This idea that Helen is aware of the meaning of the imaginary rat, through her understanding of Harvey, represents a shift away from her sense of self as vermin and victim and towards self-analysis rather than reaction to events.

Unlike Pullman's dæmons, who have the capacity to change their shape constantly during the childhood of their human partner and only become fixed in a single form when the human becomes an adult, Helen's "demon" retains the same shape throughout her childhood but its size and her relationship with it changes, as is the case with Joe. Helen's acceptance of the rat, and the resolution of her inner conflict, is also shown in the examples of mirrored body language between the two that appear towards the end of the book (Talbot 106-107). In contrast, in the real world resolution of Morrison's book, Joe and Jack are returned to the expected scale, with the fantasy version of the rat having served its function in resolving Joe's issues and helping him come to terms with his bereavement. The two are pictured together on the final page though, and their physical link is maintained, which performs the same function as Talbot's mirroring.

Scale is also significant for other characters in Morrison's book. For instance, Smoot, who is the child of dwarfs, but human sized, believes himself to be a giant. He has to confront the fact that his size is not exceptional beyond his immediate world. His realization is initially devastating and he says that "life's all about shattered illusions" (Morrison and Murphy 91). However, in the later stages of the narrative he is spurred to action, both overcoming his initial self-perception, and realizing that he can be agentic. This is linked in the narrative of Joe's coming to terms with his vulnerability. Here scale and context are used to argue that irrespective of size (implying literal size of human and rat, but also age) one can act and make a difference to others and oneself.

## Final thoughts

In conclusion, these rats are not "cute" animals, even when they are pets. Rather they are creatures generally seen as outcasts, others and vermin. Their close connection with young people here is seen to emphasize a similar treatment of that social group. The rat may also be seen in a positive light, reflecting ideas of cooperation, cleverness and cleanliness. Such reversals are used in the books to link with constructions of young people. However, a third set of concepts, of rat as survivor and scavenger appear, also a reflection, perhaps, of the problematic social position and treatment of young people. This construction can also be related to the child as animalistic, or Dionysian, disrupting established structures and binaries. Indeed, Joe's damage to his home and battles in the fantasy kingdom, and Helen's emotional responses, indicated by the way that page layout breaks up, as noted above, suggest that young people have the power to destroy and reform adult worlds.

The graphic novels deal with trauma, multiple selves, changing selves and the binary "traps" in which both rats and young people may be caught. In a sense all of the young people depicted in *The Tale of One Bad Rat* and *Joe the Barbarian* represent a spectrum of "damaged" childhoods, and a range of possible responses and solutions regarding what they have experienced. This encompasses Smoot in

the latter book, whose sense of self is utterly changed by volunteering to travel to a world in which he is not considered a giant and a liability. As Hollindale states, "If the child's journey of reading is tied to the fortunes and misfortunes of a fictitious journeying child, where the likelihood is that a series of chance encounters will finally assume an overall significance, we can expect that competing concepts of childness will confront each other in the story, and in so doing they will touch the reader's own perceptions of childhood and of self" (29).

This concept of exploring how one might deal with trauma in childhood also extends to Ben, who only appears in the first part of Talbot's graphic novel, but is mentioned again at the end. Helen sees someone wearing a tee-shirt for a band called Rat Kings and it becomes apparent that the singer is Ben. Helen had previously explained the Rat King to him as an example of intelligent co-operation. That Ben is now in a band suggests that he has taken this model on board and, like Helen, has found a way to use creativity to work through his feelings and experiences. In addition, the band, like Helen's relationship with the McGregors, suggest a model of the family where links of choice are the most significant, not those of birth. The Rat King, here, is indicative of community and co-operation in a shared cause.

Central also to both books is the recognition of the possibilities for change within the child or young person. Such constructions of the child can partly be seen as a consequence of the growth of children's rights, positioning them, like these characters, as becoming independent, active participants in society with the capacity and rights to make choices and take control over their lives (James and James, *Key Concepts*; James, "Competition"). Both Joe and Helen come to terms with their very different experiences through an acceptance of their inner "rat" and through engagement with its outer animal representative, eventually achieving agency. These changes in their sense of self can also be seen as linked to the shifts of scale in Morrison's graphic novel, something noted when Zyxy says with confidence, "One day you'll know. Big changes always start small" (Morrison and Murphy 195).

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# The Panther, the Girl, and the Wardrobe:
## Borderlessness and Domestic Terror in *Panther*

Shiamin Kwa

We all know a story that goes like this. A little boy is punished for being naughty. A little girl is angry at her parents. She runs away because of a harsh scolding. He is sent to his room without his supper. A brother and sister go to live with an old uncle because of some trouble at home. There was a sick parent. There was an attack by tigers. There was the scarlet fever. The children discover a secret room. They open a hidden door. Suddenly, out of thin air, a creature appears. Only the child can see this creature. The creature is usually an animal, and has some of the animal's mannerisms, but it also wears clothes or has other human properties, the most common one being the ability to speak. The child indulges her "animal" self, or he gains the power he lacks at home. Perhaps she gives in to excessive cravings, or he indulges in unalloyed bliss that adults simply cannot access. Then, at story's end, he returns to the world of the father, she puts back on the mantle of civilization, and the children return to being ordinary children safe in their bedrooms once again. The animal friend has played his part, and now he has to leave. The only animals the child knows are once again the nonverbal family pet or beloved toy.

*Panther* was written and drawn by the Belgian-born artist Brecht Evens. It was published in Dutch and French in 2014 and then with a few additions for the translations in English and German in 2016. To the casual viewer who picks up the book, it appears as if it follows in the tradition of the child's picture book. Though somewhat thicker and heavier, it projects the material qualities of the illustrated children's book, down to its oblong shape, bright colors, and its promise of suspended reality. First suggesting that it is a children's book, and then upending those expectations, *Panther* achieves an unnerving and unforgettable effect that is equal parts horror and shame. The titular Panther not only has the ability to appear and disappear as if by magic, but he is visually different each time we see him, taking advantage of the "sequential irregularity" (Chaney 130) facilitated as a matter of course by the comics form. From the way that rooms lose their firmness and balance in response to the emotions of the depicted characters, to pronounced

shifts in perspective resulting in an overwhelming sense of instability, Evens' art work echoes a world view inspired by artists like George Grosz (Brown), who elides teeming and teetering masses with anxiety and fear. Spareness, variation, and pattern create the visual texture of this physically beautiful book's aesthetic, but also communicate its meaning. In its purposeful manipulation of the comic book as a distinctly writerly text, *Panther* theorizes itself, highlighting epistemic challenges of the reading process that in turn reinforce the themes of ambiguity and double entendre on which its plot turns.

This essay looks at the way that the structure of *Panther* guides its readers through its philosophical provocations by exploiting the narrative structures of the comic. The book deconstructs distinctions between man and animal, and between local and outsider, distinctions that not only rely heavily on, but actively produce, difference. To that end, this graphic narrative challenges those distinctions by training its focus on boundaries. Critics and scholars have pointed to the quality of the comics form that makes it the essential writerly text described by Barthes, the kind of text that enlists the reader into the production of its meaning (Barthes). Perhaps the most theorized convention of the comics form is the gutter, as the site where narrative "closure" is produced (McCloud), or, in Groensteen's analysis, as "the site of a semantic articulation, a logical conversion, that of a series of utterables (the panels) in a statement that is unique and coherent (the story)" (114). The gutters, the spaces that divide panels from each other, create discreet units that are read individually, but the discreet units do not necessarily represent a completed action. Units of time or action may emerge from thinking of units in contiguity: narrative is indicated through the exercise of difference and repetition. Groensteen's interpretation of this narrative strategy, what he calls its "arthrology", considers the way that a graphic narrative focalizes the narrative through its redundancies (Groensteen 98–100). The sense of a narrative thus coheres not simply from the transition from one panel to the next, but around a perception of clustered repetitions. For example, an identical subject against changing backgrounds indicates the passage of time or travel in space. Similarly, it could indicate the obverse: changing postures or appearances of a subject against static backgrounds. The idea of a unit of completed action should thus be defined not only by the relationships between adjacent individual panels, but by a range of different parameters—a splash page, a cluster of panels, a series of actions within a single panel, a sequence of panels across several pages—that are functionally variable in their combinations. *Panther* does not indicate its gutters by drawing black lines that frame panels, opting instead to indicate them through absences; this sense of absence will be used to the same effect in the construction of its narrative, where the unspoken and unseen are crucial elements for the determination of what has happened. The construction of meaning across related but variant units is essential to *Panther's* problems of identification: in terms of both subject and meaning. Likewise, the way that specific

units or actions are "thought together" relay the complex processes of witnessing and interpretation that attach to perceptions formed in their reading.

*Panther* exercises the simultaneous presentation afforded by the sequential narrative form. Typically non-contiguous elements are easily broadcasted in the comics form: outsides and insides, objects within and without borders, good and evil, are no longer unequivocally static categories. The graphic narrative allows for a kind of continuity achieved by the serial, where proximity is an essential aspect of the production of meaning. The repetitions, or redundancy, work in service of producing narrative continuity, but as Groensteen warns: "*continuity* is assured by the *contiguity* of images, but this side-by-side is not necessarily an end-to-end of narrative instances structured according to a univocal and mechanical logic of repetition and difference. We must guard ourselves here against dogmatic conclusions. Comics admit all sorts of narrative strategies" (Groensteen 117). Postema also notes the way that comics urge the viewer to complete narratives through a notion of lack, critiquing Arnheim for drawing distinctions between a pictorial image as a whole in contrast to the literary image that allows for "stepwise change". She suggests that impressions of wholeness are inaccurate: "The 'wholeness' that Arnheim ascribes to the pictorial image is in fact problematic at two levels. When he says the image resents itself in 'simultaneity,' this implies it can be taken in all at once, which is not the case. Pictorial images are scanned and require reading, just as literary images do. Furthermore, the image often implies other, unrepresented, moments. Thus again, the image is not whole, at least not in the sense of being complete" (Postema 14).

The mechanisms of reading the spaces between and of comprehending sequence based on a certain capaciousness of the imagination turn out to be urgently necessary when seen through a reading of *Panther*. Games of cat and mouse, predator and prey, initially seem to hinge upon the utter lack of alertness or surveillance that could perhaps prevent its disturbing ending. As the book unfolds, however, it becomes eminently clear that no amount of alertness or surveillance would have a preventative effect within a system defined as it is by a notional understanding of molar entities. The players initially suggest a triangulation: a girl, a father, and a panther who has the ability to change from moment to moment while maintaining a consistency of identity. In his body, the panther enacts not only the narrative contiguity outlined by Groensteen, cohering into a unit in spite of the variations in his appearance. This idea of multiple "molecular" identities cohering into a molar one also brings to mind the moment of assemblage that takes place in the "becoming-animal". Outlined in the tenth stave of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus,* the process of becoming is a state that dissolves borders of identity, where the dominant molar identity of "man" becomes, in their terms, molecular in a zone of proximity, and therefore indiscernible (Deleuze and Guattari). This becoming is meant to activate a recalibration of hierarchies between human and animal identities, creating a space for the ethical considerations

of animal lives, or to show how critics who adopt this formulation cling to "an imperialistic view of the world and of nature that is accompanied by a series of transcendent values [that Deleuze and Guattari] seek to deconstruct" (Beaulieu 85).

Positive analyses of the model of becoming look to the ways that becoming-animal allows minority identities to elude the grasp of authorities that manipulate or exploit them. To that end, the emphasis is on the liberatory promise of this formulation, which allows for "escape routes—the becoming ahuman of Man. If we humans are the problem with the world then attempts to treat nonhuman animals well or differently within this world is trying to force an eternal victim into an unresolvable problem. Better to unravel the problem itself" (Gardner and MacCormack 5). There are also other benefits to unraveling the problem itself. Evens highlights the dangers that attach to ignoring the possibilities of becoming. *Panther* acknowledges the continuous processes of becoming, and the hazards of refusing to observe that reality. This is especially true when actual boundaries are nowhere near where they are imagined to exist. While the interest in *Panther* is thus less motivated by care for the animal, it also exposes the tendency to over-simplify the animal or vulnerable other as definable and therefore controllable. It presents a profound reminder of the blind spots that are created by systems of identity that depend on reified molar identities. The reader of *Panther* relies heavily on visual and linguistic clues to sort out not only the developments in plot but to aid in identifying its players. We are thus forced into confronting our epistemic limits, a productive position that encourages us to look closer rather than to look away. If the panther, seemingly *one* panther, can assume so many contiguous and yet continuous identities, and if we so easily accept each vastly different visual iteration as equal to the same panther, what categories of judgement have we relied on to assign Panther his identity? Where are the limits of contiguity, that allow us to tell him apart with certainty from, for example, Christine's father?

This essay is concerned primarily with the question of form itself—the form that the book *Panther* takes, and the forms that the character Panther takes. In the way that it inextricably links form and content, *Panther* explores the ways that we constantly rely on surface detail for meaning and patterns, to try to tell one thing from another. What happens, Evens asks, when our very sense of safety and security is tied to our belief in our ability to maintain control of borders of all kinds? *Panther* takes the problem of our resistance to ambiguity as its central premise. The visual ambiguity aligns with its narrative ambiguity, ingeniously showing how the sovereign father is invested in maintaining blindness to this state of affairs. *Panther* poses an investigation of two kinds of domestic terror. Using the threat of the domestic terror of incestuous sexual abuse, he suggests its consonance in the rhetoric used to describe the threat of the domestic terrorist lurking within the borders of the home state. The home becomes a metonym for the home state, dominated by vigilance against terrorist attacks that come from beyond borders yet unwilling to acknowledge the equally present terror of the predator within the

borders: where seemingly ordinary citizens deploy seemingly ordinary objects as weapons of mass destruction.

The answer to the question of "How did the stranger get into the house?" is that he was not a stranger in the first place. Evens' work questions the value of responses that emphasize border control to the detriment of over-reliance on inflexible terms. Borders, like the subjects they are meant to control, are in constant states of becoming, changing and repositioning constantly. It is clear that the apparatus of border control maintained by the sovereign father does not adequately acknowledge the flaws inherent in such protections, and *Panther* points to the equal dangers of the false sense of security bolstered by restrictions and the gathering of biometric data, that pretends that fences of any kind are capable of keeping evil out. The book asks us to acknowledge the unnerving fact that structures as firm as walls and as finely detailed as biometrics cannot fully account for the stranger within. The problem, he suggests, is not one of porous borders or weakly constructed ones; the problem, instead, is that the danger already lies within them and that those structures not only fail to keep the evil out but indeed create harbors that protect the evils within. The problem, in fact, is not that the sovereign father is negligent or ignorant, but that in fact he depends on these false and failing structures to maintain his power.

If we insist on molar opposites, we allow those variations to remain unaccounted, and our mechanisms for sorting, including, and excluding, fail the protections that we intend. What *Panther* suggests is a greater sensitivity to not only the structures that allow for these predations, but a greater sensitivity to how those structures are created and insinuated in their maintenance. The use of spots and patterning in *Panther* is both aesthetic and ethical gesture: what is the panther's body if not a model of the molecular form, the body that coheres from a formal arrangement of dots? *Panther*, cat-like, playfully overturns systems of deducing meaning from images, reducing the separations to show how the outsider is already inside, how the animal is the human. His take on proximities elides the proximity of sequential reading; the proximity of Christine, Panther, and father; and, ultimately, the proximity of the reader and the text.

## The Panther

Illustrated in gem-like aquarelles, *Panther* centers around a little girl named Christine, who lives alone with her father. It is unclear what has caused her mother's departure from the home. Her absence has cast a pall over the household, leaving the daughter and father behind in a home that is muted on multiple levels. When her beloved cat dies, Christine mourns alone in her room until one day she finds a replacement companion in the form of a Panther, who emerges from the bottom drawer of the dresser in her room. The drawer is a portal to his home, Pantherland, an exotic place full of lively, fantastical, and colorful stories. The book begins with

the bottom compartment of another container, the freezer where Christine's father is keeping her dead cat while waiting to bury it in the right spot. It is from the loss of this first cat that the new cat is summoned. Into the world of Christine's everyday life, depicted in sedate washes of reds and blues, comes the Panther, who introduces yellow into the pages of her world. One of the first things to notice about the Panther is that, although his name may call to mind other cartoon panthers, this one is a master of deception who is able to hide his more frightening face most of the time, a face that is sourced, like most objects of the imagination, from real objects in Christine's house. Most importantly, the Panther is patterned; he is covered in spots, a characteristic that complements the visual design of the book, and which will have profound significance in our understanding of the text at the end of the book. The panther's ability to look completely different every time is matched only by his ability to change his storytelling according to Christine's prompting, and initially, his intrusion into her life is a welcome addition (Fig. 1). It literally brings color and liveliness to the depressed blues and reds that accompany the world of her life with father. Here let me pause very briefly only to draw your attention to the fact that her father's exclusively blue and red intrusion at an early point in the book is also composed of a series of spots.


Fig. 1. © Brecht Evens. Used with permission from Drawn & Quarterly.

The transgressiveness of the friendship moves from playful to increasingly suspicious, threatening, and dangerous, all the while showing the uneasily framed borders between those states. Evens has described the Panther's behavior as explicitly that of the pedophile, emphasizing the way that the Panther grooms Christine while separating her from those to whom she is closest: "he tries to be her ideal friend, following all of her cues to avoid shock or concern. Later, he seeks information from her, thus making himself gentle and tameable in the manner of the pedophile who gains the confidence of his future victim, isolating her from her potential protectors" (Le Saux and Evens). In this particular case, Panther gradually separates Christine from her trusted friends, including her small stuffed dog named Bonzo. The fantastic stories that he tells her about Pantherland, a world he conjures up to suit her specific tastes, change according to what he thinks she wants to hear. He cajoles her into playing children's games with him that take on an increasingly uncomfortable, then sinister, tone.

Ominous warning signs alert us to the danger that the panther poses to Christine's safety. Her stuffed dog Bonzo tries to sneak away from the panther's watchful eye to warn her of the danger. Bonzo tries to write a message of warning to Christine on the wall, but is caught by Panther and disappears for a time. Panther explains that Bonzo went missing while paying a visit to Pantherland, and has returned from his travels slightly changed by his experience abroad. Unlike the various forms of Panther, Bonzo is from the start more or less visually consistent throughout the book, like Christine and her father: visually changing between panels only in the ways that are natural to comics, with position or expression, expressing "the relational play of a plurality of interdependent images" (Groensteen 22). When Bonzo comes back, however, he is physically changed: he now has a leering face that bares sharp teeth and, more impressively, now has the surprising ability to speak. His speech is not colloquial; it is contextually jarring, and unambiguously sinister to the reader, but incomprehensible to Christine. Although uncertain that he is the "same Bonzo", Christine accepts Panther's explanation of his transformation. She readily accepts the animals and animated toys that arrive from the portal to Pantherland, who arrive from her dresser drawer for her birthday party. It is at this party that Christine is drugged and then sexually assaulted by the party-goers.

Panther exploits the fact of being an animal, a fact that is particularly notable in the history of comics, which harbors a rich tradition of funny animals that have been integrated now into an equally rich history of tragic animals. The animal in the comic is already a way of foregrounding allegorical thinking. Unlike their real-world counterparts, animals in comics possess the qualities that Derrida designates as proper, and by proper he means unique, to man, such as dress, speech and reason, the *logos,* history, laughing, mourning, the gift (Derrida and Wills 373). Animals in comics possess these qualities, and do so in such ways as to undermine purely allegorical ways of reading (Cremins). Comics historians like Joseph Witek

suggest that the traditional animal allegory typical of, for example, Aesop's fables, is undone by the figure of the funny animal in comics, where the comic overturns those conventions (Witek 110). The allegorical suggestiveness of creating types through the mechanism of animal traits is accommodated in the *Animal Farm*-style metaphorical readings of the classic graphic novel *Maus,* about which Orvell remarks: "the reader comes to forget that these are cats, mice, pigs, and soon begins to view them instead as human types" (Orvell 119). That is to say, the animal form, or rather the human-animal hybrids of *Maus* in which the characters are human in body and dress and have animal faces, is an avatar that facilitates the storytelling shorthand in cat and mouse distinctions.

Similarly, animals are used to different effect in comics such as Gene Yang's *American Born Chinese*. Michael Chaney suggests that Yang's comic complicates the simple distinctions that take place on the allegorical level, where animal stands in for human, by making the animal-human distinction actually part of the story. In Yang's exploration of the immigrant hybrid identity-making of self-erasure and projection in the protagonist Jin Wang, the animal in the book turns out to be not an allegorical avatar or storytelling convention but an incarnation of the legendary monkey king from Chinese tradition, an already transtextually anthropomorphized animal. Chaney sees in comics like Yang's a specter, suggested when "social norms of anatomical and emotional proximity" are replaced by more microscopic shifts in human animal relationships (Chaney 130). More importantly, the animal in the comic challenges either-or binaries that are highlighted by attempts to distinguish the human from the animal. In the comic narrative, this distinction is blurred, and allowing the animal to act human is precisely the mechanism upon which Evens' narrative turns. *Panther* is a narrative of suggestiveness. The panther arrives at different times. Every time he comes, his appearance is different. Every time, we accept that he is "Panther", in the same way that we allow ourselves to easily slip into thinking of the vast variety of other lives as members as grouped within the same category of "animal" as if the only important distinction is that they are not like us, the human.

Of course, the predator's cunning is precisely that of suggestiveness. Double entendre protects him from blame: our reading the lewd into what he says allows him to shift the shame to us. He can deny that meaning, and ask what kinds of dirty minds we have to have come up with such conclusions. Panther works his way into Christine's life, and the facts of his being playful and cat-like call into the foreground the fact that this very consistency undoes the possibility of binary distinctions because it is not possible to say that the panther transforms into the monstrous. Rather, we are asked to consider the fact that monstrosity is very much within the continuum of reasonable behavior of this predator who takes many forms, who contains the capacity for violent attack just as much as he contains the capacity for gentle tenderness. By the time Christine has been swept into the party brought from Pantherland into her room for her birthday party, it seems

that interventions are far too late. Yet, what is this after-ness that makes something too late? What does it follow from if we recognize that the danger has always been present, and not a new manifestation? Panther's latent efforts at protecting Christine, during the party scene gone awry, lack credibility. When Bonzo more than suggestively asks her to stroke Giraffe, who "changes shape as you stroke it", (Evens, *Panther*) are we still to think in terms of ambiguities, of warning signs that only make sense in hindsight? At the party, the visitors from Pantherland separate Christine from Panther, and, drug her. Then they proceed, we assume, to rape her. This vacancy in the sequence, following a frenetic and crowded series of images, is the most suggestive of all. As the animals crowd around her, the drawing style abruptly changes once again. As if seen from her point of view, the successive pages play out in a series of flat black and white images that are composed of black spots on a white page, the kind one would expect from a diagnostic exam rather than from the fluid and colorful images that we have become accustomed to in the pages so far (Evens, *Panther*).

Instead, the transition from the fluid, the transparent, the varied into the stark world of black and white conjures up the kinds of associations we make when using these words metaphorically. The questions of what really happened, allegations of testimony, are materialized in the sequence. The series of full page spreads go from the leering face of Bonzo, to the vague outlines of circles where spots are clustered together, to a sequential diagram that slowly transforms that circle and its nucleus into view again as the face of the Panther. The images in this sequence ask the reader: do you need to see it to know what happened? How closely must the atoms be arranged for them to become recognizable assemblages?

## The Girl

During the days leading up to the attack, Christine has been having nightmares. Her father sits quietly next to her on the edge of her bed; we make these assumptions based on the way that the figures are drawn and their relative positions. She tells him about the dreams that she has been having. Christine tells him that he was in her dream, that he was angry at her, "like an animal," she says. He tenderly puts his hand on her knee. At the end of the sequence he suggests that she sleep with her windows open. "Ugh. I feel weird", she says (Evens, *Panther*). In the book the father has seemed to us affectionate, if at times distant. He has seemed kind and tender, if sometimes strangely absent. When we sense the precariousness of Christine's situation, and we see the way that the panther's grasp has become tighter and more inevitable, we wonder why the father is not present, why he hasn't stepped in to protect her. But a new question begins to take form. Is the problem not a problem of his absence, but that he actually has been present? After the diabolical birthday party, a scene plays out between Christine and Panther that looks remarkably similar (Fig. 2). This time it is Panther who sits on her bed. Instead of a rumpled nightgown, she is naked under the sheets. This time it is Panther who soothingly

tells her not to be frightened. He, too, pets her tenderly. He, too, demonstrates concern. She tells him "Aah, I don't feel right." He tells her that he is Panther, *her* Panther (Evens, *Panther*). What do these two tender scenes have to do with each other? It is at this point that we return to a consideration of the patterns that we see in the spots.

Jacques Derrida used an encounter with his cat, or rather his awareness of his cat's encounter with his naked body, as the premise for "The Animal that Therefore I Am". In his bathroom, beheld by his cat, he contemplates the way that humans are capable of being naked, whereas the cat that beholds cannot. This knowledge is what humans use to claim themselves sovereign over "the animal", referring to animals as a singular unit in spite of the surplus of forms of life that are grouped under that single word. In the naming of the animal as something from which humans have emerged, there is the blindness of what Lawlor attributes to human auto-affection (Lawlor 169). In the self-designation of "human" as an entity separate from animal, we accept that though we come from animal, are still animal, we claim that human is what animal is *not*. Not only does the surplus of meaning that attaches to the word "animal" reveal our unwillingness to accept multiplicities in others, it also reveals the unspoken fact that we are still the animal. What Evens' book exposes are our attempts and failures to sublimate the panther inside us.


Fig. 2. © Brecht Evens. Used with permission from Drawn & Quarterly.

"I'm panther. Your panther." What do these words sound like to us now? The truth that Evens' book points to is that precautions that do away with panthers, or that do away with the animal, falsely equate security with singularity, as if preventing the passage of the animal is all that it takes to prevent the child from harm. What is clear from this book is that while it may be possible to do away with what we *call* the animal, we cannot do away with the animal that we are unwilling to recognize in ourselves. *Panther* asks the reader to think through what the spots on the panther's body can suggest. It asks the reader to literally connect the dots. There are patterns that decorate the pages, and there are patterns of repeated motifs in the book, from the spots on the panther to the spots on the Twister mat, to the black and white spots at the scene of Christine's assault. There are patterns in the visual cues, and patterns in the language. There are suggestions left unspoken but still there at the surface, waiting to be read.

Panther gazes at Christine as she sits bewildered on her bed. Her father is in his bedroom, getting ready to take her out to dinner to celebrate her birthday. They have been looking forward to this night out. He looks in the mirror as he adjusts his tie, and whistles happily to himself. The panther has taken many shapes throughout the course of the book, but in the last panel of twelve, his face is cast over with shadows that obscure his eyes and mouth. It is hauntingly familiar, actually exactly the same, when we see it next, reflected in the mirror in the father's bedroom. The father is doubled, and the cast of those shadows unravel the mysteries of the circles of black and white that resolved earlier into Panther's face. These patches of black oozing in and out of focus, resolving into the spotty organization of a panther's features are uncannily those of the father's patterns of baldness as his hair recedes from his forehead (Fig. 3). There are other, retrospective, connections. Not just notable, but impossible to avoid, is the introduction for the first time of yellow into the father's room. Evens trained us to see color, and its absence, as meaningful over the course of the book. Up until this point, Christine and her father's world was exclusively shown in washes of reds, blues, and blacks. Only the intrusions from Pantherland were accompanied by shades of yellow. The black figures against multi-colored geometric shapes have been reserved only for scenes that bear the presence of the panther, literally marked by the prowling cat. Yet now we see the colors, now we see the shadowy figure, and we search for the panther in the room. And we don't see him. Or don't we? Isn't he there, looking out at us, directly from the borders of the mirror? Why is it that we are unwilling to believe that we see it now, before our eyes? I made a point earlier that the Panther resembled an everyday object, a figurine, in the father's house. Is it possible that we identified the wrong one?

Fig. 3. © Brecht Evens. Used with permission from Drawn & Quarterly.

There are other patterns. The father has been depicted throughout this narrative wearing short-sleeved t-shirts, bedroom slippers, shorts or underwear. In the earlier pages of this book, this seems only like signs of his depression. His dishabille is not notable until it is contrasted with the preening father in the mirror admiring himself in suit and tie. It calls to mind Panther himself, who brightens everything with his cheerful yellow tones. It calls to mind the strangeness of those funny cartoon animals whose nakedness is made stranger when they wear only shirts, and are naked from waist down. Now suddenly we see warning signs where before we only saw ordinary conventions. Now we see the monster in the mirror and wonder how long we have known that he was there. By the end of the book, it becomes abundantly clear that the problem is not that there is an anthropomorphic—animal with human form—panther, whose possession of language has allowed him his access to Christine; instead, we cannot deny the much more troubling possibility that it is Christine's father who is therianthropic—human cast into animal form (Baker 108)—and that he has always had access to Christine.

"I'm panther. Your panther." What separates the panther, *Panter* in the original Dutch, from the father, the *pater*, only requires the slightest adjustment of a single letter.

## The Wardrobe

*Panther* reminds us that we often believe that the stranger has arrived without the necessary papers, that he is an intruder who has snuck across the border, an uninvited guest who comes with the intent of harm. This is a belief that strengthens confidence that if only borders can be secured, and the appropriate documents and papers assigned and produced, the realm of sovereign power can be maintained. The vocabulary of inside and outside extends to here and there, to us and them; and the security of the borders becomes the security of that which we keep within. But it is more often the case that the predator is undocumented because he did not need documentation to enter in the first place: he was already on the inside. The comics elision of the animal and the father in the figure of the Panther makes this point without needing to delve into the questions of allegory or metaphor. By its very nature of allowing for the multiple iterations of form that fall within the convention of the comics narrative, *Panther* does not allow for easy gestures towards difference. The panther has appeared in remarkably varied forms, but we have accepted him as if he is a singular, individual entity. Yet the safeguards we take are made in the name of the singular as well, even though we know that we mean the plural. Evens' Panther becomes emblematic of the so-called inclusive exclusion, the bare life, that is the central self-producing activity of the sovereign father. It is this bare life that precisely forms that "zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast, nature and culture" (Agamben 109). The bare life that is created by and for the sovereign. As *Panther* suggests, it is the sovereign father, the creator of the *homo sacer* in the form of the Panther, who has been the greatest threat all along. The comic makes it plain that they are one and the same, so that it is only inevitable for *his* presence to be wholly inescapable.

There is a mistake to attributing singularity to groups of others. There are no protective precautions that can be taken against singulars meant to define everything that we are not. The animal. The foreigner. How can we prepare for and identify threats that we cannot distinguish from the ordinary? The problems of dealing with Panthers of all sorts are thus related to a false faith in our biopolitical apparatuses, created based on how things appear. Our methods are those depending on anticipation and control, in service of risk management. Forms of security are expressed as border policing, technologies of surveillance, the gathering of biometric information, the tracking system of visas and immigration laws, the patterns of movement. They are expressed as travel bans. They are expressed as alerts for the unusual, without articulating what constitutes the unusual. Borders in Evens' book are configured so that they flicker back and forth between the bare life and the

sovereign-sanctioned life; sometimes the panther, sometimes the father. Always the panther, always the father. This provocation asks us to think about the other ways that we fail with our biopolitical assertions of borders maintained in purely spatial and territorial terms. Because just as much as biopolitical apparatuses have become increasingly mobile and invisible, so are their objects mobile and invisible. Flickering on the atomic level, on the level of little spots that cohere into meaning only after it is too late, they reside within. They have always already been there. And we are responsible for them.

The belief that dangerous elements can be reduced out, isolated, and contained, is too often the belief at the heart of our mechanisms of security. Keeping our children away from animals may protect us from *those* animals, those that we define ourselves against. But what do we do about the fact that we, too, are animals? We see in the spatial territory of the wardrobe the embodiment of this paradox. The wardrobe is the border, the portal between Christine's world and Pantherland. But the wardrobe is both exterior and interior, both container and contained. Closing the border may keep out what we think are the outsiders from our borders, but this does not solve the fact that we are all outsiders to each other. It is undeniable that the violence against Christine began once the Panther was invited into her room, but the fact remains that he emerged from her bureau drawer. The bureau drawer that was already inside the room. That is to say, he was always already there.

The last page of the book is a surprise; a black and white page continues into the end papers with the image of the panther skulking off the page back into the wardrobe. In fact, the book presents its final illusion: the wardrobe contains a secret passage, a foldout page that transforms into the technicolor magical dreamscape world of Panthésia, or Pantherland, unfolding seductively into an illustration of Panther's exotic land. In this final action, Evens literally forces the reader's hand, making her carry out the border crossing that cannot be passive, active because we all play a part in assuming the impassability of a border. The problem of access, of closed doors, of who holds the keys, are simply distractions. The danger is already here, inside all of our homes. We are blind to its power, and so long as we remain blind, so long as we remain complacent to it, it threatens to consume us. Each and every one.

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# Politics

# Animal-child Dyad and Neurodivergence in *Peanuts*

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> From which point must we look at children so that they appear to us as objects of teasing and mocking, not gentle creatures needing protection? The answer, of course, is *the gaze of the children themselves*.
>
> Žižek, *Sublime Object of Ideology*.

What connects the animal-child dyad to neurodivergent sociality? We approach this question, first, by considering a broader set of cultural texts that link neurodivergence to animal being. Temple Grandin claims just such an affinity in the title of her 2010 book, *Animals Make Us Human*. Other direct ties between animals and those judged as having social-cognitive or neurodevelopmental differences may be found in clinical literature, as in *Animal-assisted Interventions for People With Autism*, for which Grandin wrote the foreword. Grandin's thesis relies upon autobiographical experience and experimentation to assert that she and others marked as neurodivergent are essentially like animals for "seeing a whole register of the visual world normal people can't, or don't" (Grandin 24). This claim of kinship with animals is mirrored in popular representations of neurodivergence like *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime,* a story in which the young autistic hero's concern for his neighbor's dog ultimately serves as his means of connection to the human world. Whatever social awareness he achieves is triangulated through his insight into animal being.

Why do animal-human relationships provide such a convenient shorthand for the depiction of cognitive difference and neurodivergent sociality? In this essay, we approach this question via analysis of one particular set of represented bonds between the animal and the child in Charles Schulz's strips dramatizing Snoopy

in relation to Baby Linus and Charlie Brown. We argue that these strips, through their acceptance of "whole registers" of relation not often represented in human dialogue, model neurodivergent forms of sociality, communication, and affect. Our intention here is not to categorize characters in Peanuts as neurodiverse, but to consider neurodiversity as a relation that relies on the animal-child dyad for its complete expression. Our use of the term "neurodivergence" is borrowed from activist Kassiane Asasumasu to describe those who "have a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of 'normal'" (Walker). The term stems from the neurodiversity movement, which applies "essential principles of society's embrace of diversity in ethnicity, nationality, religion, and sexual orientation toward people embodying diverse human neurology" (Robertson and Ne'eman).[1] We wish to note that terms like "neurodivergence" and "neurodiversity" emerge from the autistic self-advocacy movement but are not synonymous with autistic spectrum disorders.

We do not have to believe that Schulz was intentionally referencing cognitive difference in order to say that his cartoons, as texts, make such references promiscuously. What allows us to structurally connect *Peanuts* and culturally-inscribed habits for thinking about neurodivergence and atypical affect is the *a priori* network of commonplace assumptions about social normalcy that would mark some behavior as "abnormal" to the extent that it fails to conform to prescribed social codes. For example, maintenance of regular eye contact and turn-taking in conversation are both considered to be developmentally appropriate for a child who is developing in a neurotypical way. It is generally assumed, in fact, that children cannot relate themselves to others without conforming to such expected behaviors. These social codes are referenced frequently in *Peanuts*, but social relations in the strip do not depend on them. Indeed, social relatedness in *Peanuts*, particularly that between animal and child, does not always depend on neurotypical standards of behavior and exchange.

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1. Both neurodivergence and neurodiversity are terms frequently used in critical autism studies and the autistic self-advocacy movement. Much good work is available in comics studies of disabilities, such as Jose Alaniz, *Death, Disability, and the Superhero: The Silver Age and Beyond* (Jacksonville: University Press of Mississippi, 2014) and Shannon Walters, "Graphic Disruptions: Comics, Disability and De-Canonizing Composition" *Composition Studies* 43, no. 1 (2015): 174-177. These studies build upon foundational models in literary and disability studies, which also inform our approach: G. Thomas Couser, *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009); Jay Timothy Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric*: *Critical Perspectives on Disability* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013); Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, *Extraordinary Bodies*: *Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: NYU Press, 1998). Our work also runs adjacent to the study of medicine and comics as explored by Ian Williams, "Graphic Medicine: Comics as Medical Narrative," *Medical Humanities* (2012): 1-7; and Muna Al-Jawad, "Comics Are Research: Graphic Narratives as a New Way of Seeing Clinical Practice," *Journal of Medical Humanities* 36, no. 4 (2015): 369-374.

Although Schulz's animal-child dyad opens up space for neurodivergent expressions of sociality, his readers are encouraged to regard these alternative relations through a screen of sadistic humor.[2] In our reading of sadism in *Peanuts*, we follow Erica Burman's argument—founded on her interpretation of D.W. Winnicott—that sadism protects the self from submersion in the other's pain, and an aggressive relation to the child allows us to "confirm power over the feelings mobilized by imagery of children […] and limit claims to empathy" (Burman 133). Our readings of the humor conveyed by Schulz's panels remain sensitive to their sadistic undercurrents because, for better or worse, these panels frame a normative view of neurodivergent sociality that encourages a sadistic relation to the perceived isolation of the non-neurotypical child.

Schulz hints at the psychological meaning of the relationship between the animal and the child in a strip from March 29, 1953 of Charlie Brown indulging in self-pity.[3] Alone with Snoopy, Charlie Brown confesses himself to tears. He cannot stop crying, becoming an uncontrollably leaky body beside an impassive puppy. But his pathos triggers not pity but sadistic laughter or amusement on the part of the ideal reader. The strip ends with Charlie Brown grabbing the dog's ear to use as a handkerchief, at which the dog indicates surprise and distaste. This ends the strip.

Summarized as a narrative event, the strip recounts the movement of Charlie Brown from the potential sympathetic subject of feeling (a role typical for children to occupy in art and literature) to a hyperbolic object of surplus feeling. In the most explicit way possible the strip shows us that the bond between the child and his dog is directly linked to the child's distance from others. Indeed, the animal-child dyad is an alternative sociality in the comic from the very beginning. It exists to supplement

2. We recognize the complexity of our use of the term "dyad" in this context, as most definitions of dyadic communication do not account for the presence of cognitively or socially divergent subjects. In our understanding, however, dyadic communication does not have to presume face-to-face or sustained communication, as both expectations would preclude the presence of neurodivergent subjects at the very foundation of social exchange.

3. Charlie Brown's relationship to Snoopy bears many similarities to other visual stories told about the animal-child dyad in 1950s American popular culture. To know the visual culture of this period is to know the pervasive visual idiom of Norman Rockwell, whose illustrations grace the covers of various issues of *This Boy's Life*, *Saturday Evening Post, Country Gentleman,* and *American Magazine,* to name only a few. The dog's desire in these illustrations and advertisements evokes a low humor that dates back to the middle ages. The iconic Coppertone ad, for example, of the dog pulling at the girl's bathing suit echo back to the scatological jokes of the middle ages. In most situations, it is the insubordinate will of the dog—to take the child's food, space, or place—that brings about the comedy. The dog either humiliates or serves as boon companion to its child-clone, so subordinate as to meld with the child or become a prop for the child's amusement. Dennis the menace's dog Ruff presents an exception to the commonality of breed in the visual range of dogs represented during this time. Either puppies or small breed dogs, the canine semiotic of Rockwell's 50s is dominated by terriers, spaniels, and setters. Ruff is an exception. Larger than the typical dog companion, he is pictured more like a long-suffering dray animal whose misery serving Dennis is to be enjoyed by the viewer.

the child's empty or broken peer relations.[4] The joke of the strip, in other words, is that this rather odd child loves his dog altogether too much. Thus, the dog acts as the ludic cipher for another otherness, that of the strange child's estrangement. Such strange children are, one could extrapolate, defined by their affective excesses, their inappropriate management of social relations and or identifications.

Against convention, and even when the butt of an inexplicable joke, the animal in proximity to the singular, socially-estranged child tells visual stories about alternative ways of being together. In addition to positioning viewers in sadistic forms of relation to Charlie Brown, with whom the cruel, physical, or aggressive butt of the joke limits empathy, Schulz's strips from this era in his production also experiment with spatial arrangements of characters that trace out alternative social geometries worthy of further scrutiny. We are not saying that *Peanuts* strips are sadistic in theme nor in intent. Rather, in our application of the concept of sadism from Erica Burman and Slavoj Žižek we consider how certain *Peanuts* strips court or solicit a particular type of viewing relationship towards the abstractions that special children represent, which underscore, prioritize, or invest in cruelty. As Žižek suggests in the quote that serves as an epigraph for our chapter, sadism is a perspective. The *Peanuts* comics we discuss in this chapter offer a perspective on children's sociality that invites potential viewers to further perforate Charlie Brown's uncontrollably leaky body with cruel and distancing laughter. Memorable tableaux of Charlie Brown's many humiliations may be pointed to here as examples. And even though the humor is, of course, redemptive, Charlie Brown's missed footballs and mocked loneliness ultimately convene his peers into a choric community, whose humor and levity ironically converge around the limited emotional distance they maintain with the lampooned source of their unison. These social geometries, we contend, give access to neurodivergent forms of sociality based more on propinquities of physical relation than on linear forms of face-to-face verbal exchange.[5] Pointing back to the epigraph of our chapter once more, we observe that the choric community of children can only be cruel to Charlie Brown because they are equal to him. Because their mockery is communal it is also political and bristles with social judgement (think here of Lucy's many condemnations of Charlie Brown's bad qualities). From this we might speculate that the gaze of the child is the origin of sadism against the child, in Žižek's formulation, because only from a position of imagined equivalence can we see the child as both sovereign and punishable.

4. Furthermore, Snoopy is also the animal other that Charlie Brown pretends to parent. This relationship exacerbates and exposes its absent inverse: Charlie Brown's traumatic disconnect from his own parents.

5. In our use of the term "social geometry" we seek to extend the discussion of what Sarah Birge calls the "innovative narrative geometries of text and image [in graphic memoir] that can more flexibly represent both the embodied and social experiences of people with autism" (Birge 2010). Once again, we are extrapolating here so as to encompass not just those who identify with any particular neurology but those *who are positioned to relate* in ways falling outside of recognizable social norms.

Assuming our co-contributors to this volume have much to share on the comics child, we begin our analysis of the child-animal dyad with the comics animal—"a ludic cipher of otherness" whose "appearance almost always accompanies the strategic and parodic veiling of the human" (Chaney, "Animal Subjects", 130). The cartoon animal body of Mickey Mouse epitomizes, for Walter Benjamin, a fantasy of creaturely life able to withstand the ravages of modernity and death, as well: "Mickey Mouse proves that a creature can still survive even when it has thrown off all resemblance to a human being. He disrupts the entire hierarchy of creatures that is supposed to culminate in mankind" (Benjamin 338). But, exaggeration and humor undercut this morbid dimension of the anthropomorphic animal, which also signals *prima facie* genre clues to cartoon readers familiar with the "funny animal comics". The impossible flexibility that Frankfurt School critics like Benjamin chided Mickey Mouse for having too much of may extend to the funny animal as a concept, stretching the symbolic meanings of figures like Mickey Mouse or Snoopy to include decidedly unfunny demon archetypes, making such figures arbiters and tempters who, like the Cat in the Hat, conceal sinister motives behind ludic masks.

The animal in comics reminds us how multiple boundaries function within the text, whether they be related to distinctions of species, in/communicability, or narrative form. David Herman contends that comics about animals call for a re-conceptualizing of narrative structure, since "in [comic] stories figuring the moment-by-moment experiences of nonhuman animals, narrativity is constituted on different grounds: in the very attempt to imagine how a different kind of intelligent agent might differently negotiate—enact—the world" (Herman "Storyworld/Umwelt", 178). Efforts to imagine the different but intelligent agent make animal comics rich sites for "informal theorizing about nonhuman minds" (Herman, "Zoonarratology", 95). We might extend this point to consider how animals are figured in comic narratives so as to "mark the space of witness, invoking the same questions of address and audience that relentlessly vex trauma narratives" (Chaney, "Animal Witness", 95).

Tropes of animality and cognitive difference meet in the figure of Snoopy. Snoopy appears in the *Peanuts* universe in two primary and opposing ways—as a beast or as a savant. Particularly in the early strips from 1953 and 1954, Snoopy's persona is built on bestial markers of laziness, languor, and corporeality. When scolding Snoopy to "think about something else in life besides eating" (December 7, 1957), Charlie Brown draws attention to one key characteristic of Snoopy's animality: he is primarily concerned with basic life functions of physical egress and ingress. In other words, his tendency to think *only* of eating makes Snoopy an animal, and Charlie Brown's ability to think about more makes him something more than an animal (i.e., a human). In this Cartesian distinction between the animal and the child, Snoopy is the body and Charlie Brown is the brain. Yet Snoopy's bodily sensuality and slothfulness are only half of the gag. The other half requires

Snoopy to break from what is expected of a beast in moments of exceptional and therefore absurd ability.

The wide availability of these strips online and our use of them as part of a general comics vocabulary for articulating the animal-child dyad allow us to describe the pictorial essentials of the strip pertinent to our argument: as Snoopy sits over his typewriter in a stooped posture of industry, his absorbed attention echoes that of Schroeder, the piano genius. In Schulz's landscape of gesture, shoulders stoop to signal absorption and aversion to social connection. But where Snoopy is concerned, this gestural shorthand for genius produces an ironic antithesis meant to elicit laughter. Because Snoopy is usually slothful and bestial, his sudden expression of unexpected cognitive ability is absurd and functions as a punch line. Schroeder's aversion to Lucy is presented as charming and even sympathetic, since it is coded as an emerging masculine personality that eschews the cloying, feminized world of social connection for an abstract and isolated creative space. In this regard, Schroeder's insular posture at the piano operates like Linus's blanket as a visual marker of social withdrawal. These psycho-social interpretations are canny reminders of the reach of the domain of the ego into that of the cultural text. But do the same set of behaviors when "aped" by Snoopy suggest something else, something more?

It is worth recalling at this point the connection between autism and animal genius posited by Temple Grandin: both are invisible to a neurotypical audience that refuses to recognize giftedness where they do not expect to find it. To see animal genius, you have to see, feel, and perceive more. In other words, you have to be able to think with an amplified sensorium, one not limited by neuro-normative assumptions. We might argue, then, that the comics offer a window into the very amplified sensorium Grandin describes as being essential to "animal genius". Like autistics, "animals can use their amazing ability to perceive things humans can't perceive and to remember highly detailed information we can't remember" (Grandin 8). This vision into unseen talents can be made available to others through the comics, though often presented under the sign of humor or as a demonstration of the comic medium's unique ability to violate boundaries and animate impossible subjects. Even so, the strip demonstrates for those able to see the joke a dynamic of genius usually invisible through neurotypical frames.

Other *Peanuts* strips featuring Charlie Brown alone with his dog yoke Snoopy's animal genius to visual models of communication that do not prioritize face-to-face forms of reciprocal attention. To begin with a concession, many of the strips do reinforce normative communication. When we see Charlie Brown scream in consternation at Snoopy's writings in panel three of a strip from March 19, 1970, his question, "Whaddyamean hardships?!," is not only directed at Snoopy by virtue of the story plotting but by virtue of their face-to-face posturing. This exchange demonstrates a form of reciprocal attention scrupulously tested for in the conversation practices of children with differences in social cognition. Children

are expected to demonstrate their social normalcy by maintaining eye contact with others while speaking and showing the ability and willingness to direct their attention to the same object or focus as their interlocutor. While the Snoopy strip discussed earlier in this paragraph reinforces these social codes, many other Snoopy strips present non-normative modes of exchange as viable social alternatives, as we will discuss later in the next paragraph.

Typical *Peanuts* child-dog strips contain in their panel layout and character placement models for visualizing communication events that do not depend on reciprocal attention. In many, the child's cognition is comically flawed yet fundamentally superior to the animal's. For example, when Snoopy tries to steal cookies from Lucy (February 8, 1953), her poor grasp of counting would seem to make her an easy mark. In the first six panels, she is seen parceling out cookies to herself and Snoopy, declaring "one for you, Snoopy, and one for me". The reader soon discovers that her command of numbers doesn't seem to extend beyond the number one. Upon leaving the scene to answer the doorbell, she stops to "count" all the cookies in the box, and reveals herself: "One, Six, Eleventy-Four, Thirteen-Eight, Nine Million, Twenty-Three… Uh-huh…" Not surprisingly, Snoopy takes more than his share of cookies while Lucy is absent from the scene, thinking she will not be able to count their absence. Yet upon her return Lucy catches the dog immediately, shouting "YOU TOOK TWO", and proving that her lack of numeracy does not correspond to any lack of extra-verbal numbers savvy. She still possesses an accounting knowledge construed by an immediate processing of "mine" and "yours". When Lucy looks into the cookie box and instantly shouts "YOU TOOK TWO", it is suggested that struggle sharpens what we might call her *thinking* as an essential capacity. When fighting to protect what is hers, her command of math is both intuitive and instantaneous. Since it is not visible in the traditional instructional scene (represented by her failed counting), but only revealed in the presence of the animal, we might call this moment of thinking a demonstration of Lucy's animal genius.

The exchange of wills and knowledge between the child and animal is not so much a representation of thinking but sociality as thinking—the process of thinking with and through others. Just as a Simon Baron-Cohen's "theory of mind" test requires a child to decode and operationalize the minds of others, the narrative of this comic strip requires Snoopy to read Lucy's mind and the reader to laugh when the dog fails the test. Before stealing the extra cookies Snoopy makes a judgement about the state of Lucy's knowledge and its difference from his own. He will know how many cookies he has taken, but she will not. Snoopy's calculated risk is a neat demonstration of theory of mind, the ability to recognize how other minds differ from our own. But Snoopy fails to gauge the state of Lucy's mind because her animal genius allows her to do the impossible—to know what she should not be able to know. In this instance, Lucy's essential capacity to know what is hers makes her cognitively superior to the dog.

What does the animal-child dyad finally convey in this instance? In keeping with the animal's office as ontological boundary marker, the dyad here confirms the insuperable distance between combatants, while naturalizing a cognitive hierarchy according to which the child is superior to the animal. It lays bare two kinds of being together, understood here as thinking with and thinking through others. The first associates with language and conventional performance of knowledge; the latter with instinctual self-preservation.

Snoopy's competitive hijinks escalate from jockeying for cookies to vying for a superior position in front of the television in another strip, featuring Baby Linus from December 18, 1953. Snoopy's struggle for position is a visual priority in the design of the strip and the basis for its punchline. In essence, a simple gestural or physical contest unfolds over the course of four panels. In the first, the puppy sits happily in front of the TV where Baby Linus, in the background, discovers him. By the second panel, the child is sitting in front of the puppy, watching the TV with glee. Behind him, Snoopy's speech balloon contains only a question mark. The third panel shows the animal's increasing consternation at having his position seized by the child once again through the speech balloon. Where the question mark had been, Snoopy's speech balloon now contains scribbly marks. They appear as a dark cloud. Another sudden reversal finalizes the strip in the fourth panel. Once again Snoopy sits in front of Baby Linus, whose face is masked by Snoopy's extended ear. From Linus, an exclamation in a speech balloon concludes what has been an extraneous yet nonetheless intriguing dialogue.

Seen as spatial actors, Snoopy and Baby Linus speak a physical language of position within the strip. Between them, a non-verbal exchange punctuates abrupt turnabouts happening in the gutters. Of course, there is another type of framing mark within the panels, a repeated series of lines representing the TV screen. It appears as the thickened right margin of each panel. That this mock epic plays out before a TV suggests an inter-medial rivalry between superior screens and vantages of surveillance.

The TV is an inferior spectacle compared to the comic, as ironically demonstrated by this strip. The point of the comic hinges upon our ability to see that the positions taken up before the TV leave characters fully available to the comic strip reader's view. Rather than cookies, then, TV represents the triangulating object. TV encodes a desire for uninterrupted gazing and the strip dramatizes how that desire is made all the more legible when it is enacted across species. That both child and dog want to see the TV alone normalizes wanting to see and to look as universally appealing and thus worth fighting over. That neither human nor animal seem to win definitively suggests their competition to be a conflict without domination, a struggle with no clear victor whose final claim upon the desired object precludes the other from making future claims upon it.

Central to understanding the strip's political analogy is the role cognition plays within it by implication and in its very premise. In order to desire another's line of sight, one must have an appreciation for that other person's sensory experiences. The strip thus presumes a theory of mind as it orchestrates an atypical exchange between pre- or non-verbal actors. Along the way, it dramatizes how the animal-child dyad solicits and partakes in fantasies of a lucidly transactional physical form of communication. The puppy and the child express themselves in a pugnacious syntax on the first level of the visual joke, while they share center stage for the comic viewer on a second level, where neither gestural interloper can be eclipsed from view. They remain visual objects of uninterrupted specular gazing for viewers even as they vie for the better view against one another. We occupy a superior mode of viewing to which the cartoon characters are measurably inferior. Thus, our laughter may finally be a "laughing at" rather than "laughing with", since the contest itself has become visually immaterial to us.

As with the other alternative forms of sociality instigated by Snoopy, this one plays up the contrast of innocents taking part in so sordid a view of life. *Ex-change* is reduced to an etymological literalism: social actors trade places to effectuate exchange. And yet, the social geometry between the animal-child dyad and the viewer is activated by voyeuristic rather than physical dominance.

In a related strip from September 19, 1953, Snoopy refuses to get into position for Charlie Brown who wants to take his picture. As a whole, the strip helps to reveal the significance of viewing and being viewed within the Schulz universe. The spectator presumes a sightline ironically unaccounted for by those within the comic vying for superior lines of sight. The position of the viewer cuts like a tangent across the action to yield resolution in all senses. The script is straightforwardly about capturing the animal via representation. Over the course of a few panels, the child gives his rambunctious pet futile instructions on how to pose for the camera. Unable to domesticate Snoopy in hamming it up, Charlie Brown continues to tell the dog to hold still for the perfect shot, growing ever more irritated with the dog's antics. Attention to Snoopy's subtle changes in facial expression rewards careful reviewing. But the punchline of the strip may be so typical as to go unnoticed.

When Charlie Brown lands flat on his face in the last panel, unable to take it anymore, and while his trickster antagonist smirks on, another child appears in the background. She has a speech bubble over her head with a question mark in it. By including this character at the end, Schulz ensures that the reader will feel superior to at least this particular onlooker, whose entire being is defined in this final panel as the one who wants to know what has happened. The ideal viewers of the strip may be many kinds of people in actuality but only one person in relation to this final onlooker—the one who knows the basic plot of what has transpired to make Charlie Brown bang the ground in Job-like misery.

As with Snoopy's contest for the best TV viewing position, this comic situates looking within a field of brutish struggle strikingly different from that outer field of voyeuristic superiority occupied by the character in the background, the one who wants to know what every comic strip viewer has just been shown. At this outer level of exchange, we would only struggle with what remains un-given or unclear. Here, nothing is withheld. Even the rarely shown top of Charlie Brown's head is given over to the viewer as if to re-enact a type of tonsure ceremony. We are once again put in a position of looking equated to knowing by the comic strip's visual design. Beyond the plot of the strip, at this outer level, viewing is tantamount to unrestrictive access—uninterrupted and, most importantly, unimpeded by mere physicality.

In their totality, these child-dog strips show how proximities of the child and the animal induce plots and themes of gustatory experience, bodily desires for eating and sleeping, and competitions for cookies and other consumables. But, as we have sought to show, there is more to discover abstracted in Snoopy than the trope of the idiot-savant. Rather, we have aimed in this chapter to show how Schulz visualizes a type of communication exchange that produces humorous effects through normative absences and divergences. Thus, in a manner of speaking, one could say the *Peanuts* strips meet the challenges of a pressing political burden: despite using sight gags and visual jokes to do so, these strips portray a public. They show as well as enact community. They glimpse vastly different social actors in forms of alliance and struggle that may be read as demonstrating other ways of being together. To be sure, actors in the animal-child dyad do not rely on norms of social exchange. They do not speak the same language nor is their relation necessarily cooperative or progressive. Seldom social in the usual sense, engagement in the animal-child dyad is comprised of a rambunctious, asocial sociality. It is often triangulated by a third desired object. This triangulation takes the form of a type of parallel play, in which conflicts arise incidentally and serially, sometimes without consequence or obvious resolution.

Schulz's signature experimentation with resolution contributes to the cognitive force of the strips. Having no clear resolution, like most gags, allows them to function as types of cognitive tests (for the characters and the readers) that are themselves not so different from those administered to children as a measure of their social cognition. *Peanuts* comic strips operate as tests of viewers' theory of mind, challenging viewers to supply the appropriate or conventional judgment elicited by the strip. For example, the script interrogates the viewer's ability to take perspective (of Charlie Brown behind the camera or Snoopy behind Baby Linus) even as it narrates the taking of perspective literally as a moment of childish contest that results in violent frustration. This representation of perspective-taking calls into question the commonsense assumption that a capacity to take on another's perspective always or necessarily heightens one's social facilitation.

Therefore, even as the *Peanuts* strips stage a contest for superior perspective between animal and child, they also offer in the comic structure a third gaze that transcends both. This third gaze represents another way of knowing, not strictly defined by perspective-taking, at least not in the conventional sense. If this hierarchy of perspectives is necessary for a complete interpretation of the comic, should it not be accounted for (even perhaps in clinical settings) whenever comics are used as tests? For most readers of tests—including the "theory of mind" test—a standard of right and wrong, correct and incorrect, reigns. In typical "tests" that rely on comic strip convention, reader-viewers must identify the false belief held by one actor within the comics frame. Only by deducing from visual reading cues (and by abiding by an unstated set of comic strip reading conventions) does the reader-viewer-test taker arrive at the one and proper answer or reading to a narrative problem set forth by the test. By insisting on the proper decoding of another's false belief in a comic to be a matter of singular, correct, and diagnostic importance, such theory of mind tests are woefully incomplete in their conceptualization of visual communication.

Indeed, a more thorough reading of any comic strip—including those masquerading as clinical tools—entails the interpretive position from which a comic reader can recognize multiple points of view.[6] Such a view necessitates seeing points of view in terms of their limitations, while simultaneously seeing across, beyond, and through them. If we assume that the child taking a clinical comics test is a reader of comics, primarily, and a social thinker only referentially or by way of that literacy, then it seems reasonable to claim that the neurodivergent interpretation of the comics—the interpretation that will fail the theory of mind test, in other words—is not only the more complete perspective, but in some cases the one towards which most strips guide us all along.

Rather than visual resemblance or social imitation, the *Peanuts* strips discussed in this chapter model a social exchange founded upon a proximate rather than shared striving together. Yet we should remain cautious about celebrating such proximities. After all, the animal encodes an unsentimental response to the child's social distress, since the child's emotional turmoil is literally immaterial to the animal. While proximity to Snoopy may help us to see Charlie Brown in new ways, not all of them are positive, enabling sadistic forms of satirical looking similar to the one Žižek references from the epigraph of our chapter regarding Charlie Chaplin films that mock and humiliate children for laughs: "only children themselves treat

6. For some clinicians, autistic thinking has been best understood as a comic already. The "Sally-Anne Test", a theory of mind task developed by Simon Baron-Cohen, Alan Leslie and Uta Frith in 1983, uses a sequential graphic narrative to test children for their ability to recognize states of mind different from their own. Older children on the autism spectrum may experience social thinking curricula like that developed by Michelle Garcia Winner, whose superflex comics have been widely used to teach social cognition.

their fellows this way; sadistic distance towards children thus implies the symbolic identification with the gaze of the children themselves" (Žižek 107).

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# The Most Loyal of Friends, the Most Lethal of Enemies:

## Child-animal Relationships in *Corriere dei Piccoli* during the First World War

Fabiana Loparco

### Introduction

According to Juliet K. Markowsky "animals have always had a place in literature" (460). Enacting diverse roles, animals have functioned as antagonists against humans, as role models of morality and as magical and mysterious creatures. The intimate connection between animals and humans is already evident in the etymology of the word animal: the Latin *anĭmal –alis* stems from *anima*, the Latin word for soul. The original Latin term derives from the Ancient Greek ἄνεμος (*anemos*) meaning wind or breath. Animals are thus tied to "animate". Their presence in literature reflects, as David Rudd points out, the transformation performed in children's literature by writers and illustrators to make animals act in anthropomorphic ways (242).

Since industrialization, animals became increasingly irrelevant to adult concerns because of which animal stories are perceived as suitable only for children (Le Guin 22). Anthropomorphized animals have been playing important roles in children's literature since the eighteenth century (Biagini 19). Andrea Giardina calls literature with anthropomorphic animals "animal literature" (146). For Giardina, animal literature gives voice to what cannot be seen or heard, offering a representation and a tangible body for what would otherwise have been missed by the readers, both young and old.

Animals appear in several stories for children, often assuming roles that are crucial for the development of the plot and range from faithful companions to dangerous and mysterious presences. Notable examples of such works include Alan Alexander Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* and Elwyn Brooks White's *Charlotte's Web*. Anthropomorphic animals often serve to teach children moral lessons in an accessible manner by facilitating their identification with nonhuman characters

(Markowsky 460). When involved in children's stories, animals often also play an introspective role. A pertinent example can be found in Philip Pullman's famous trilogy *His Dark Materials*. In this fantasy world human souls acquire the shape of talking animals called dæmons. These dæmons provide their human counterparts with companionship and comfort. They also adapt and change their appearance and feelings to reflect the physical changes and emotions of the humans they are connected to. Similar to the dæmons in Pullman's work, animals in children's literature can be said to give shape to the child character's soul, expressing and interpreting their feelings and representing their internal emotions.

In his book *Picturing the Beast*, Steve Baker highlights the intimate connection between our ideas of animals and the use of these ideas to frame and express concepts about human identity. Building on Baker's work, Sue Walsh explores the question of "why the child and the animal should be positioned in relation to each other and be used to comment on and/or explain each other" (2002, 151). For Walsh such representations share similarities with the romantic perception of the child and the animal, whereby both are conceived as *tabula rasa* or blank slates that can be assigned particular cultural and symbolic meanings such as innocence or freedom.

Hence animals in children's literature can help towards a better understanding of the workings of literature and culture for young people. Propelled by the aim of amusing and educating children, the presence of animals in children's literature underscores, on one hand, "the importance of training the child to dominate his or her animal instincts with rationality" (Howard 647). On the other hand, animals have also been used to represent children's freedom to act and grow independently. In exploring their environment in the company of animals, children experience and learn lessons essential for their growing into self-confident and aware adults (Wehrmeyer 86).

The animals present in the World War One issues of the Italian children's magazine *Corriere dei Piccoli* fulfil roles that are similar to those listed above: the animals serve as companions to children, initiating them in a new, almost adult world; at times they also symbolize particular, human qualities. When Italy entered WWI in 1915, a large part of the national press supported its participation in the war by resorting to a specific representation of the Homeland and nationhood rooted in the need to defend itself from German and Austrian expansionism. Children's magazines eagerly participated in this warmongering with the intent of forging a strong national identity among young readers and the *Corriere dei Piccoli,* the most popular Italian children's magazine at that time was no exception. This weekly magazine published comics throughout the duration of the conflict with the aim of educating children about the values of sacrifice, duty and love for the Homeland in order to construct an idealized and militarized childhood. Children are often accompained by animals in the magazine's stories as they participate in an

extended, captivating series of adventures where both children and animals fight against the enemy often by cheating and humiliating them.

War stories became a tool used by the magazine to promote Italian participation in the war and the necessity of using force to obtain the long awaited national unification. However, the strong militaristic message combined, somewhat paradoxically, with the need to partially hide the violence of the battlelfield, encouraged the *Corriere dei Piccoli* to publish comics where the reality of the war is obscured; the young characters often with their many nonhuman allies, are involved in unrealistic adventures and missions. These comics incorporate a myriad of animals, from cats and dogs to monkeys, wolfs and even moths, all of which are often accorded key roles. Many of the animals take part in the conflict by supporting the characters and helping them attain victory. In other stories, however, animals also play an important role in preventing characters from fulfilling their patriotic duty. Good and bad animals follow one another in the comics published in the *Corriere dei Piccoli* during the First World War, enabling authors of the magazine to portray a variety of characteristics necessary for inculcating patriotism in children.

According to Markowsky, animals can be used to symbolize (anthropomorphized) attributes that are commonly associated with them: readers can infer these attributes through simply referring to the animal's status in the collective imaginary, without requiring a description of the animal's characteristics (461). In *Corriere dei Piccoli* the animals' features are frequently used to convey specific values—perseverance, courage, and loyalty—within the limited, charged pages of the magazine. In these comics adventures animals symbolize the nature of the conflict and its effects on society, provide companionship to the characters (and young readers), enable children to clearly distinguish between good and evil and render the most dramatic events of the conflict consummable for them (and acceptable for society at large).

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the interdependence of child and animal characters through the comics published in the *Corriere dei Piccoli* from 1914 to 1918. I will explore the nationalist and militarist messages conveyed by the adventures in order to highlight the central role played by child-animal relationships for sustaining propaganda in favor of the conflict and for the representation of Italian society as combat ready, selfless and united against the enemy.

## Historical context of the *Corriere dei Piccoli*

First published in 1908, *Corriere dei Piccoli* was an illustrated supplement of the daily *Corriere della Sera*. This newspaper catered to the new Italian middle class, established predominantly in Northern Italy at the end of the nineteenth century in the wake of the industrial revolution and the Risorgimento. The *Corriere della Sera* played a crucial role in the reinforcement of the ideologies promoted by the upper and middle classes of that time. The newspaper, together with its sup-

plements, promoted a conventional view of society based on gender inequality, nationalism and capitalism, with women, workers and children consigned to the lower echelons of society. According to this view, the central values exemplified by the triad of God-Homeland-Family were essential to establish order in, and ensure the functionality of, Italian society. The ruling classes of that time strongly supported the education of every citizen, children included, according to this set of virtues and children's magazines were a part of this drive to inculcate bourgeois values in young readers.

In Italy, publications specifically devoted to children have a long tradition. Appearing in the late eighteenth century, the first Italian children's magazines were inspired by the famous French magazines targeting, separately, children and (female) adolescents (*Magasin des enfants* and *Magasin des adolescentes*), written by Jeanne-Marie Leprince and Arnaud Berquin's *L'Ami des enfants*. The success of these initial attempts encouraged many Italian editors to produce magazines exclusively devoted to children. Their aim was to provide Italian children with a new product able to amuse the readers, while at the same time inculcating Italian values promoted by the Risorgimento, including the importance of the spiritual and geographical reunification of the nation and love for the Homeland (Genovesi 381).

After the Italian Unification in 1861, children's magazines became essential for creating the "new generation" of Italians. Magazines such as the *Giornale per i Bambini* educated young readers about the bourgeois values of the times, including the love and respect for God, the family and the Homeland. The aim was to provide children with a set of principles that would improve their sense of belonging to the nation and prepare them for their future roles as active and faithful citizens of the new country (Loparco, *Giornale* 14).

The progressive rise of numerous magazines expressly conceived for children was accompanied by changes in the conception of childhood. Between the late nineteenth century and the First War, childhood was reconceptualized (Gittins; Steedman; Zelizer), evolving from the Romantic image of the endearing, helpless and innocent child to a new vision of the child as independent and well aware of her desires (Heywood). To capture the imagination of this independent child, children's magazines evolved constantly in the bid to attract readers by publishing captivating tales accompanied by elaborate, colourful and cute images.

*Corriere dei Piccoli* was rapidly able to establish its supremacy over the many children's magazines being published in Italy since the late nineteenth century. The magazine targeted middle-class readers aged between six and twelve years and soon became the most successful and famous Italian children's magazine of the twentieth century (Loparco, *Bambini* 49). One of the secrets behind this success was the high proportion of images on its pages.

Silvio Spaventa Filippi, the editor-in-chief of the *Corriere dei Piccoli* from the magazine's inception in 1908 until his death in 1931, had immediately understood the importance of illustrations and comics for attracting readers. Every week, the magazine published a series of comics strips to entice children through their bright colours and amusing stories. The *Corriere dei Piccoli* was the first to introduce American strips in Italy, by publishing, among others, Frederick Burr Opper's *Happy Hooligan*, R.F. Outcault's *Buster Brown*, Rudolph Dirk's *Katzenjammer Kids* and George McManus' *Bringing Up Father*. However, in the drive to adapt the American comics to Italian customs, speech bubbles were replaced with octosyllabic rhymed couplets under each image. The reasons behind this preference for text outside the panels are still debated. According to several Italian scholars, text balloons were eliminated in order to prevent unnecessary distractions for readers and to avoid according too much space and narrative power to the images as opposed to the text (Conti and Toffoli 100-101; Faeti 323).

Another possible reason is the discrepancy of the format between American and Italian magazines. The page size of the *Corriere dei Piccoli* was 22.5 x 30 cm, a quarter of the size of the American counterpart. To adapt the original images to the actual size of the *Corriere dei Piccoli*, the editor decided to eliminate the speech bubbles and to condense the stories into one single page divided into six equal panels (Ginex, 423). Furthermore, young Italian readers were already accustomed to octosyllabic rhymed couplets under illustrations, which were common in contemporaneous children's magazines (Loparco, "Boys of England", 443). By removing the text balloons from the original strips, the *Corriere dei Piccoli* simply adapted the American comics to Italian conventions.

Alongside American comics the magazine also encouraged the publication of comics by Italian cartoonists and several important artists, such as Antonio Rubino and Attilio Mussino, created stories and characters that would have a lasting impact on Italian comics (Faeti; Loparco, *Bambini*). These Italian strips played an essential role especially during WWI, when the artists were required to create characters and stories that could comfort, strengthen and galvanize not only the children but also the entire nation at war.

Soon after the Austrian Empire declared war against Serbia in 1914, the Italian government opted for neutrality. This decision left public opinion sharply divided. Although a large part of the population did not support participating in the war, part of the government and the monarchy considered the war as an opportunity to reinforce the government and to recuperate the border regions that were still under Austrian control. Owing to the economic advantages of these acquisitions, a large part of the upper and middle classes supported the government's effort to create popular consensus for Italian participation in the war. Hence, the national press, which expressed the points of view of these classes, supported the government's decision to join the war in 1915 by launching a propaganda campaign aimed at convincing people of Italian participation in the war. The *Corriere della Sera* was

the focal point of this campaign and it also involved the *Corriere dei Piccoli* in its war mongering.

The children's periodical started a massive campaign to discipline its readers in supporting the family at the home front. In all of the wartime strips children, depicted as brave and loyal warriors, become the symbol of the national identity. The comics published in those years contribute to the "trivialization" of the war, defined by George Mosse as a process that helps reduce the frightening aspects of the conflict and to transform war into a commonplace reality (Mosse 126). The *Corriere dei Piccoli* marshalled its imaginative troops of children and animals for this project of normalizing the war. In their cheerful and funny stories these characters were always happily victorious. The enemies could only suffer a humiliating defeat in these strips offering unrealistic depictions of the war, while the heroic Italian characters remained gloriously victorious. Their adventures were distorted imitations of the real events experienced by the troops on the battlefields and this helped the *Corriere dei Piccoli* to sell the war to its readers and to make this event more familiar and understandable to children, with the ultimate aim of preparing future generations of soldiers.

The use of children as characters in these stories helped the young readers to identify with the protagonists, and thus better assimilate the educational messages. In addition, although comics involved both adult and child characters, only the children have animal companions. This reflects the hierarchy envisaged by the magazine and the society of that time, with the adult human at the top of the hierarchy, far above the children and animals (Rudd 242) by virtue of their level of civilization. Although the lower hierarchical position was full of constraints, it also offered children in comics with a different view of the world, less orthodox and more independent. This perspective opened up new possibilities, allowing the fictional children to act more freely and to live, together with or in opposition to the animals, more intriguing and exciting adventures, than in real life.

## The little girl who fought the enemy with the help of her farm animals: Didì

In the comics published in the *Corriere dei Piccoli* during WWI, animals were usually companions of the human characters. They provided the protagonists with strong support and encouragement while accompanying them on their imaginative adventures. This strong bond between children and animals is particularly evident in the *Didì* tale. First published on February 20, 1916, illustrated by Mario Mossa de Murtas, this story was about a little girl named Didì. The girl lived with her family and their animals in a small Italian village close to the Italian border with Croatia. The story opens with the liberation of the village from Austrian domination by the Italian soldiers. The magazine depicts the new life under the Italian government as joyful and lively. However, Didì's peaceful and cheerful life is suddenly interrupted

by the brutal counterattack against the village by the imperial troops. The enemy soldiers terrorize the peaceful village by imprisoning innocent people and seizing their houses. Didì's parents are immediately arrested but Didì manages to escape together with her trusted friends: a goat named Lea, a cat called Frufrù and Zozò, a dog (Fig. 1).

The choice and depiction of these three animals gives readers important details about the relationship between them and the characters and the cultural construction of the girl character and the animals involved in this story. As stated by Markowsky (1975), these animals were used to evoke in the readers' minds a specific set of attributes without the use of explanations. Goats, dogs and cats were common farm animals, familiar sights in many Italian country homes of that time. Their presence in the story recalled the peaceful and laborious days when life was defined by farm work. Their escape from home represents the end of that world, underlining the brutality and devastation caused by the war. Furthermore, cats, dogs and goats are among the earliest animals domesticated by humans. In the comics, this submission was captured by the collars around each animal's neck, symbols of possession, portraying the indisputable superiority and control of humans over animals. At the same time these animals substituted Didì's human family by providing the little girl with companionship.

Throughout the comic strips, the child and the animals act together, focusing all their efforts on the fight against the enemy and supporting the Italian cause. In each strip, the characters are directly involved in the war; their missions consist of sabotaging the enemies' maneuvers in order to help the Italian troops. Didì frequently uses the animals' support for sneaking into enemy camps. Lea, Frufrù and Zozò become active agents at the service of the Italian troops, able to listen to enemy conversation, to spy on army commanders and to create confusion on enemy camps (Fig. 2).

Animals in the *Didì* series also provide a family for Didì. In eighteenth century pedagogical theory, the child figures as the site where the opposition between nature and reason is articulated and where nature is more powerful. Parents teach children to overcome these animal instincts and fulfil their social and moral duties by becoming self-regulating subjects (Howard 647-8). However, in the *Didì* series, as in the lives of its readers, this process of education is interrupted by the war. Left alone with her animals, Didì can only survive the atrocities of the conflict by relying on her survival instinct, a primordial, animal feeling. This instinct complements her animal friends' virtues: the endurance and efficiency of the goat (at that time, a valuable food source for families), the astuteness and agility of the cat, the loyalty of the dog. Following Lisa Rowe Fraustino (151), we can assume that these stereotypical animal traits underscore the girl's talents. By using these animals as mental and physical extensions of the girl's abilities, the author amplified Didì's astuteness and adaptability without making her grotesque or unrealistic.


CORRIERE dei PICCOLI
ANNO SEMESTRE REGNO: L 5.— L 2.50 ESTERO L 8.— L 4.—
SUPPLEMENTO ILLUSTRATO del CORRIERE DELLA SERA
UFFICI DEL GIORNALE: VIA SOLFERINO. N° 28. MILANO.
Anno VIII - N. 8
20 Febbraio 1916.
Cent. 10 il numero.
1. Quattro amici eccovi qui, Lea, Frufrù, Zozò e Didì. D'un villaggio ormai redento su la via che mena a Trento.
2. Un mattin la loro casa dai croati viene invasa. "- Voi spiare! oh cran pirpanti! „ Ed arrestan tutti quanti.
3. Ma nessuno ancor s'è accorto della bimba che, nell'orto, con un po' di cacio e pane rappaciar fa gatto e cane.
4. Soli in casa allor restati si divertono i croati, ed innanzi a un muso brutto la Didì comprende tutto.
5. Cosa far così d'un tratto? Bimba, cane, capra e gatto se ne van con cera smorta, ma da fuor chiudon la porta.
6. E la nostra fanteria ecco incontrano per via. "- Capitano, ascolti, scusi... venti austriaci abbiam rinchiusi! „
7. L'ufficial col reggimento ch'è arrivato in quel momento, corre lesto e acciuffa infatti quei nemici stupefatti.
8. "- Grazie a lei del colpo scaltro! „ "- Oh ma noi farem ben altro!... „ Si salutano così l'ufficial con la Didì.

Fig. 1.


CORRIERE DEI PICCOLI
1. Dà i comandi l'Arciduca: " - Nuovo attacco or si conduca! Io partir debbo lontano, ma vi lascio un vasto piano. „
2. E il più grande dei suoi piani studia contro gl' italiani, senz'accorgersi un momento di Frufrù che guarda attento.
3. Snella ed agil dietro il gatto la Didì vien di soppiatto; con un gesto della mano rovesciato ha tutto il piano.
4. Verso sera il generale con la carta arciducale dà i comandi conseguenti, e Frufrà sta su l'attenti.
5. Or l'azion comincia bene, (ma ai croati spesso avviene per un fatto naturale di finir piuttosto male!)
6. " - Ohi che reti! Ahimè che buca! - Questo è il pian dell'Arciduca? „ Grida ognuno, e Lea sgambetta, poi si cela in tutta fretta.
7. Un austriaco reggimento balza fuori in quel momento, e lo scontro è d'ambo i lati di croati con croati.
8. Dagli opposti due sentieri giungon lesti i bersaglieri, l'accompagnano fin lì Lea, Frufrù, Zozò e Didì.

Fig. 2.

In this comic, animals are the symbolic representation of Didì's virtues, without retaining any sense of their animal otherness (Howard 650). They play a relevant role in supporting the character's actions, but they are never solitary heroes. One example is offered by the story published on April 2, 1916 (Fig. 3). In this strip, the Croatian general's plan to attack the Italian troops the next day is undermined by the clever Frufrù, who stops the clock and prevents the General to wake up on time to carry out his attack. Meanwhile, the loyal Zozò runs to the battlefield, to alert the Italian soldiers of the imminent danger, while the strong Lea destroys the company drummer of the enemy preventing the sounding of the alarm. Didì appears only in the last panel, when all the enemies are surrounded and defeated. Nevertheless, she gets the credit for the success. This is because readers were made to assume that the brave animals' actions were motivated by Didì's willingness, acting as "extensions" of her abilities.

The animals' active involvement evokes the shared suffering of Didì and her animals. The animals participated in the conflict because of their desire to put an end to the devastation and suffering by supporting the Italian side, the only option offered in the *Corriere dei Piccoli*. Despite these human feelings, the representation of the animals in the *Didì* series was always semi-realistic. These astute and brilliant animals had no other human characteristics, like the ability to talk. They always remained animals, with a subordinate role to humans and no intention to question it.

Didì is the sole female protagonist appearing in the *Corriere dei Piccoli* during WWI. She opposed the discourses of masculinity and war dominating the magazine. Through Didí, the children's journal tried to also give girls a relevant role in supporting the home front. Didì served as a model brave and audacious girl on a par with the other male characters used by the *Corriere dei Piccoli* to support the Italian war efforts. However, her story differs from the others published by the children's magazine with boys as protagonists. Didì is involved in the conflict against her will and her fight against the enemy is caused by the invasion and devastation of her house and life. In contrast, comics with male protagonists showed young boys willing to join the conflict and ready to leave the safety of their home in order to support the Italian war campaign on the battlefields. Another relevant difference concerns the presence of the animals. Didì is never alone in her adventures as her nonhuman friends always support her. On the contrary, masculine characters participate in the conflict without any assistance except their own inventiveness and enthusiasm. When animals are present, their support is irrelevant to the course of events. The rationale behind this choice can be found in the conception of the role of women in society and the general perception of girls as being mentally and physically less capable than boys. Exceptionally, through Didì, the *Corriere dei Piccoli* also allows girls to contribute to the war efforts of the Homeland.


CORRIERE DEI PICCOLI
1. Dice il capo: "- Gl'italiani alle sette di domani fan l'attacco. Amici miei, noi facciamolo alle sei! „
2. Dato l'ordine opportuno, a dormire va ciascuno, ma Frufrù tranquillo e mogio mette un freno all'orologio.
3. Già un bel sole i monti indora quando il capo guarda l'ora. "- Son le quattro? dunque è presto! „ E a ronfar ritorna lesto.
4. Va Zozò per la vallea, dove abbaia, urla, guaisce, corre all'itala trincea, sì che ognun s'impensierisce.
5. Il maggior grida: "- Perbacco, voglio anticipar l'attacco! Son le sei; sul in pochi istanti, fucilieri e alpini, avanti!
6. Lea fracassa per benino il tamburo a un tamburino che col rapido rullare più l'allarmi non può dare.
7. Ed avviene che i croati fino allora addormentati. si risveglian prigionieri degli allegri fucilieri.
8. Pensa il capo: "- E un gran barbogio chi si affida all'orologio! „ E la pensan pur così Lea, Frufrù, Zozò e Didì.

Fig. 3.

However, also in this fictional world the separation between boys and girls remains strict and Didì's brave actions are mitigated by the presence of others in order to maintain the stereotypical depiction of insufficient, weak women.

Didì's adventures ended after a few issues on May 14, 1916 and she was never seen again. It is very likely that the unconventional message of this story differed too much from the middle class ideology that the *Corriere dei Piccoli* represented; an ideology according to which women and girls had to maintain and decorate domestic spaces assuming the role of the angel of the house and being devoted and submissive to husbands and fathers. The little Didì was thus replaced by girls aspiring to become little Red Cross nurses or supporting the home front from the security of their houses.

Nevertheless, Didì's story is able to give readers an interesting and new perspective about the relationships between children and animals as well as adults. In this strip the weak (i.e. the child and the animals) triumph over the strong (adults and soldiers) through guile, a very childish feature (Catarsi 14). In reality, both animals and children were traumatized by the violence of the conflict and they were powerless to fight against it. It is only in the fantasy world of the *Corriere dei Piccoli* that readers found an imaginative way to confront the war. The alliance with animals empowered children to obtain that power and recognition denied in reality by their weak position in society.

With their adventures, Didì, Lea, Frufrù and Zozò represented the unconditional support for the war from the home front. All their loyalty and efforts were in favour of the Italian nation. The vices and negative behaviours were justified only when addressed against the enemy, leaving the children and the animals free to break with social rules and conventions only if this contributed towards Italian victory.

## The independent boy and the submissive animal: Luca Takko and Blick

On the pages of the *Corriere dei Piccoli*, the story of Didì and her friends stood out in its portrayal of a strong alliance between children and animals. In the other stories published by the *Corriere dei Piccoli* that starred boys, animal friends were generally absent. When the protagonist has the companionship of an animal, the latter only has a marginal role.

This unbalanced child-animal relationship is exemplified by the adventures of *Luca Takko and Gianni*, illustrated by Antonio Rubino and first published on August 23, 1914. Despite the strong friendship between the two boys, the outbreak of the war forced them to join their respective, opposing armies. The beginning of this comic overlapped with the initial declaration of neutrality by the Italian government. Therefore, in this phase, Antonio Rubino and the *Corriere dei Piccoli* portrayed the war as an irrational event, guilty of forcing divisions between friends and loyalties. In visualizing the tragic moment of Gianni and Luca's separation,

Rubino also includes Luca's dog, Blick. The presence of this dog is particularly relevant: while the two boys remain mute, expressing their suffering only through their hands waving goodbye, Blick is the only one able to express the internal pain of the protagonists. The verses accompanying the scene inform the reader that Blick barked loudly, for he was crying for Gianni's fate (Fig. 4). The *Corriere dei Piccoli* uses the shared feelings between the boys and the dog to dramatize the event and to represent the young Luca Takko's internal conflict. The dog, with his howling, which resembles crying, portrays the afflictions of his young master and discloses his deep torment. From the outside, the young boy remains calm and resolute, exemplifying for (male) readers the fierceness and resilience required during the wartime.

When Luca Takko leaves his family to fight with the troops, the loyal dog does not hesitate to run away from the safety of home to join his friend on the battlefield. In the bloodless series of fights portrayed by Rubino, Luca Takko is able to humiliate and defeat his enemies through sheer wit and tricks. Blick supports Luca in all his attacks to sabotage the enemy's efforts and plans. The dog is a symbol of loyalty not only to Luca, but also to the national cause. Like his master, Blick does not hesitate to participate in the war with the main purpose to protect Luca's life and to assist him in his adventures. In the story published on December 13, 1914, for example (Fig. 5), Blick is portrayed watching over the captured enemy Gianni. When he falls asleep, Gianni takes advantage to escape but Blick, who feels guilty, does not give up and manages to find the prisoner and to capture him again. At the end of this story, Blick becomes a hero by showing loyalty to the nation, courage and perseverance.

Despite the valuable role played by Blick in this and other adventures, he remains subordinate to human authority in the comic. In contrast to the animals accompanying Didì, Blick is not an extension of Luca's human abilities; Rubino draws the dog realistically, portraying not only his loyalty to humans but also his animal instincts. In one strip, for example, Blick instinctively runs after a hare in keeping with his nature and it is only the sudden discovery of an enemy trench that prevents him from capturing the animal. The emphasis on his animal instinct was used to reaffirm his lower position in the hierarchy and the supremacy of human intellect (especially male) over nature. At the same time, Blick remains resolutely loyal to Luca and the nation. Moreover, Blick is able to control his instincts when involved in the war effort. Through this story, Rubino stresses the idea of dog as man's best friend and represents the relationship between human and dog as characterised by friendship, loyalty and companionship. At the same time, as pointed out by Ursula Le Guin, in children's literature "to dogs, men are gods" (23). This reinforces the dominant position of the human protagonist, stressing his importance and power. In this series Blick was essential to reinforce the image of Luca Takko as capable of exercising his authority and fighting the enemy, despite being so young and inexperienced.


CORRIERE DEI PICCOLI
ZOCCOLAIO
1. Nell'Ucrania, a poche miglia dal confine, vive gaio con un figlio ed una figlia Simon Takko zoccolaio.
2. In bottega da sette anni gli lavora un certo Gianni, nato a Nur oltre il confine, al di là delle colline.
3. Luca il figlio di Simone è di Gianni l'amicone: buoni entrambi, sani e belli sono come due fratelli.
PATRIA!
4. Ma sui monti ecco addensarsi nere nuvole di guerra: il buon Gianni dee recarsi a difender la sua terra.
5. Quella buona onesta gente or straniera gli sarà; nel lasciarla Gianni sente un dolor che al cor gli va.
AL CONFINE
6. Gianni e Luca con la mano si salutan da lontano; anche Blick latrando forte sembra piangerne la sorte.

Fig. 4.


CORRIERE DEI PICCOLI
ZOCCOLAIO
AIO
1. Passa un mese: la ferita del buon Gianni è già guarita: ed ei vuole ritornare nuovamente a guerreggiare.
2. Blich, che veglia sulla soglia di dormire ha una gran voglia: ne approfitta il prigioniero per fuggire a piè leggero.
3. Resta il can molto avvilito nel saper Gianni fuggito: una grossa fune addenta e a gran corsa fuor s'avventa.
4. Gianni fuor dal bosco scuro sta per giungere al sicuro, ma già il can l'ha sorpassato onde tendergli un agguato.
5. Dalle macchie brulle e folte balza il cane e cento volte il fuggiasco, quand'è a tiro, con la fune prende in giro.
A. RUBINO
6. Poi Simon con la figliola metton Gianni in carriola, e le gran risate fanno mentre a casa se ne vanno!

Fig. 5.

Unfortunately, we will never know the end of the adventure involving Blick, Luca and Gianni. In 1917, Rubino was conscripted and he left the story unfinished. What remains is a strip that continues to charm its readers for the elegant use of colours and soft lines, and its beautiful Art Nouveau style (Cesari 125).

## When the animal is the enemy: savage nature against children

The *Corriere dei Piccoli* was generically positive in its depiction of the animals inside its comics. Most of the nonhuman creatures were shown willing to contribute to the Italian war efforts and to actively support the young heroes in their fight towards victory. Nonetheless, animals sometimes played a negative role in the magazine, by creating obstacles in the characters' plans and even threatening to kill them.

According to Kimberley Reynolds, the similar status shared between animals and children in children's literature allows the latter to identify with the animals. This opens the possibility for writers and illustrators to convey potentially disturbing issues and behaviours—such as death and violence. During WWI, the stories in *Corriere dei Piccoli* largely conforms to this strategy. By representing the violence and ferocity of undomesticated animals (such as eagles, wolfs and months), the magazine portrays aggressive human traits involved in the conflict and does not hesitate to represent death, destruction and suffering.

Specifically, the story of *Abetino* offers an interesting example of animal interference and hostility and of the use of animals for portraying the most violent aspects of the war. Published in 1917 by Rubino, Abetino is a young boy completely made of wood. He is the commander of a fictional wooden army committed to block the invasion of its country by Emperor Arcipiombo's army of steel. By giving life to inanimate objects, the children's magazine opts for anthropomorphism again. According to James Derby "anthropomorphism is one of the vehicles we use to explain our relationship to the world and to the universe" (190). Anthropomorphic characters are used by the *Corriere dei Piccoli* to explain the complex relationships between the nations involved in the war and to talk about the most brutal aspects of the conflict without showing human violence.

The names assigned to the characters symbolised the two nations at war. Abetino means Little Fir. He is a personification of Italy and its Alps, which form a natural border in the north. In contrast, Arcipiombo, which can be translated as Archduke of Lead, personifies the powerful German iron and steel industry. The two countries involved in this fictional conflict were unequal in their military power, with the stronger Arcipiombo likely to attain an easy, fast victory. The weaker wooden army nonetheless demonstrates an incredible resilience and perseverance. In the effort to physically destroy the hero, Arcipiombo introduces an army made of moths, the most lethal adversary for Abetino and his troops (Fig. 6). These moths do not hesitate to attack the defenceless civilian population, thus going against humanitarian law. They personify the complete lack of humanity and

highlight the extent of the enemy's brutality and ruthlessness to the readers. Moths symbolize the inhumanity of war, where people lose their humanity and act like animals following their most evil instincts. More specifically, moths represent the moral decadence of the German army. Through these moths, the German enemy is placed at the bottom of the human hierarchy, in an attempt to incite hate against the powerful enemy as well as a sense of moral superiority in spite of Italian military inferiority.

The moths in Abetino's story joined the war only for selfish reasons, whereas Abetino fought with the higher purpose of promoting humanitarian law and peace. This inhuman army is as brutal and cruel as its actions. Abetino finally destroys them, burning and poisoning all of the insects.

By using animated puppets, Rubino took the trivialisation of the war (Mosse) to extremes since in his hands WWI became a funny game. In the comic, the wooden soldiers replace real troops and the readers were encouraged to consider the war in the same way as they considered their toys when playing war games at home. The children's magazine used non-domestic animals and pests to recount the brutality of the war and to assign nonhuman characteristics to the enemy. The message was clear: Italy had to fight against this barbarism, in order to protect its population. This was an important component of home front propaganda.

Bad animals are also used in other comics, again with the aim of portraying the violence and the danger of the enemy. Specifically, in one strip, the main character Schizzo (drawn by Attilio Mussino) dreams about fighting against a vicious and ravenous pack of wolves (Fig. 7).

Readers could read the names of the wolves: Germany, Austria, Bulgaria and Turkey, all enemies of Italy. The ferocious fight against the four beasts culminates in Schizzo's total victory. The young boy manages to imprison the enemies and thus saves the Italian army and its allies. The story aimed at exhorting Italy and the allies to be aware of these wolves disguised as lambs. According to the *Corriere dei Piccoli*, Germany and the other enemies were acting as innocent and trustworthy lambs, by offering false promises of peace. Under the guise of frightened lambs, they had the violent, brutal instincts of wolves and they were trying to undermine Italian vigilance in order to stab the nation in the back. Schizzo represents the nation on alert, always prepared to detect threats and to monitor its borders against greedy enemies.

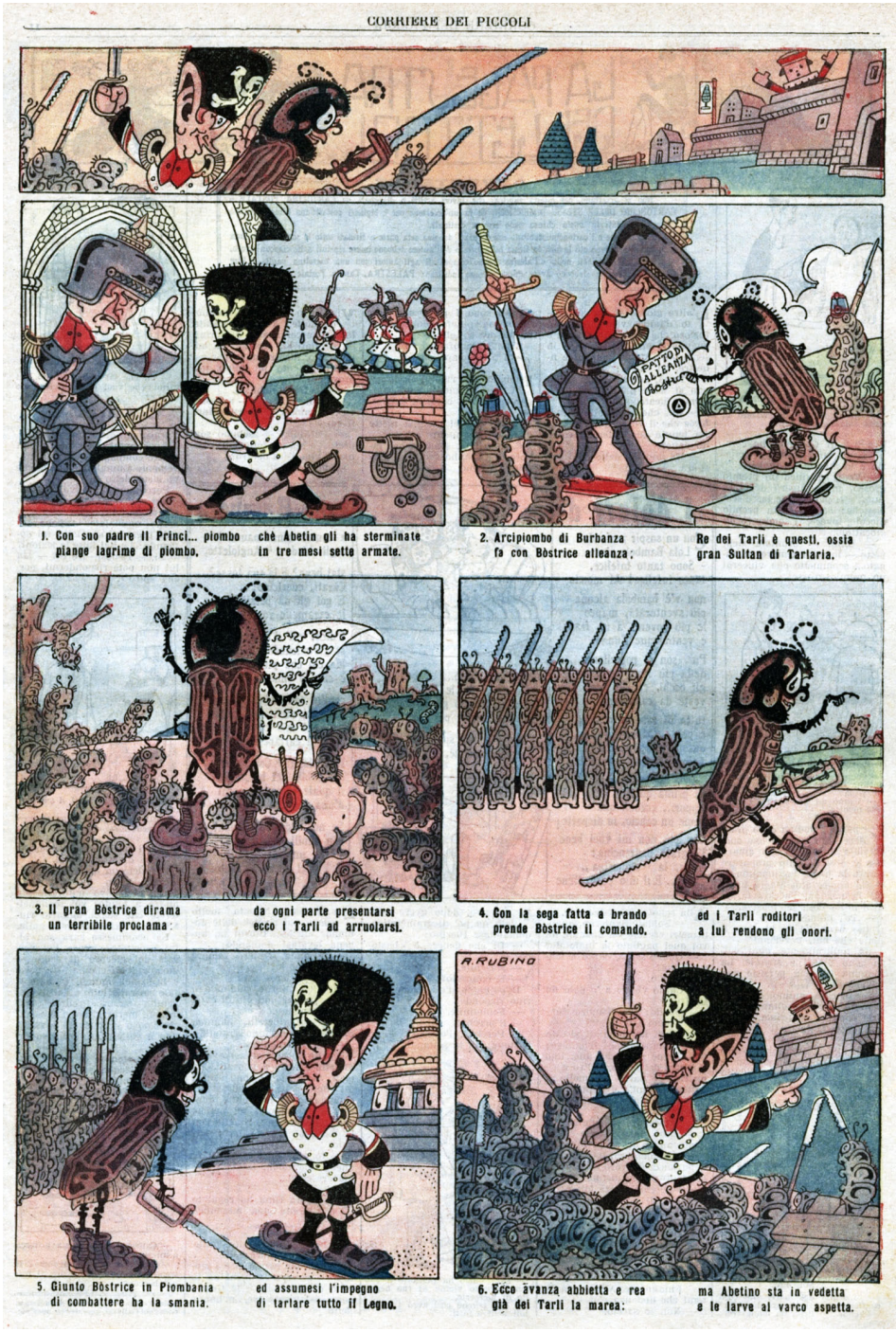
CORRIERE DEI PICCOLI
FATTO DI ALLEANZA
1. Con suo padre il Princi... piombo chè Abetin gli ha sterminate
piange lagrime di piombo. in tre mesi sette armate.
2. Arcipiombo di Burbanza Re dei Tarli è questi, ossia
fa con Bòstrice alleanza; gran Sultan di Tartaria.
3. Il gran Bòstrice dirama da ogni parte presentarsi
un terribile proclama: ecco i Tarli ad arruolarsi.
4. Con la sega fatta a brando ed i Tarli roditori
prende Bòstrice il comando. a lui rendono gli onori.
5. Giunto Bòstrice in Piombania ed assumesi l'impegno
di combattere ha la smania. di tarlare tutto il Legno.
A. RUBINO
6. Ecco avanza abbietta e rea ma Abetino sta in vedetta
già dei Tarli la marea: e le larve al varco aspetta.

Fig. 6.


CORRIERE dei PICCOLI
ANNO SEMESTRE
REGNO ESTERO
L. 5.— Fr. 8.—
L. 2.75 Fr. 4.50
SUPPLEMENTO ILLUSTRATO del CORRIERE DELLA SERA
UFFICI DEL GIORNALE VIA SOLFERINO. N° 28. MILANO.
Anno IX - N. 3
21 Gennaio 1917.
Centesimi 10 il numero.
1. - " La proposta della pace - Schizzo legge - è un gran tranello della belva che d'agnello ha sembianze, ed è rapace.
2. (Dove van quei quattro agnelli presso il campo dei soldati? Dove van, soli, sbandati innocenti e poverelli?)
3. Sono quattro: e i soldatini da pietà vinti, li fanno sollevare da ogni affanno sulle brande e tra i cuscini.
4. Ma di notte quei malnati han gettato via le lane! Sono i lupi delle tane e fan strage dei soldati!
5. Ma ecco Schizzo, il gran campione, Schizzo armato con la spada sopraggiunge, e la masnada delle belve fa prigione.
6. Ora i lupi incatenati Schizzo porta nel castello con la scorta d'un drappello di compagni bene armati.
BULGARIA
TURCHIA
GERMANIA
AUSTRIA
7. Dalla torre (che sorpresa!) stanno i lupi a rimirare tra i vessilli e le fanfare il trionfo dell'Intesa.
8. La fanfara poi risveglia Schizzo... Dove? Nel suo letto? (È la tromba del distretto) Schizzo mormora: - " la sveglia... "

Fig. 7.


CORRIERE dei PICCOLI
ANNO
SEMESTRE
REGNO ESTERO
L. 5.— L. 8.—
L. 2.75. L. 4.25
SUPPLEMENTO ILLUSTRATO
del CORRIERE DELLA SERA
UFFICI DEL GIORNALE:
VIA SOLFERINO. N. 28.
MILANO.
Prezzi delle inserzioni: Pubblicità commerciale L. 1.80 per millimetro d'altezza (larghezza di una colonna). — Rubrica "Le Specialità per i piccoli" L. 5.— per riga contata in corpo 7. — Piedini di colonna nel testo (mm. 34 × 56) L. 100 per inserzione. — Tassa governativa in più.
Pagamento anticipato. — L'Amministrazione si riserva il diritto di rifiutare quegli avvisi che a suo giudizio insindacabile ritenesse di non poter accettare.
Anno XI - N. 16. 20 Aprile 1919. Centesimi 10 il numero.
1. Il simpatico Italino della chioccia nel cestino prende un ovo e su di quello fa un Kartofel col pennello.
2. Vien la sera lenta lenta e Italino s'addormenta, e nel sogno (oh meraviglia!) l'ovo a un tratto vita piglia.
3. Il sor Otto inviperito il piccino segna a dito; ma Italin con furberia teso ha un filo a mezza via.
4. Già si slancia il signor Otto per ghermire il ragazzotto, ma quel fil cascar lo fa e il suo guscio in cocci va.
5. Nera un'aquila bicipite nasce fuor dal rotto occipite; Italino con valore già difende il tricolore...
6. Ma si desta... È già mattino: divien l'aquila un pulcino, ed inneggia ogni campana alla Pasqua italiana!
BUONA PASQUA
A. RUBINO

Fig. 8.

When the war ended, the *Corriere dei Piccoli* expressed the same plea to watch over Italian lands and to not trust its enemies. In a comic strip from April 20, 1919, the young character Italino bravely fights against a double-headed eagle to defend the Italian flag (Fig. 8). The eagle symbolizes the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Despite the Empire's defeat, the old enemy is still perceived as rapacious and deadly. The shabby physical appearance of the dying eagle masks his real nature and belies his powerful claws. However, his false appearance does not mislead the young Italino, who fights vigorously to protect the Italian flag and succeeds in obtaining a bloody victory.

Again, this bad animal was a sign of danger, an invitation to the young readers not to lower their guard: the victory obtained by sacrifices and suffering was still under peril. All Italians, children included, were asked to continue supporting their nation despite the end of the war.

## The use of animals as tools at the service of the Homeland

Alongside stories where animals played an important part, the *Corriere dei Piccoli* also portrayed a plethora of animals that only acted as passive tools in the hands of the young characters. This specific use of animals is particularly noticeable in the *Italino* series. Drawn by Antonio Rubino from June 20, 1915 until the end of 1917, this young character lives his adventure in a small village in the region of Trentino, a territory claimed by both Italy and Austria. The aim of the story is to portray the Austrians in a bad light in order to reinforce the Italian claim on that land and suggest that the local population was willing to join their real Homeland, Italy.

The fight Italino engages against the local Austrian authorities is completely different from the other battles represented on the pages of the *Corriere dei Piccoli*. Rather than fighting at the front, Italino resists the enemy in his own village by opposing Austrian rules and dictates at home, in the school, on the streets. He uses his inventiveness and audacity to humiliate the enemy with tricks and jokes that serve the sole purpose of representing the intellectual superiority of Italians over Austrians.

To underline this superiority, Italino does not hesitate to involve a variety of animals in his plans: ravens, parrots, monkeys, cows and pigs become the tools employed by this child in his plans to humiliate the enemy. In a comic from November 5, 1916, Italino paints all the animals of the village in white, red and green to recall the Italian flag (Fig. 9). From domestic pets to farm beasts (such as cows, rabbits, pigs and chickens) and wild creatures (like turtles and snails), all are instruments in Italino's hands, used for shaming the enemy.


CORRIERE DEI PICCOLI
INCETTA BESTIAME
1. L'imperial governo emana una legge draconiana, che severe norme detta del bestiame per l'incetta.
2. Ma Italino, bimbo astuto, degli amici con l'aiuto gli animali a più non posso tinge in verde bianco e rosso.
RECINTO BESTIE
3. Il bestiame così tinto giunge a frotte nel recinto, suscitando gran furore nel signor Governatore.
4. Una mucca porta altera tra le corna una bandiera: gliela strappa Otto furente con un gesto prepotente.
A. RUBINO
5. E la bestia molto offesa con un colpo di sorpresa scavalcare fa di botto lo steccato al signor Otto.
6. Ricamando in seta nera sta Katina una bandiera; ma cadendo Otto precipite sfonda l'aquila bicipite.

Fig. 9.


CORRIERE dei PICCOLI
ANNO SEMESTRE REGNO: L. 5.— L. 2.50 ESTERO L. 8.— L. 4.—
SUPPLEMENTO ILLUSTRATO del CORRIERE DELLA SERA
UFFICI DEL GIORNALE: VIA SOLFERINO. N°28. MILANO.
Anno VII - N. 36. 5 Settembre 1915. Cent. 10 il numero.
1. Brilli, merlo ammaestrato e cantante diplomato. fischia l'inno di Mameli trasportando ai sette cieli.
2. Un croccante Kate ha fatto. e Italino di soppiatto introduce nel croccante quel prodigio di cantante.
3. Quando taglia il signor Otto quel croccante raro e ghiotto. n'esce Brilli e alla sorniona di Mameli l'inno intona.
4. Indignato l'Intendente per quel canto irriverente. dietro al merlo maledetto manda d'uomini un picchetto.
5. Ecco: il merlo s'è posato sulla testa d'un soldato. che, accennando al suo kepi, dice all'altro: "- Il merlo è qui! "
6. Sul kepi simile a bomba il baston tedesco piomba mentre il merlo allegro vola zufolando a squarciagola.
A. RUBINO

Fig. 10.

In other strips, Italino teaches a raven to sing the Italian anthem before sending it to the Austrian commander. He then instructs a parrot to say "Long live Italy" in front of the Austrian Emperor (Fig. 10). Finally, he trains three monkeys to paint the walls and roots of the houses with the colours of the Italian flag. Such use of animals differs dramatically from the other stories, where animals assume an active role and concretely influence the plot in a positive or negative way. In this series, animals are neutral. They do not have any human characteristics and they do not symbolize any stereotypical animal traits. They behave as real animals because they are not required to elicit identification from the readers (Fraustino 152). Children are invited to identify only with Italino because he is the symbol of the Italian resistance in the Trentino region, a land where Italy needs to prove its right of possession. Within this fight, animals were only an instrument used by Italino to purse his goals and to underline the indisputable Italian spirit of the inhabitants of the disputed village.

## Conclusion

According to psychologist Hal Herzog "humans are natural anthropomorphisers. It is part of our mental equipment"; anthropomorphizing tendencies relates to the human ability to "imagine what other people are thinking and feeling" (60-62). Through anthropomorphism, humans extend this ability to project emotions and thoughts onto members of other species with the aim of teaching children the correct way to be human (Fraustino 145).

The introduction of animals who fought together with young characters helped the *Corriere dei Piccoli* to educate its readers about a specific set of values based on loyalty, courage and endurance. Additionally, it allowed the magazine to convey the more disturbing issues related to the war. With Didì and her farm animals and Luca Takko and Blick the magazine portrayed the loneliness caused by the war, with children forced to leave their home and to defend their homes, their lives and, above all, their Homeland. In Abetino's story, the *Corriere dei Piccoli* depicted the most brutal aspects of the conflict, with the moths representing the death and violence of the battlefield, the mutilated bodies and the bloody clashes. *Corriere dei Piccoli* was not the only Italian children's magazine to adopt this euphemistic strategy during WWI (Bianchi 281), but it was the main magazine to pursue this strategy in a systematic and organised way. The aim was to convey the reality of the war to the readers. On the one hand, children were instructed to hate the enemy and to support the Italian cause. On the other hand, this strong war mongering aimed at educating future soldiers, by instilling patriotic feelings in the readers. Male readers were especially targeted by this propaganda, and this explains why most of the heroic characters in the strips published during WWI were young boys (Loparco, *Bambini*). In transmitting war propaganda, the *Corriere dei Piccoli* tries to soften the reality of the conflict by trivializing its brutality. This trivialization

relies on animals in the attempt to attenuate the reality of the war while, at the same time, illustrating its most terrifying aspects.

In the comics of the *Corriere dei Piccoli*, the relationship between children and animals is key to the story and has a central role. Animals support their young friends' efforts and share their emotions and pains, and ultimately provide companionship to children and prevent them from facing the atrocity of the war alone. Both girls and boys are still immature and too young to deal with the reality of the war without any support. Animals are part of the strategy adopted by the adult cartoonists and editors of the children's magazine to offer the necessary support to their young characters, without weakening their heroic behaviour and mission.

This is particularly relevant for comics with girl characters. Didì's animals support her, helping her accomplish her missions. They also prevent the protagonist from facing the dangers alone, thus reinforcing the ideological message of the woman as mentally and physically unable to deal with critical situations alone because of her presumed inferiority to men.

In contrast, in comics with boys, animals do not provide concrete or essential support to the protagonist. They are used mostly to externalize the characters' internal emotions, enacting their sufferings and feelings, while the boys maintained a stoic attitude praised by propaganda. The sporadic animals used in the comics starring boys were essentially tools used by the protagonists to fulfil their aims. Ravens, parrots, monkeys, rabbits, pigs are few of the plethora of animals used as instruments to humiliate and defeat the enemies. They do not have a will of their own; they are like toys manipulated by children's whims.

Whenever animals act against the children (and the nation), they acquire a strong symbolic significance. They represent human cruelty and brutality, the concrete image of what to expect when, following their animal instincts, humans lose their humanity.

The alliance and affinity between children and animals in the comics of the *Corriere dei Piccoli* was tolerated because of their powerlessness and social vulnerability in comparison to adult humans. However, at the same time children were taught to not consider animals as equals. In a society were animal and adult worlds remained strictly separated, children's path towards adulthood required young boys and girls to lose their childish, instinctive behaviours, so similar to animal nature, in order to obtain recognition as full members of Italian society.

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# Poetics

# A Poetics of Anti-authorianism:
## Child-animal Relationships in *Peanuts* and *Calvin and Hobbes*

Emmanuelle Rougé

This chapter sets out to show how the animal character is part of a poetics of childhood: instead of just observing an animal presence in kid strips (Gordon 2), or tracing parallels between one subject (the child) and another (the animal), this chapter argues that there is a specific poetic form capturing the encounter between the world of childhood and the animal world. Through *Calvin and Hobbes* and *Peanuts*, two iconic comic strips with child and animal characters, I show how both animal and child partake of an anti-authoritarian poetics hinged on mechanisms of identification and distancing.

### A typology of animals in kid strips: toys, pets and companions

Harry Morgan points out that cartoon animals are not readily distinguishable from childlike characters because both share "childish" features. Graphically, this comes across in their round shapes that are soft, "cute"[1] and comforting. While these graphic similarities increase the proximity between the animal and child characters in our corpus, they also foster confusion between the animal and the stuffed toy, contributing to the impression that the comics unfold in the universe of childhood. In *Peanuts* Snoopy is a real dog but the children regularly hug him as if he were a stuffed toy, emphasizing the cuddly and comforting nature of this contact. This is apparent, for instance, when Violet cuddles Snoopy and declares: "You're so sweet, Snoopy" (November 12, 1959). In another, oft cited and commercialized strip it is Lucy who takes him in her arms and concludes that "Happiness is a warm puppy" (April 25, 1960).

1. Thierry Smolderen recalls in *Naissances de la bande dessinée (Origins of Comics)*, the characteristics of cuteness: "oversized eyes, rounded forehead, receding chin, dimpled chubby cheeks, rubber-like limbs" ("*les yeux disproportionnés, le front bombé, le menton fuyant, les joues rondes à fossettes, les membres caoutchouteux*"). He also reminds readers that these characteristic features of young children trigger a mechanism of protection and attachment (93).

The comforting aspect of the stuffed animal is also recurrent in *Calvin and Hobbes*, despite Hobbes' portrayal as a real-life companion. The strip in which Calvin cannot get to sleep because he is afraid of the dark (April 23, 1989) can be compared with the one published two weeks later in which Calvin's parents are frightened after a burglary in their home and cannot sleep (May 8, 1989). In the former, Calvin's expression changes from anguish to serenity as he watches Hobbes slumbering beside him until he falls asleep himself. The crux of the strip can be located in the moment when the child character realizes that the presence of his tiger dispels his fear: "Things are never quite as scary when you've got a best friend" (April 23, 1989). This instant is deliberately highlighted by its central position in the final tier of the strip and the borderless panel, which creates a graphic break with the rest of the strip and so catches the reader's attention. The parallel between the two strips was also obvious for regular readers because they were published just a few days apart. A reversal can be observed, given that we have, on the one hand, a stuffed animal which the child takes as his best friend and which comforts him, and, on the other hand, the husband who serves as a comforter for his wife who holds him tight to reassure herself: "I wish I had a big stuffed animal to feel safe with. I guess you'll have to do." This suggests an analogy between the human and the stuffed animal, strengthening the lifelike quality of the latter, and reflecting the opposition between the viewpoints of the child and the adult, since the adult envies the child whose toy is enough to provide reassurance, whereas for the child the toy is a real and reassuring presence—just the presence that the mother figure is missing. These comics also reflect a degree of childhood nostalgia, underscored by Calvin's father when he says: "I figured that once you grew up, you automatically knew what to do in any given scenario. / I don't think I'd have been in such a hurry to reach adulthood if I'd known the whole thing was going to be ad-libbed" (May 10, 1989).

In a certain *Peanuts* strip, Snoopy is shown as a comforter and winds up replacing the security blanket that Linus usually holds: in this Sunday strip, Linus sucks his thumb as he sleeps, holding tight to his blanket, while Snoopy lies beside him on the blanket (May 1, 1994). The two characters switch positions in the course of the strip, which has a circular structure. The central panel introduces a change of situation with the two characters stretched out on the ground. The final panel depicts something akin to the initial situation: Linus is asleep again, sucking his thumb, but the gag is that instead of hanging on to his blanket, he is clinging to Snoopy's ear. The circular construction of the strip is based on the similarity between the first and last panels, inviting readers to see an analogy between the comforter and Snoopy. This creates a comic effect since the animal character, who is humanized in the comic strip, is reified here; and this also brings the comforter to life, which is seen on various occasions in *Peanuts*. In the strip from 12 March 1960, the blanket seems to have a life of its own because it does not fall to the ground when Linus lets go of it, as a piece of cloth would, but remains "upright", animated by the child's imagination, and stays in the shape in which Linus usually

holds it. This animated state is further accentuated when the blanket "attacks" Lucy, crawling over the floor or acquiring a hand-like shape ready to grab her (respectively, March 16 and March 20, 1965).

The ambiguous status of the animal and the interplay with the boundary between animate and inanimate are therefore characteristic of both these kid strips. They contribute to building an atmosphere that is specific to both the real and imaginary world of childhood. The Sunday spread from 3 October 1993 is representative of the way the *Calvin and Hobbes* strips mobilize the animate-inanimate binary and its erasure (Fig. 1). Variations in the way Hobbes is represented reflect two alternating points of view within the strip. Hobbes is portrayed as a real tiger when he and Calvin are alone, and as a stuffed toy when Calvin's mother is present, even when the child cannot see her: in the fourth panel, Calvin's mother is barely visible behind the door that is ajar and Calvin has his back to her, but the portrayal of Hobbes as a stuffed toy indicates the overriding viewpoint of the adult. Hobbes remains beside Calvin despite the rain, until the bus leaves, and we catch a glimpse of the game that Calvin's mother accepts to play, colluding with the child without him knowing because she waits until the bus has gone before going to fetch the stuffed toy that has remained behind on the pavement. The next two panels clearly show that the time for which the two characters are separated is experienced as a long wait to get back together, given that their gazes are fixed not on the place where they are but on when the child returns home: Calvin keeps looking anxiously at the clock and Hobbes waits with his snout pressed against the window pane. The two characters are depicted in two frames that place them face to face in apparent expectation of their getting back together. There is also a noticeable contrast, throughout the strip, between the hostile outdoors, which is dark and rainy, making Calvin's leaving for school even more of an ordeal, and the welcoming indoors where his tiger awaits him and where he can find solace.

This bias towards the child's point of view is also reflected by Hobbes being a toy that retains his stuffed toy appearance when he turns into a tiger although he behaves like a tiger, pouncing on Calvin as if he were prey, for example, in one of the comic's recurring gags. Such ambiguous status is characteristic of children's games of make-believe in which the animal friend is sometimes a comforting soft toy and sometimes an imaginary friend who can take on the features of a playmate or a wild animal depending on the games and on the child's imagination. This ambiguity can also be perceived in the interaction between the two characters. There is another recurring gag in which Calvin comes across Hobbes stretched out on the ground. The little boy seems irresistibly drawn to Hobbes' soft furry appearance. In these strips, Calvin often nuzzles Hobbes' fur, which he describes as "one of the greatest pleasure of life" (October 22, 1992) or "fuzzy therapy" in a strip in which he appears, at the beginning, completely exhausted but which ends with him smiling and reinvigorated after contact with his tiger (December 8, 1986).

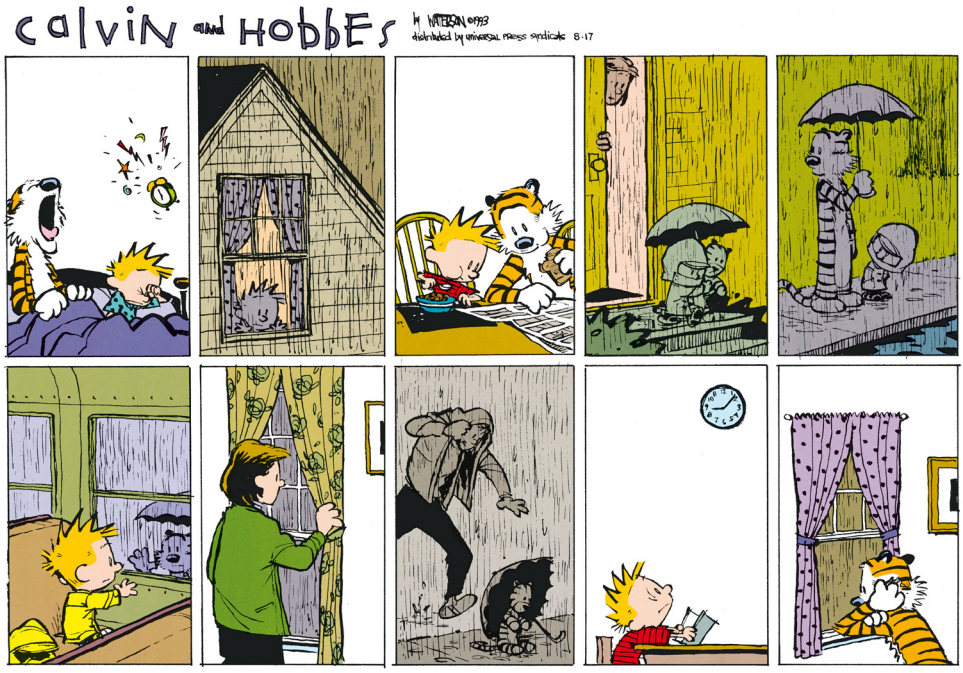


Fig. 1. *Calvin and Hobbes* © 1993 Watterson.
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In addition, these comic strips often play on the nature of the animal character and its reactions, which are those of a wild animal. In the comic strip of 11 January 1995, a contrast can be seen between the child who strokes his tiger, attracted by its physical softness, which seems to demand touching ("Their tummies shouldn't be so soft and fuzzy if you're not allowed to do that"), and the tiger's aggressive response. The ellipsis before the final panel allows the reader to guess how the tiger reacts while underscoring the opposition between the two types of touching—the child's stroking and the tiger's violent reaction—through their immediate juxtaposition. Also noticeable is a marked opposition between the gentle touch that is meant to express Calvin's affection and Hobbes' threatening behaviour when the little boy stops stroking him, transforming a gratuitous expression of affection into a constraint (October 14, 1990). There is, therefore, a constant opposition in the comic strip between gentle and rough contact. While raising questions about the constrained nature of touching on both sides, this opposition is in accordance with the mental universe of the child character who grabs his stuffed toy but plays on the reaction of his imaginary friend as a tiger. This paradoxical association between gentleness and a form of wildness and between expressions of affection and threat also emphasizes a particular way of expressing affection that matches Calvin's turbulent temperament. In a strip narrating a typical school day for Calvin, evoking all the unpleasant things he must put up with, which is made worse

because he must wait in the rain to catch the bus home, the tip of Hobbes' tail on the right-hand edge of the third last panel suggests action beyond the panel: the tiger's traditional attack to welcome Calvin home from school (May 13, 1990). The visual effects, such as the stars symbolizing the impact of the two characters, Calvin's book flying through the air and the fact that there is only a bit of Hobbes to be seen all emphasize the swiftness and suddenness of the attack. Calvin usually complains of these attacks and sometimes says he wants an animal that is not so wild: "I wish I had a gerbil", he exclaims elsewhere (October 11, 1987). Here however the greeting ritual and rough show of affection are a source of comfort for Calvin. His joyful air when he arrives home contrasts with the preceding panels in which he was frowning, and this change of mood is confirmed when he answers his mother's question about whether he had had a good day: "Getting better" he replies. The progressive form indicates that the change is still happening and that it stems from his reunion with his tiger.

This seeming contradiction captures the duality of (representations of) childhood. Mark Heimermann recalls that in western culture there are two contrasting conceptions of childhood: one associates childhood with "cuteness" and innocence whereas the other is based on the myth of the *enfant terrible*, the unruly child (235). *Calvin and Hobbes* brings these two conceptions together. This double dimension is presented here both as a need for softness and comfort and a desire to be free of rules, a desire that is embodied by the wild animal and the child's identification with it.

It is also worth emphasizing the mimetic relationship between the two characters. The animal companion often shares Calvin's fears such as being afraid of the dark and monsters. In this, the animal-imaginary friend seems to be an extension of the child character who projects his own emotions onto it. Hobbes, by comforting and consoling while reflecting the child's fears echoes the animal in children's literature as described by Françoise Armengaud. The philosopher affirms that animals "create between young readers and reality […] the *right distance*, which makes for the right degree of closeness. The animal sometimes comes across as a monster, a concentration of anguish and fear, but much more often as a rescuer or a being to be rescued" (190, all translations are mine). But in *Calvin and Hobbes*, it is a matter of representing childhood and the child's point of view without the comic strip being specifically aimed at a child readership. Ian Gordon points out in the introduction to his book on kid strips that the term refers to comic strips where the main characters are children, but whose readers may or may not be children; in other words, and despite all appearances, the comics are not aimed specifically at children (2).

Indeed while Calvin and Hobbes share many similarities with figures from children's literature, the function of such figures is kept at a distance. While the animal character in children's literature makes a "detour" possible, enabling, as Françoise Armengaud puts it, "the paradoxical encounter and conjunction of an

action of distancing—*It's not me*—and a secret, unavowed proximity—*I know full well it's me*" (189), *Calvin and Hobbes* breaks with these codes because it is through the child character himself that the veil is lifted, comically, on the ambiguous status of the animal character. In one comic, Hobbes no longer recognizes himself as a tiger and jumps in fright when Calvin, who has gone looking for "wild life" suddenly shouts: "Look! A tiger!" (May 20, 1989). Calvin's unruffled and satisfied air, contrasts with Hobbes frightened and disgruntled look, introducing a form of derision based on the child's awareness that his companion is not a "real" tiger and that to frighten it, he can make use of whatever he himself finds frightening. Here, Armengaud's detour is the source of comedy.

## Between identification and distancing

In *Peanuts* as in *Calvin and Hobbes*, the animal character is closely associated with the child character. Harry Morgan emphasizes that "the animal character shares with the child the primitivity of reactions, the impulses (or atavisms) that regularly crack his façade of education". Hence, what brings the child and animal together is the divide that separates both of them from behaviour that is in accordance with social rules. For instance, the term *bêtise* (silliness) used in French to characterize children's actions is reminiscent of the term *bête* (animal, creature), as Pierre Péju points out in *Enfance obscure* (90-94). In one chapter he describes the "archaic tendency to imagine children as crawling, dribbling, gnawing creatures devoid of moral scruples and incapable of realistic or rational considerations":

> *Auteurs de grosses et petites bêtises, et de cochonneries diverses : « tu manges comme un goret », « tu picores comme un oiseau », « tu grignotes ton crayon, ton tricot ou un vieux croûton, comme un rat ! », « tu n'es qu'un perroquet ». Comment contrôler, parquer, discipliner cette sauvagerie tellement spontanée ? Bêtise bestiale. Bêtise parfois terriblement expérimentale…* [2]

This connection between child and animal is therefore not specific to the comic strips examined here. The strips do diverge from typical connections between children and animals in that they take the opposite track to a certain conception of childhood on which this rapprochement is based; this is a negative conception of childhood where the child is seen as someone not yet completely civilized, who has not yet learnt social rules, who must be brought up and brought into line with humanity. The confusion between child and animal in language underlined by Pierre Péju is visible in *Peanuts* where the ambiguity of the terms employed concerns the character Snoopy and ties with Harry Morgan's observation about the representation of animals in comics.

2. "Being beastly in major or minor ways, 'stop eating like a pig', 'don't peck at your food', 'don't nibble your pencil', 'stop parroting'. How can such spontaneous savageness be brought under control, penned in, and disciplined? Beastly monkey business. Sometimes terrifically experimental mischief…"

Snoopy is commonly confused with a young child and is spoken about in a fatherly way by his owner, Charlie Brown: in one daily panel, however, the child characters are surprised to see the dog at the cafeteria (June 29, 1991). When they express their admiration for Snoopy's behavior ("Your dog seems especially well-behaved"), Charlie Brown replies: "Give him a coloring book and some crayons and he is very happy." There is a disjunction with the dog being likened to a child. This disjunction emphasizes a type of discourse in which the same expressions are used to speak of children as well as animals that have been reared: the remark that he is "well-behaved" could equally be made of a child. Accordingly, in *Peanuts*, Snoopy is often the one the older children take care of, especially Charlie Brown who looks after his would-be guard dog when afraid at night and speaks to him in the way one would to reassure a child: "Don't worry… I'm here / I'm here to give you reassurance… everything is all right /[…] I'll always be here to take care of you! / Be reassured!" (July 18, 1993). This strip presents a reversal of roles not only because Charlie Brown is led to speak in the way a parent would, which may also be a reflection of children's games in which the child imitates parental attitudes and discourse, but also because Snoopy is the "guard" dog that should embody the reassuring presence, particularly when we see in the final frame a parallel between Snoopy's position and that of Charlie Brown, who is just as worried as his dog since he asks, when he cannot fall sleep either, "Who reassures the reassurer?".

Moreover, child and animal seem interchangeable. Even when Snoopy does not take the place of Linus' security blanket, he often fights over it with the little boy. This situation may lead to a new reversal of roles, as in the strip from 20 February 1994 which ends with Snoopy sleeping on the floor, hugging the blanket and sucking his thumb, in Linus' typical pose, and Linus lying on top of the dog-house. The characters seem to be fully interchangeable; all boundaries between child and animal are erased.

The animal character often appears in both *Peanuts* and in *Calvin and Hobbes* as a full member of the family. But there is a significant difference between the two comic strips, given that Snoopy is presented as a real dog and it is not unusual for a pet to be thought of as part of the family: this phenomenon can be seen in other comics featuring both people and animals, as in Jim Davis' *Garfield* or Jean Roba's *Boule et Bill*. But the thing that connects the two comics in our corpus is their focus on the child's point of view, which often eliminates the boundary between child and animal. The animal is viewed as the child's equal: the *Peanuts* strip from 27 April 1998 plays on the pecking order in that it establishes a ranking amongst siblings, but denies any hierarchy between child and animal. This strip, which takes the form of a daily panel, shows Lucy, Linus and Rerun sitting on the sofa in order of age. The choice of this form makes the sofa appear like a sort of podium on which the child characters proclaim their ranking. While Lucy and Linus use the criterion of birth order ("I was born first so I get the gold medal/ I was born second so I get the silver"), Rerun breaks away from the logical order which the reader

has come to expect by introducing an ambiguity between birth order and order of arrival in the family: "I'm lucky we never had a dog". In *Calvin and Hobbes*, the relationship between child and animal regularly takes the form of brotherly rivalry, as when Calvin complains of apparent favouritism towards Hobbes ("mom always takes your side") and Hobbes answers, "She wanted another tiger, not you", which portrays the tiger as an elder brother (January 12, 1986).

The comic strips play on the animal character's appropriation of elements from children's culture, which strengthens the association between child and animal characters. This phenomenon can be observed when Hobbes is made to resemble any other child, first because he recites a nursery rhyme and then through the inclusion of "tigers" in a rhyme about "little girls" and "little boys": when Hobbes tells Calvin he has read that "girls are made of sugar and spice and everything nice whereas boys are made of snips and snails and puppy dog tails", Calvin asks him in return, "So what are tigers made of?", breaking the binary opposition between girls and boys and bringing in tigers as a third possible category (June 26, 1987). The gag lies in the contrast between the innocence of the original rhyme and the part added by Hobbes which retains some of that innocence but adds elements of savagery to the nursery rhyme: "Dragonflies and katydids but mostly chewed-up little kids."

In *Peanuts*, children's culture is evoked through references to the *Alice* books. This reinforces the nonsensical dimension that is constantly present in the comic strip and to which the animal character contributes substantially. The characters in *Peanuts* are regularly shown reading *Alice in Wonderland* to Snoopy who makes parts of himself vanish as if he were the Cheshire cat. Moreover, *Peanuts* works in a similar way to Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books in which adult reasoning, seen through a child's eyes, seems arbitrary and absurd. A Sunday spread shows Snoopy playing like a dog fetching objects thrown by a character who remains constantly out-of-shot. This is surprising because Snoopy usually takes part in the children's games such as base-ball, golf, see-sawing, sledging in which all players are generally visible (June 20, 1993).[3] We learn at the end of the comic strip that it is Charlie Brown's present for father's day: "I let him play with my dog". This strip is unusual in that adults are rarely seen in *Peanuts*, and their presence is always implicit. That the grown-up is not visually depicted strengthens the punch line because at first we do not know who provoked this behaviour that is out of keeping with the comic's conventions. Accordingly, although all what is shown is a game of fetch, this representation of Snoopy as just another pet dog is initially incomprehensible to the reader. The punch line of the strip releases this tension by providing an explanation that underscores the exceptional nature of the situation—a father's day present—and reveals a discrepancy between the logic of the child and that of

3. In the years when the comic strip first came out, Snoopy is often shown running to fetch a ball or a stick but this type of play is distanced by Snoopy's comments and strategies to end it and it becomes rarer as the character is made progressively more human.

the adult by reversing the hierarchy since, as in *Alice in Wonderland*, the comic strip shows us the view point of the underling, child or animal, depicting as absurd a situation that is generally thought of as normal and rational from an adult's point of view.

Relying on the *detour* described by Armengaud, Snoopy's comments also provide an absurd dimension. While playing golf, for instance, Snoopy tells Charlie Brown, who asks him whether he should not shout "fore", that dogs cannot speak (May 17, 1994). Although this comment is supposed to bring the child character back to what is logical, it merely heightens the absurdity of the situation.

These comments remind us that the animal is not identical to a child. We have already seen that the animal retains some of its characteristics as an imaginary tiger or a real dog. The child however crosses the boundary that separates human and animal worlds by identifying with the animal and imitating its behaviour. It is in this sense that we can say we are dealing in these comics with a poetics of the "minor", because they show an essential dimension of childhood, recalling what Pierre Péju says when he affirms that it is "impossible to form an idea of the child's world without experiencing its animality, crawling through its burrows" (95). Moreover, far from seeking to remedy matters, these comics focus on the childhood desire for freedom and fantasies of escape from social or familial rules. This is evident when Calvin pounces on his food and rips open his packet of cereals with his teeth (May 9, 1992). The final frame gives us to understand that he has followed the advice of Hobbes. Calvin agrees with a satisfied Hobbes: "You're right. Food tastes better this way."

Through his identification with the animal, the child character expresses his refusal of social rules: Calvin, for instance, often chooses the company of Hobbes over that of humans, asserting that "I'd rather see this with a tiger than a person" (October 9, 1988), or when he takes off all his clothes. The type of animal the child chooses as a playmate is significant: Susie Derkins, Calvin's neighbor and who is the same age as Calvin, has a rabbit as a cuddly companion. She represents compliance with and reproduction of social rules. She plays make-believe games, such as having tea with her stuffed rabbit or playing mummies and daddies. Calvin's companion, in contrast, is a wild animal. There is a striking difference between the pet toys that reflects conventional representations of gender: the little boy's stuffed toy, which is virile and fierce, contrasts with the little girl's toy, which is soft and harmless. Corresponding to the wildness of his companion, the little boy rejects social rules by refusing to play Susie's games of make-believe. In one instance, Calvin suddenly puts a stop to the game they are playing by changing roles, removing his clothes and stating: "Me off to jungle! Find tiger friend! Live with animals" (January 31, 1999). In another strip Calvin refuses to cooperate with Susie and disrupts the frame of make-believe by declaring: "He looks like a rabbit to me" (July 9, 1989). And when Susie asks him to pretend it's a baby, Calvin categorically answers: "NO! This is idiotic! I refuse!!".

In this way, animals in these kid strips are used as symbols of opposition to social rules, as symbols of freedom. What is represented is the childhood fantasy of becoming an animal and standing up against authority. In *Calvin and Hobbes*, this desire is especially prominent in the strips about school, which the animal does not have to attend, or about bath time or any other constraint on the child from which the animal is exempted. When Calvin has to take a bath against his will, he complains of his lack of freedom as a child and, after saying how much he envies the tiger's lot, muses: "I wonder if I can grow fangs when my baby teeth fall out" (March 8, 1988). This remark reflects age-old fears related to adult representations of children. As Isabelle Nières-Chevrel points out, there is a fear, persistent in many cultures, that milk teeth can be replaced by animal teeth (148). Consequently many cultures have rites concerning the loss of milk teeth. She explains that strict differentiation between the young child and the animal is a necessary condition for giving the animal character room in children's literature. *Calvin and Hobbes* plays with the adult fear that the child might turn out more animal than human.

There is a constant confrontation between the rules embodied by adults and the child's desire to be free of them in *Calvin and Hobbes*; the complicity between the child and the animal-imaginary friend against adult authority also rests on the child's feelings of alienation from his family. This feeling leads him to identify with the animal. The two characters share the same mischievous and self-satisfied look after having found a secret code on a cereal packet which allows them to communicate without being understood by others (March 26, 1986). The punch line lies in the word play on the verb "understand", bringing the child to suggest the code is not as useful as they first thought: "Mom and dad won't be able to understand us at all! Not that they do anyway." This lack of understanding is further emphasized in another strip when Calvin complains to Hobbes: "Mom and Dad drive me crazy. / They don't understand me and I don't understand them. It's hopeless! / I'm related to people I don't relate to" (February 13, 1992).

But the animal cannot be reduced to an imaginary friend, a playmate or an accomplice resisting adult rules and regulations. It also serves as a foil and makes it possible to introduce multiple voices and distancing. As a result, the animal becomes a mentor of sorts to the child character, which is at cross-purposes with the educational aims informing many proponents of children's literature. Florence Burgat emphasizes that "it is as if getting into the adult world meant resolving oneself to being violently severed from animals" (quoted in Armengaud 190). In these comics, on the contrary, and especially in *Calvin and Hobbes*, becoming an animal is an opportunity for the child character who wonders whether "you can refuse to inherit the world (March 21, 1987) and not grow— or 'sink' —into humanhood".

## Overturning hierarchies: the animal in charge

The animal character can embody a point of view that is distanced from that of the other characters. Hobbes, paradoxically, represents Calvin's reasonable side, thus reversing the usual associations and distinctions established between humans and animals. Hobbes often takes an ironic distance from Calvin's utterances, reactions and opinions, whether directly by way of reproach or via comments that seem to be addressed as much to the complicit reader as to the child character. This is the case when Calvin expresses his desire to achieve perfection without having to put in any effort (January 25, 1995). He also expresses his indignation at the idea of making any effort in the final panel: "Why should I have to work for everything?! It's like saying I don't deserve it!". While looking at the reader who seems to be called as a witness, Hobbes comments drily: "The American dream lives on."

Here, we are witnesses to power relations between the two characters and Hobbes' relative superiority. Knowing things that Calvin does not, Hobbes seems older and more mature. He is consequently in a more powerful position than Calvin. It is Hobbes whom Calvin questions about love, but at the look of repugnance on the child's face, Hobbes responds: "I told you you weren't old enough" (March 8, 1992). In another strip Hobbes also seems to be familiar with a register of vocabulary that he refuses to explain to the child (April 30, 1986). The word is never uttered but we can guess it is rude from Hobbes' reaction in the third panel, the effect of which is highlighted by the absence of frames around the panel. On reading the word Calvin is asking about the tiger springs up, with his fur on end and his eyes wide open, his hand over his mouth and an exclamation mark drawn above his head to symbolize both surprise and indignation. However, he replies in a calm and composed tone that contrasts comically with his bodily reaction: "I don't know." This blatant lie then prompts Calvin to become indignant: "You do too!". Calvin's reaction suggests he has already asked his parents and that Hobbes therefore shares knowledge with the adults but refuses to let the child in on the secret.

In *Peanuts,* Snoopy also often occupies a distanced point of view and a more privileged position than the child, thus calling into question the established hierarchy. The strip dated 17 April 1993, consists of two almost identical panels, creating a parallel between Charlie Brown and Snoopy and underscoring their two opposing points of view. In the first frame, Charlie Brown wonders what things would be like if their "roles were reversed". At this point, the two are in exactly the same position and the words Charlie Brown utters seem to mean the same thing to both of them, even though we can predict the misunderstanding that is coming because the parallel drawn between them through the similarity of their attitudes erases the boundary between child and animal. The reversal occurs in the second frame when Charlie Brown clarifies his thinking, which astounds Snoopy: "I thought I was the master…" The binary composition of the strip here emphasizes the irresolvable opposition of the two points of view.

In addition, the animal's concerns in the strips discussed here are often at the center of things, thus questioning the stereotypical tenets of anthropocentrism. In *Peanuts*, Snoopy adapts what he writes to take in Lucy's criticism with a skewed touch that makes his corrections comical: when she advises him to write a biblical novel, he replaces "John the Baptist" by "John the Beagle" (August 9, 1994). In another strip the comic effect likewise lies in the discrepancy between Lucy's advice: "You should write about something pleasant / Write something that you know will make everyone happy", and Snoopy's choice, focused on himself and excluding the little human community he lives with (August 22, 1994). This disjunction emphasizes that "everyone" is a relative notion to which Lucy has not given enough thought and which does not refer to the same thing for everyone. Accordingly, in the final panel, eager to apply the advice he has just been given, Snoopy writes: "The cat left the room." Even though this focus on the dog seems ridiculous and has a comic effect, it invites us to think again about our own conceptions about humans whom we usually place at the center of things and prompts us to see things from more diversified perspectives.

As we have already seen, Calvin often distances himself from human ideals. Frequently disappointed by human behavior he considers the animal, conversely, as a worthy role model, even if its reactions are often terribly pragmatic as when Calvin asks Hobbes "as a tiger" (as if his judgment were more valuable because of his tigerhood): "What's our purpose in life? Why are we here?" (February 23, 1992). Hobbes replies with a satisfied look: "We're here to devour each other alive". The child is terrified at the answer and takes refuge indoors, in the safety of his home, but the answer is not so far removed from human reality and ties in with Cathy Parc's observation that "Hobbes comes across as the most human of all the characters, with predation being presented rather as a constant of the human world" (125). The bluntness of the answer has a comic effect but also raises the issue of the violent inclinations of each species; Calvin's comparison between human and animal behavior invites us to question the confinement of savageness to the animal kingdom. After Moe steals his truck at school, Calvin expresses his failure to understand "people's behavior" and his indignation at their selfishness and wickedness (September 20, 1989). Hobbes answers wisely and in a manner that seems to reflect a degree of compassion and pity for human weaknesses that "the problem with people is that they're only human". The child character's conclusion reflects his critical view on the inconsistency of people with respect to their own values: "Well, you're lucky you don't have to be one". The child's bias for the animal world is even clearer when Hobbes says to Calvin, after finding rubbish in the woods: "You know, there are times when it's a source of personal pride to not be human" (July 19, 1987). Replying that he is "with him", Calvin takes off his clothes to underscore that he is siding with Hobbes, the tiger, against so-called civilized humankind. There is a difference that can be noted between *Calvin and*

*Hobbes* and *Peanuts*: *Peanuts* is less about "de-centring" than about mirroring the ridiculousness of humans through the ridiculousness of the animals.

Another *Calvin and Hobbes* strip reverses the roles, placing the tiger at the summit of creation (February 3, 1992). When Calvin asks: "When a kid grows up, he has to be something. He can't just stay the way he is. But a tiger grows up and stays a tiger. Why is that?", Hobbes smugly confirms his own perfection: "No room for improvement". The third frame, in which nothing is said, shows Calvin's puzzlement and Hobbes' satisfaction. They look in different directions as if to symbolize their different states of mind. The tiger looks calm and confident whereas the child seems to be thinking about what he has just been told. The final frame exposes Calvin's disappointment: "Of all the luck, my parents had to be humans". The punch line lies in Hobbes' words of comfort: "Don't be so hard. Humans provide some very important protein". In truth, these words are of no comfort at all, but merely confirm how insignificant humans are. Hobbes' answer reveals a pragmatic point of view. He brings humans down to a mere food source, which is a far remove from how humans see themselves. His answer thus reverses the superior status of humans as a species into a simple link in the food chain, where their worth is measured by their nutritional properties, with the tiger becoming the evaluator of their worth because of his position at the top of the food chain. This *Calvin and Hobbes* strip can be compared with a *Mafalda* strip in which the character Miguelito expresses his indignation about the status of humans which he sees as unfair: "*¿Qué tiene que hacer una tortuga para vivir? ¡Ser tortuga! Qué tiene que hacer un gato para vivir? ¡Ser gato! ¿Qué tiene que hacer un oso para vivir? ¡Ser oso! ¿Qué tiene que hacer un tipo para vivir? ¡Ser albañil, abogado, tornero, oficinista o qué sé yo! ¿Porque tenía que tocarnos a los humanos el estúpido papel de ser animales superiores?*"[4] (1457).

In *Mafalda*, although human superiority appears to be a drawback, it is not called into question; in *Calvin and Hobbes*, there is a reversal which combines both the negation of human superiority to other species and the assertion of a distinction, a distinction that underscores human imperfection instead of superiority. On the contrary, while most portrayals of the child, or "man-cub", usually involve a few human weaknesses, in the comic strip, the child seems to have the possibility to choose between human and animal and there is a reversal of values through the idea of the animal's superiority. This is at odds with the path that children's literature proposes to child readers for the pedagogical purpose of transforming children into "good" adults. Françoise Armengaud examines the various ways in which the animal character appears in children's literature that endeavors to humanize the animal character by lending it anthropomorphic features, placing it in situations

4. What does a tortoise have to do to live? Be a tortoise! What does a cat have to do to live? Be a cat! What does a bear have to do to live? Be a bear! What does a guy have to do to live? Be a bricklayer, a lawyer, an office worker or whatever! Why did we have to get the stupid role of higher animals?

familiar to children and surrounding it with a family (193-197), as in *Petit Ours brun* or Kazou Iwamura's *L'Hiver de la famille Souris* or *Peter Rabbit*. However, several *Calvin and Hobbes* strips show Hobbes as an alternative role model for the child character who repeatedly asks him to teach him how to become a tiger (March 9, 1988). Calvin seems to envy the animal's physical advantages over his own human status as can be seen in a concluding panel where he complains: "No retractable claws, no opposable toes, no prehensile tail, no compound eyes, no fangs, no wings… SIGHHH…" (November 21, 1992).

Both *Peanuts* and *Calvin and Hobbes* are therefore comics for adults and children that play with adult idealizations of childhood. Their subversive dimension lies in their hijacking of the principles that adults apply to children's literature such as its use of animals to make children learn "inevitable sociability" through the fact that they "are not animals like others" (Nières-Chevrel, 149).

The child character and the animal character both contribute therefore to a poetics of the minor through their constant challenging of the rules governing society and consolidating authority. They overturn logic, social (adult) conceptions and established hierarchies; they also invite taking a distanced perspective on what it means to "grow up". The way out that is proposed is "a way out towards the margin" ("*une issue vers la marge*") to take up the terms of Pierre Péju about the adult's escape towards the "*Enfantin"* or childlike world (93). Here it is the animal that represents an alternative future for the child character.

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# Child-animal Interactions in Yakari's Early Adventures: A Zoonarratological Reading

Benoît Glaude*

The Swiss comics author Derib (Claude De Ribaupierre, b. 1944) is best known for the (semi-)realistic drawings of his French-language Western comics. He is renowned for his virtuosic use of the black brush for painting vast natural landscapes, wild animals and horses in a manner comparable to the styles of Jijé (Joseph Gillain) and Jean Giraud. His series *Buddy Longway* (1972-2006) is deemed to have introduced innovative layout techniques in francophone mainstream comics such as "*incrustation*" [embedding] (Roux 43), or the insertion of one panel into another, and the "*gaufrier éclaté*" [splinted grid] (Corbellari 52).[1] The series is also said to have broken a taboo in storytelling by introducing heroes that mature and die. In contrast, Derib's series *Yakari* has received limited attention from comics scholars, and has attracted only a few papers from ethnographers and comparative literature scholars (Braun; Jérôme; Meyer). Co-authored with the comics writer Job (André Jobin, b. 1927), and aimed at children *Yakari* has been running since 1969, acquiring considerable success in France and in Germany. The series recounts the adventures of an eponymous Sioux child who does not grow up, and who can talk to the wild and domesticated animals that he meets while travelling with his nomadic tribe across North America.

This chapter discusses the special interaction between children and animals in this series from a zoonarratological perspective. Zoonarratology, according to David Herman, "explores how storytelling practices (and strategies for narrative interpretation) relate to broader assumptions concerning the nature, experiences, and status of animals" ("Zoonarratology" 95). Building on historian Éric Baratay's work on the "animal's point of view" (49-51), I will begin by showing how the

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1. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

first album, *Yakari et Grand Aigle* [*Yakari and Great Eagle*] (1969-1977) confirms the animal's otherness in human-animal relationships while allowing for human-animal communication. I will then combine several typologies of strategies for representing animal experiences (Collignon 47; Descola 122; Herman, "Storyworld/Umwelt", 166; "Zoonarratology", 98) in order to describe the verbal interactions established in *Yakari and Great Eagle* and a later album, the third of the series,[2] *Yakari chez les castors* [*Yakari and the Beavers*]. I will focus on interactions between the child and two talking animals: his totem, Grand Aigle [Great Eagle], and his horse, Petit Tonnerre [Little Thunder]. Both animals play key roles in the two parallel plots in Yakari's first adventure:[3] the initiation of a Sioux child, who is proving his worth to the eagle which appears in his visions; and the story of his friendship with a wild mustang, which reveals to him "his ability to talk to all animals" (Derib and Job, *Grand Aigle*, 41).

## Child-animal interactions in children's culture

In the 1970s and 1980s, Derib launched several series of Westerns, using different writers for different magazines, but only one of these was specifically aimed at children. The *Yakari* series was published in Switzerland in *Le Crapaud à lunettes* [*The Toad with Glasses*], a school magazine aimed at 10 to 15-year olds, then continued to run in the *Yakari* magazine which, in targeting 4 to 8-year olds, was closer to the series' target age group. It was also republished in foreign magazines aimed at a wider audience, such as *Tintin*. *Yakari*'s writer André Jobin, also known as Job, was editor-in-chief of the two magazines for Swiss Francophone children. His inclination towards animal documentary is evident in the detail included in *Yakari*. Under his editorship, the weekly *Le Crapaud à lunettes* introduced a news section, sponsored by the "eminent biologist Jean Rostand", with "a recurrent [although far from exclusive] focus on the life of nature (fauna, flora), the environment and its pollutants" (Sardet 33-34). Fortunately, Derib was able to inject some life into the narration of their comics with his lively and innovative compositions and layouts, which mitigate the impression of a Wild West documentary.

Between 1964 and 1966, Derib worked on the character design of Yakari and Little Thunder while he was working in Peyo's studio in Belgium (Pernin 67-71). A clear stylistic transition is discernible from the Derib's early sketches and the first *Yakari* episode, released in 1969: the style has become less caricatural and

2. This album is interesting because it introduces a colony of beavers, which provides an animal allegory of Yakari's human tribe, and which often reappears in later albums.

3. The first *Yakari* albums were successful long before the animated movie released in 2020, given that two animated series have been broadcasted on European television, in the 1980s and in the 2000s respectively. The adapters of the latter split the double plot of *Yakari and Great Eagle*, and their corresponding novelisations (Mortimer, *Grand Aigle* and *Petit Tonnere*), over two episodes, under the titles *Yakari et Grand Aigle* [*Yakari and Great Eagle*] and *Yakari et Petit Tonnerre* [*Yakari and Little Thunder*].

more semi-realistic. The resulting ambivalence between caricature and naturalism in the representation of living creatures, in contrast to the setting which was always depicted in a realistic manner, lasted throughout the series and is comparable to the "bestial ambivalence" inherent in the depiction of animals in cartoons. Here I am extending to comics a concept developed in animation studies by Paul Wells, who defines bestial ambivalence as "a representational flux [that] accommodates a raft of polar extremes: the irreconcilable difference of animals and its opposite, the sociocultural assimilation of animals" (51).

Before *Yakari*, Derib had simultaneously worked on the adventures of *Attila* written by Maurice Rosy, for the *Spirou* magazine, and the adventures of *Pythagore*, scripted by André Jobin, in *Le Crapaud à lunettes*. Both series share Derib's trademark style for humorous drawings exemplified by his work on Peyo's *Smurfs*. In both series, the main characters are talking animals, a dog and an owl, that can converse with other animal species, including humans. The inclusion of a human-animal dialogue, which seems uncommon in French-language comics, even in humorous children's comics, was undoubtedly an idea of Maurice Rosy's (Vernet 49; Lesage 231). Rosy had temporarily given a voice to André Franquin's Marsupilami (a fictional marsupial-like character from the *Spirou and Fantasio* series) in the mid-1950s, ten years before launching the *Attila* series with Derib. The originality of this human-animal interaction might explain why studies on funny animal comics only gave a marginal place to *Yakari*.

One of the first monographs on animal comics, *Animaux en cases* [Animals in panels/cages] (Groensteen 184-189), mentions *Yakari* only in passing in two chapters on animals as sidekicks, such as Tintin's Snowy and Lucky Luke's Jolly Jumper. Admittedly, *Yakari* is neither a zoocentric comic with no, or very little, room for humans, nor an anthropocentric one with a human hero and an animal sidekick. For Groensteen, the interspecies relationships in *Yakari* are exceptions in French comics in that they depict "humans surrounded by a whole menagerie, of which Kipling's Mowgli was of course the forerunner" (189). Such stories involving children speaking to animals remain relatively uncommon; even the Beatrix Potter and Benjamin Rabier albums, with their rich and diverse animal population from the first half of the twentieth century, and many animated films before the twenty-first century, avoided dialogue between humans—and, to a lesser extent, children—and animals (Wells 121; Collignon 52).

Even though exceptions should be noted in the twentieth century—and their number grows every day, particularly in the case of animated television series—the relatively late arrival of human-animal interactions suggests that they might contain an element of subversion. The animation scholar Stéphane Collignon defines "anthropomorphization" in a broad sense, "as the erroneous process by which one attributes to a non-human object human characteristics" (47), and he establishes different levels in endowing nonhuman characters with a human psyche, ranging from an obvious intentionality of actions to more specifically human abilities.

According to him, "even when characters are fully anthropomorphized, in so far as to actually interact with human characters in a human world, animators feel the need to remind us that their creations are still animals" (53). For Paul Wells, the verbal interaction between humans and anthropomorphized animals in animated films is problematic on two counts: there is a narrative issue, a need to suspend disbelief, and a cultural issue, the tacit need to avoid confusion between human and nonhuman worlds (120-121). The first episodes of the *Attila* and *Yakari* series mitigated the discordance of such interspecies communication, which risked hindering readers' ability to suspend their disbelief, by making the animal's voice perceptible only to the readers and a privileged few. In *Yakari and Great Eagle*, the little hero is the only Sioux who can see his totem eagle and who understands animal language (while the animals understand each other). At this stage, we might think that animals are defined essentially as nonhumans in *Yakari* but, as we will see below, not all animal species are treated in the same way.

Later, as Little Thunder and the little girl Arc-en-Ciel [Rainbow] share Yakari's adventures (Derib and Job, *Castors*, 36), they meet the eagle and the horse even becomes "in the course of the albums, the friend, confidant and cultural mediator between the human and the animals they meet" (Jérôme 336). However, although Rainbow loves to be with animals, she will never be able to communicate with them. This is already evident in the scene below from *Yakari and the Beavers* (Derib and Job, *Castors*, 33): having heard that one of the beavers' cubs has disappeared Yakari and Little Thunder immediately set off to search for him without providing any explanation to the puzzled Rainbow. Initially surprised by her incomprehension, Yakari understands the issue: "Oh, that's right, you don't talk to animals".

It should be noted that several fictions featuring child-animal interactions prior to *Yakari*, such as the Walt Disney films *Pinocchio* (1940), *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and *The Jungle Book* (1967), are adaptations of nineteenth-century classics of children's literature. Animal fables can of course be traced back to ancient Greece, but animal literature specifically aimed at the young did not appear until the nineteenth century (Cosslett 475-476). The Victorian animal novel was based on a romantic notion of the relationship between children and nature, with language being the feature distinguishing humans from animals. The youngsters in Victorian children's literature appear almost like a "missing link" (Cosslett 480) in the Western hierarchy of living beings dominated by adults, presumed to be rational, as opposed to their children and the so-called "primitives", presumed to be governed by the imagination instead of reason, lacking language and having a propensity to humanise animals (especially by bestowing them with communication skills). By forging this link between children, "primitives" and animals, all three, supposedly incapable of sophisticated communication, are lumped under the group of "others" who are not recognised as rightful subjects (Baratay 49-50).

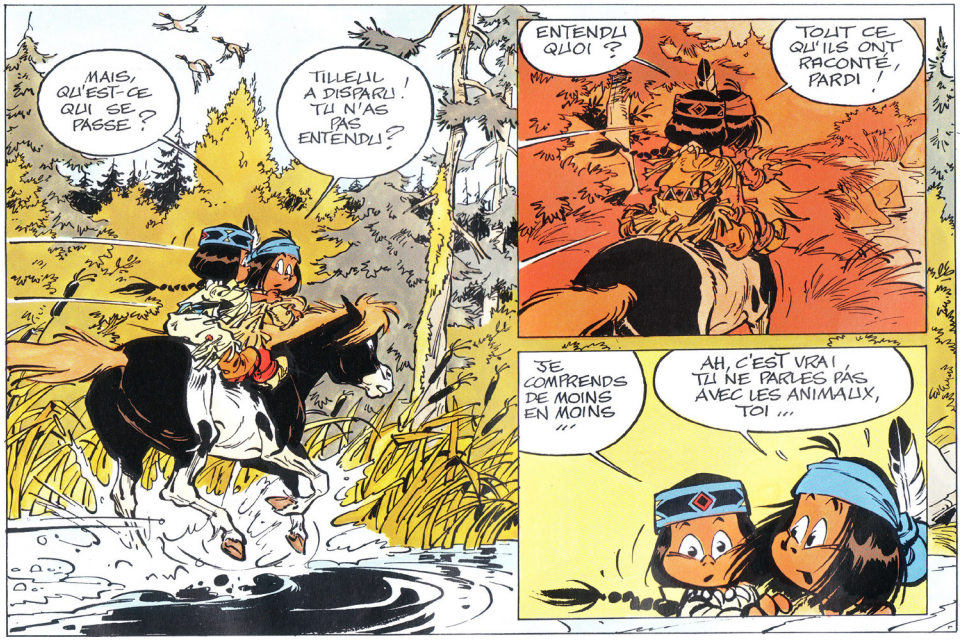


Fig. 1. Derib and Job. *Yakari chez les castors*. Bruxelles: Le Lombard, 2012. 33. © Derib + Job / Éditions du Lombard (Dargaud-Lombard S.A.) 2020.

This new genre of animal stories for children, arising from the debate on the evolution of species sparked by Charles Darwin, led to a new anthropomorphism in fiction, which is still found today in Hollywood cartoons. This anthropomorphism functions "as a tool by which a variety of discourses are simultaneously called into the interpretation of the animal and operate as a way in which any potential anxiety about animal otherness and difference might be potentially reconciled" (Wells 98). Disney's *Jungle Book* (1967) is a particularly illuminating example because it came out at the time when *Yakari* was conceptualized (1964-1969). The following extract, taken from the official novelisation of the Disney animated film,[4] maintains the animals' point of view, which is mirrored in the final scene of the film, at the moment when Mowgli is reunited with his fellow humans. We observe the man-cub from the subjective point of view of the jungle animals. However, although Baloo and Bagheera have not mastered the mimical, postural and gestural codes of human conversation, they are not mistaken when they interpret the interaction as a friendly encounter. Incidentally, there is no difference in language register between the narrator's voice and the animals' voices, unlike Rudyard Kipling's collection of *Jungle Book* stories, in which the animals often speak an archaic form of English:

4. The French translation appeared towards the end of 1968 in a popular collection called "La Bibliothèque verte" published by Hachette.

> When he [Mowgli] had turned ten cartwheels and added a somersault or two to his performance, he stopped long enough to ask the girl-cub her name. "She can't understand him", whispered Baloo to Bagheera. "I wouldn't worry." The panther chuckled. "I imagine she understands well enough when a man-cub starts acting like that." Indeed, the girl-cub seemed perfectly at ease in the situation. She did what any well-bred girl-cub would do. She giggled (Carey 188).

This apparently childish example demonstrates the strong impact of an important, contemporaneous scientific debate on even the most mainstream productions of the entertainment industry. Our perception of the living world, which Philippe Descola called "modern naturalism" (xviii), today looks like a cultural construction, built on many scientific and technical discoveries since the seventeenth century, according to which man is the main exploiter of passive natural resources. Also considered as natural resources, animals are paradoxically regarded "either as the lowest common denominator of a universal image of humanity or else as the perfect counterexample that makes it possible to define the specific nature of that humanity" (Descola 178). Recently, following the reappraisal of ethnocentrism in anthropology, which led to, among other publications, Philippe Descola's *Beyond Nature and Culture*, most human sciences have begun to re-evaluate an anthropocentrism that is still very much prevalent, both in historiography and narratology, despite advances in life sciences. In its own way, *Yakari and Great Eagle* could support a zoonarratological reading insofar as it portrays interspecies friendships between children and animals.

## Interspecies friendships in *Yakari and Great Eagle*

Éric Baratay was one of the first scholars in France in the late 1990s to suggest adopting the "animal's point of view" in order to move beyond "the human history of animals, which was too rooted in a false or partial representation not only of the animal, […] but also of the human/animal duo, envisaged as a subject/object, observer/observed, active/passive relationship" (29). The French historian was inspired by anthropologists who "demonstrated empathy and ethnomorphism" to move beyond the ethnocentrism that had prevailed until then, recommending that his fellow historians "maintain an anthropomorphic approach" (63). By making it possible to recognize human abilities in animals, anthropomorphism, despite its anthropocentrism, can contribute towards closing the gap between humans and animals. In its French formulation, this historiographical project seems similar to the zoonarratological project that Anglo-American literary researchers have been working on since the beginning of the twenty-first century:

> One should therefore eliminate anthropocentrism from history, look at man's sidekicks, these other living beings that animals are, immerse oneself in their world, look from their point of view by going back to questioning, looking

for the wordiest documents or by reading others in another way, by throwing the narrative off-centre (Baratay 12).[5]

David Herman, pioneer of zoonarratology, suggests that certain strategies for narrating nonhuman experiences would challenge the anthropocentric foundations of narratology. Herman is interested in a radical strategy of representing animal experiences, which he calls *Umwelt*[6] exploration or the exploration of an animal world as it presents itself to a specific species, and which he believes represents "the very attempt to imagine how a different kind of intelligent agent might differently negotiate—enact—the world" ("Storyworld/Umwelt" 178). The entire paradox of this speculative strategy (which isn't applied in the *Yakari* series) is its inevitable mediation through a human storyteller. Herman topples the Western dualist vision of the human-animal duo, by modelling different strategies lying between these two extremes: the reconstruction of an animal's *Umwelt* and the allegory introduced by animal fables. He describes how the storyteller slips into the animal's skin without explaining how this human narrator presents the relationship of his fellow humans with the animals in the diegesis. The notion of specific animal worlds takes into account "the quality or specificity of nonhuman experiences" which, in comics, "use words and images in a bid to capture the[ir] distinctive texture and ecology" (Herman, "Storyworld/Umwelt", 158). However, as was the case in ethology, this theory failed to take account of interspecies relationships in that "it laid too much emphasis on the differences, separations, lack of communication between these worlds […] and propounded the theory that any interaction between species, particularly with humans, came about merely as a happy coincidence, fruitful misunderstandings" (Baratay 255). Éric Baratay proposes a compromise by considering "partial overlaps of the worlds" that allow mutual behaviours to adjust until "interspecies friendships" are formed (257).

In *Yakari and Great Eagle,* this approach is reflected in a story that adopts an "empathic anthropomorphism" (even though it does not explore an *Umwelt*) and provides a narrative application of the historiographic "anthropomorphic approach" defined above. In his representation of Little Thunder, for example, Derib takes care to depict his non-verbal behaviour; not the sense of smell, sight or hearing specific to his species, but rather his sensitivity to pain and the externalisation of certain emotions that he shares with man: pride, distress, mistrust, defiance. In the drawings, the horse's degree of pleasure or stress is shown through his facial expressions, his restlessness and his whinnying. Wandering alone after the men of

5. "*Il faut donc arracher l'histoire à une vision anthropocentrée, regarder ces comparses de l'homme, ces autres vivants que sont les bêtes, passer de leur côté, regarder de leur point de vue en retournant les interrogations, en cherchant les documents plus prolixes ou en lisant les autres autrement, en décentrant le récit.*"

6. The American scholar David Herman borrows and builds on the concept of *Umwelt* from German biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944), that is "the lived, phenomenal worlds […] of creatures whose organismic structure differs from our own" (Herman, "Storyworld/Umwelt", 159, 178).

his tribe have captured a herd of mustangs, Yakari hears the distressed neighing, which he cannot yet understand, of a horse, Little Thunder, who had escaped only to have his hoof trapped in the wake of a rockslide (Derib & Job, *Grand Aigle*, 18). Yakari releases his hoof, setting him free, without explaining a gesture that is unusual for someone who had only hunted animals until then. As he takes leave of the horse, he tries to interpret its nodding head: "It looks like he's trying to say thank you…" (19).

The process of domesticating Little Thunder could be described as an "inculturation that is not merely imposed by man but also welcomed by the animal, a dialogue between the two, with the animal influencing the man in return" (Baratay 67). At the end of the coming-of-age story, despite everything that has happened, Yakari still wants to "capture" Little Thunder when he sees him again, this time with a different herd. He observes the horse and makes several unsuccessful attempts to capture him but the horse insists on communicating in its own way, encircling Yakari, challenging him and gently pushing him. Finally, Yakari speaks to the horse and offers his friendship. When he understands the horse's willingness to be his friend, he realizes that he can "talk with all animals" (Derib and Job, *Grand Aigle*, 41). Little Thunder lets the child mount him bareback, in exchange for the only thing that Yakari can offer him: his affection. The friendly pact between Yakari and Little Thunder places friendship above possession and sociability between animals of the same species. Talking about another mustang that refuses to be ridden, Little Thunder finds that "He doesn't yet know what friendship is…" (44), thereby affirming the individuality that sets each of the mustangs apart.

Language is used to iron out the implausibility of the situation because a gregarious wild beast theoretically prefers the company of its fellow beasts; it only forges an interspecies friendship "when each animal is the only one of its species and has to move out of its own world to re-establish a link with living creatures" (Baratay 258). Derib is familiar with this type of relationship through his experience with horse breeding. Bred horses usually live in small herds, in stables that restrict contact between them and encourage the establishment of a relationship with their breeders. In an interview published in 1985, the illustrator said he had been riding every day since the age of fifteen and that he had a mare that taught him to "discipline himself in order to anticipate and control the animal's reactions" (Derib qtd. in Pernin 50).

## Strategies for capturing the animal experience through the child's experience

In a recent article, anthropologist Sebastian Braun defined a French "ethno*graphic novel*" (I underscore the pun) as an adult comics of any genre, including science fiction, which is based on solid ethnographic documentation and which "attempts to tell the story of American Indian culture and history from a Native point of

view as interpreted by Europeans" (Braun 53). He compares two of Derib's works, *Buddy Longway* and *Celui qui est né deux fois* [*The One who Is Born Twice*], with his children's series *Yakari*, which he alleges contains unspecified ethnographic shortcomings:[7] "Although Yakari is a Native [American] protagonist, the readers do not learn too much about American Indians except a reinforcement of the already existent, positive, but heavily romanticized European stereotypes" (Braun 43). However, in his interviews, Derib mentions many ethnographic references that he uses for all the Westerns he works on simultaneously.[8] For *Yakari*, in particular, the emphasis is on nature and animal documentation—"I have almost become an animal illustrator", he declares (Derib qtd. in Vernet 55)—instead of ethnographic accuracy: "without ever being rigid (I do not, for example, concern myself with any potential differences between how the Sioux and Cheyenne dress), [it] allows me to paint a credible picture of the Indians in the story" (Derib qtd. in Pernin 112). Indeed, *Yakari* is not intended to offer an accurate representation of the Sioux people—let alone the Lakota Sioux tribe, as identified by anthropologist Laurent Jérôme (336).

Although one can disapprove of the little importance Sebastian Braun places on *Yakari* and his blanket condemnation of other works for children, his interpretation of *Yakari* as a rehashing of the myth of the noble savage is accurate. This well-known and "erroneous" (Désveaux 435) romantic vision "of the ecologist Indian addressing animals as though he were addressing humans" (Jérôme 338), is discernible in Derib's interviews. When asked to explain his fascination for "Indians", he replies:

> Firstly, because of their oneness with nature, their respect for Mother Earth and the sacred relationship they had with animals. When killing a bison, for instance, they would make sure it was facing east to ensure its soul could leave its body in the proper manner; they would then use every part of the animal, nothing went to waste, which is of course a far cry from our abattoirs! (Derib qtd. in Vernet 76)

Yakari and the men of his tribe do not always have such a respectful, harmonious and peaceful relationship with nature. According to anthropologist Laurent

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7. Sabine Meyer, who is interested in the cartoon series adapted from the comics in 2005-2007, notes that "the series also attempts to approximate Sioux habitation styles (tepees) and clothing" but that there are inaccuracies, in her view, regarding everyday objects, and the spatio-temporal framework remains, in her opinion, far too imprecise (87-88).

8. According to Georges Pernin (122-123), Derib's three coming-of-age tales, mentioned by Sebastian Braun, appear to be less dissimilar than the anthropologist would have us believe. Although Yakari is only a child, certain aspects of his coming-of-age story, such as the isolation, the capture of a mount and his first visions, are not unlike a (non-violent) version of the Native North American young adult rite of passage commonly known as a vision quest. During the threat of fires, Great Eagle reassures the little Sioux with these words: "Have faith, follow your totem! Something new begins for you, Yakari" (Derib and Job, *Grand Aigle*, 27).

Jérôme (336), they belong to the Lakota people, one of the Great Plains Sioux that Philippe Descola places in the "predatory animism" category (345). Two factors define this predatory relationship (Désveaux 442) and both seem to be present in Yakari's Lakota tribe: it lives in a hostile natural environment and appears to be sociologically cut off, it never meets settlers and only rarely interacts with other tribes. In *Yakari and Great Eagle,* the hero has a relationship with animals that is characterised by possession, excluding, of course, dangerous predators such as bears and pumas. At the beginning, the hero has a standoff with a female puma in an attempt to capture her cub. He then follows the adults of his tribe as they chase after a herd of wild mustangs. He witnesses the taming of the captured beasts, a violent process, which ignores the fact that "wild mustangs are very sensitive", and at the end of which "the horse has found its master", (Derib and Job, *Grand Aigle*, 16-17). However, these child-animal relationships evolve from predatory relationships to friendly ones in *Yakari and Great Eagle* and subsequent albums, with the hero forging friendships with as many species as possible.

As an exception to these two kinds of child-animal relationships, Yakari's interaction with his own personal totem, Great Eagle, is more a relationship of identity than friendship, which is in keeping with the metamorphic process specific to animist ontology. In this ontology, which is one of the "systems of the properties of existing beings" (Descola 121), humans and nonhumans have similar interiorities and "dissimilar physicalities" (116).[9] In other words, they have the same soul or consciousness, the same "intentionality, subjectivity, reflexivity, feelings, and the ability to express oneself and to dream" (116), but, physically, their bodies and means of subsistence, are different. According to the resulting cosmology, nonhumans constitute "a collection of subjects with which humans day after day weave a web of social relations" (123). Despite this interspecies sociability, the animist humanisation of animals is incomplete because they are physically different from humans. This is why, in *Yakari and Great Eagle*, animal-human metamorphosis is included: the child dreams that his totem eagle takes on a human body while keeping his bird's head (Derib and Job, *Grand Aigle*, 23); a little earlier he is given his quest through the voice of his totem who encourages him "to be like me as much as possible, and then you will see me for real" (6).

Alternatively, approaching this from the perspective of modern naturalism, the animals (whether real or imaginary) are very often reconstructed, transformed or distorted to symbolise something in human nature: "the closest living beings to man, animals are a 'useful means of thinking symbolically'" (Baratay 20). The most widely used strategies for representing animal experiences in comics, generally speaking, keep human experience as a reference point. Typical anthropomorphic

9. Descola describes this neologism as follows: "physicality is not simply the material aspect of organic and abiotic bodies; it is the whole set of visible and tangible expressions of the dispositions peculiar to a particular entity when those dispositions are reputed to result from morphological and physiological characteristics that are intrinsic to it" (116).

projections, which characterize many talking animals in the *Yakari* series, continue to use "human motivations and practices […] as the template for interpreting nonhuman behaviour", with no intention of creating allegories (Herman, "Storyworld/Umwelt", 167). In these treatments of animal experiences, the relationship between human and nonhuman worlds is metaphorical, whereas the Sioux's representation of the world is more often represented through metamorphosis rather than metaphor. The Sioux of the Great Plains "confer the position of an intentional subject upon a large number of members of the cosmos", whereby "each of these humans and nonhuman subjects [are] striving to incorporate the substance and identity of others" (Descola 345). In *Yakari and Great Eagle*, only the relationship between the child and his totem remotely resembles the kind of metamorphic treatment described above; the other relationships are based on metaphor.

To portray an animist representation of relationships between humans and nonhumans (similar interiorities, different physicalities), Western comic book authors need to adopt a vision that is diametrically opposed to their own cultural vision: modern naturalism (according to which humans and nonhumans have different interiorities and similar physicalities). To get around the complexity of this task, it seems that, like modern-day ethologists, Derib and Job have been "less quick to affirm an obvious discontinuity in the interiorities of humans and nonhumans" (Descola 179). In *Yakari and Great Eagle* and a later album, *Yakari and the Beavers*, I observe a naturalism with two faces. On the one hand, this naturalism could be considered "modern" (representative of the most common naturalist ontology in the West since early modern history) for its representation of man's potential predators (wolf, bear, puma), and of other non-anthropomorphized "animal objects" (fish, dog), with which Yakari does not verbally communicate, at least not in the early episodes of the series. On the other hand, this naturalism could be "ethological" due to its facilitation of interspecies interactions, as in the way it portrays the child's potential friends (mustangs, mallard, beavers), which are given an internal voice and, frequently, the ability to talk. Amplifying this latter trend, the recent adaptation in cartoons (2005-2007) militates firmly "against anthropocentrism and positions itself in favor of animal rights. […The] *Yakari* animated version, even more explicitly than its printed predecessor, argues that all human beings, including the Native Americans, have prejudices toward and a tendency to think in hierarchies and to dominate […] the (non)human Other" (Meyer 90, 96). To sum up, some human-animal relationships, in the fictional world of *Yakari and Great Eagle* and *Yakari and the Beavers*, determine a new type of Western ethological naturalism, in which humans and nonhumans are not fully assimilated, but where their physicalities and interiorities are brought closer, i.e. comparable (but not identical), exemplifying an empathic anthropomorphism through showing greater sensitivity to interspecies interactions.

| | Identification between human and nonhuman | Examples of animals in two comic books |
|---|---|---|
| Animism | dissimilar physicalities, similar interiorities | Great Eagle |
| Ethological naturalism | comparable interiorities, comparable physicalities | friends: mustangs, mallard, pelican, butterfly, beavers |
| Modern naturalism | similar physicalities, dissimilar interiorities | predators: wolf, bears, puma<br>other "animal objects": fishes, dog |

Fig. 2. Shift of ontology types in the representation of the relationships between humans and animals in the fictional world of *Yakari and Great Eagle* and *Yakari and the Beavers*.

As is often the case in Western fiction, many aspects of animal life are not caricatured, in *Yakari and Great Eagle* because plenty of beasts are relegated to secondary, or even background, roles. Most of the animal species, particularly the predators but also the fish and (with very few exceptions) the mustangs, are realistically portrayed and do not talk. These "animal objects" are not anthropomorphized, unlike other species that are either humanised, simply by giving them the ability to speak, or anthropomorphized graphically, often in a caricatural manner. Humans are the most frequently caricatured species. To a lesser extent, is not Little Thunder, with his bright yellow tail and mane, and small size a caricature of a young mustang, especially when compared to the realistic depictions of his fellow horses? Correspondingly, the novelisations of the *Yakari* animated series describe Little Thunder as "a wild pony", and not as a mustang[10] (Mortimer, *Grand Aigle*, 5; *Petit Tonnerre* 5).

The hesitation between caricature and realism in the representation of animals, is reflected in the alternation between their French words and their inarticulate vocalizations, which is particularly audible in the animated series. In three of the five chapters of the novelisation of the second animated episode *Yakari et Petit Tonnerre* [*Yakari and Little Thunder*], adapted from the album, *Yakari and Great Eagle*, the little hero (who is the autodiegetic narrator) forgets his gift of understanding animals and introduces the setting as follows: "The sun rises over the camp. I hear a frog croaking in the distance, horses pawing the ground in the paddock, birds chirping in the trees, and a dog sniffing near the tepee" (Mortimer, *Petit Tonnerre* 11). Through these ambivalences between an irreconcilable difference and the possibility of interspecies interactions, the *Yakari* comics inadvertently illustrate the concept of "bestial ambivalence", which concerns even slightly anthropomorphized fictional animals. By giving them the status of both "pure animal" and "hybrid humanimal" (Wells 51), these fictions simultaneously laud and criticize humankind.

10. In *Yakari and the Beavers*, the foreman Thousand-Mouths calls him "this quadruped with a mane", then "this pony [who, he says,] is getting on my nerves" (Derib and Job, *Castors* 8, 13).

Generally speaking, all talking animals in *Yakari and Great Eagle* fall into the first category of anthropomorphization suggested by Stéphane Collignon for animated films. This "consist[s] of normal animals, objects, plants drawn in a relatively realistic manner, although they can be caricatural or 'cartoony' as long as they remain close to their natural form, endowed with an human psyche. […] Sometimes the ability of speech is added." (Collignon 47). In theory, these animals are supposed to remain animalistic and, if they speak, they cannot be on a par with the humans. At first sight, therefore, one cannot fail to be surprised to see animals that are barely anthropomorphized talk on equal terms with Yakari. And yet, the convention becomes acceptable as a result of being constantly used and because the main human interlocutor is a child.

The third album in the series, *Yakari and the Beavers*, introduces a colony of beavers that reminds us of humans in the same "carnivalesque" way as the colony of monkeys in *The Jungle Book* (Cosslett 490; Wells 50), albeit without the anarchy, insofar as the beavers ape, grotesquely and implausibly, the behaviours and the social roles of the Sioux. Their social structure is similar to that of humans and both animals and humans are caricatured to the same extent. There are, moreover, parallels between the characters in the Indian tribe and those in the beaver colony, such as the two who are always asleep (Œil-de-Bouillon [Broth Eye] and Bois-de-Lit [Wooden-Bed]) or the two wise elders (Roc-tranquille [Tranquil Rock] and Digue-de-Bois [Dam-of-Wood]). *Yakari*'s beavers share similarities with Collignon's second category of anthropomorphization, which "consists of non-human characters set in a human-like environment" (Collignon 47), that is characters who speak and have a will of their own, as in the first category, but who also move about on two legs, accompany their words with elaborate hand gestures and use rudimentary tools. The old wise man Dam-of-Wood always walks with a stick and the sculptor Double-Dent [Double-Tooth] steers a raft with a pole (Derib and Job, *Castors* 46). Yakari and Little Thunder run into the beavers as they unintentionally trample on their dam to cross a river, incurring the wrath of the beavers' foreman Mille-Gueules [Thousand-Mouths] (8). The composition of the meeting scene produces an effect close to the cinematographic "shot reverse shot", alternating the point of view of talking beavers with that of Yakari and Little Thunder, who remain silent. This alternation of compositions, recurring throughout the album and its cartoons, indicates a desire to take differing points of view into account. While a line of Thousand-Mouths adopts the point of view of an animal that would never have seen horses or humans, described as "this quadruped with a mane and this biped with a feather" (Derib and Job, *Castors* 8), this contradicts another beaver who declares "I always dreamed of riding a horse!" (10). But Derib and Job do not reconstruct with more accuracy how a beaver would experience, from his *Umwelt*, a confrontation with large mammals destroying his habitat.

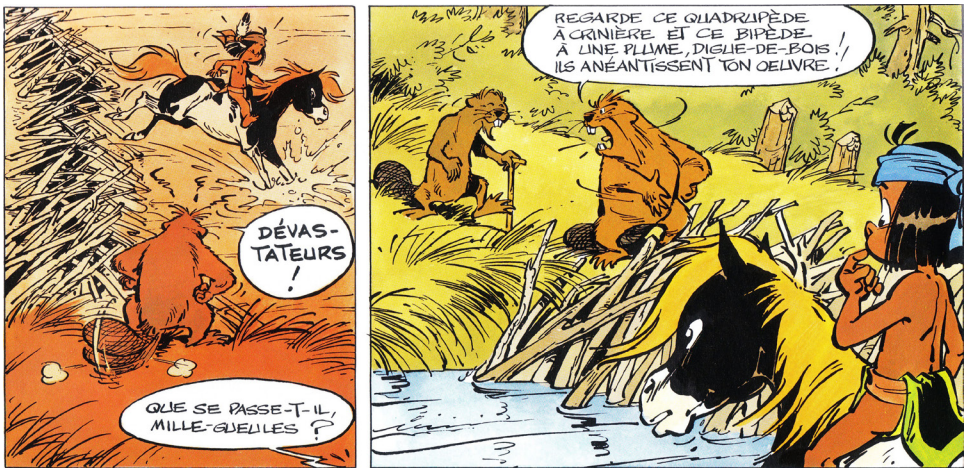


Fig. 3. Derib and Job. *Yakari chez les castors.* Brussels: Le Lombard, 2012. 8. © Derib + Job / Éditions du Lombard (Dargaud-Lombard S.A.) 2020.

## Conclusion

To sum up, a variety of "narrative strategies for representing nonhuman encounters with the world", (Herman, "Storyworld/Umwelt", 166) are noticeable in *Yakari and Great Eagle* and *Yakari and the Beavers*. These reflect how "any given text may use a range of strategies for figuring agent-environment interactions" (179). Talking animals endowed with subjectivity (Little Thunder, mallard, pelican, butterfly) are what Herman calls "anthropomorphic projections", while the colony of beavers is an animal allegory of Yakari's tribe, with its patriarchal organization, dominated by an old wise chief, and with several members mirroring the Sioux characters. In the two comic books, there is no real "narrative strategy [that] shows what it would be like for human characters to take on nonhuman attributes" (Herman, "Storyworld/Umwelt", 167), and no further exploration of an animal *Umwelt*.

While Yakari's relationship with his totem, Great Eagle, tends towards the ideal of zoomorphic projection, in the sense of an animistic metamorphosis between the child and the bird, such zoomorphism is not really achieved. As the child's protective totem, Great Eagle has the gift of omniscience, ubiquity and, of course, he is endowed with the faculty of speech, since "anthropomorphism entails the imposition of human language on species that communicate otherwise" (Herman, "Storyworld/Umwelt", 174). The eagle dominates Yakari in size and intelligence; he is the voice of wisdom. The other talking animals also appear to be wiser and often smarter than humans. In *Yakari and Great Eagle*, the totem congratulates the child for behaving empathically towards Little Thunder, "you have heard the calls of the little horse and you have been generous in freeing him" (Derib and Job, *Grand Aigle*, 20), but he only explains Yakari's particular gift in the 2005 cartoon: "Great Eagle! I know how to talk to animals! / I know, Yakari. It's because you are

an animal friend. I'm counting on you to comprehend them and to argue their case among humans" (Mortimer, *Grand Aigle*, 50-51). The Lakota child thus becomes more sensitive than the average person thanks to his privileged relationship with animals.

The fact that dialogue between children and animals is relatively rare in classic francophone comics makes the early adventures of Yakari an exception and fascinating case study. "Over and beyond the contexts in which animals speak as humans," Paul Wells tells us, "even if they sustain anticipated animal behavior, the most important factor becomes when animals speak and when animals speak to humans" (120). As we have seen, the representation of verbal interactions between children and animals, excluding allegorical animal comics, comes up against something like a cultural and narrative taboo, at least in many French-language comics from the twentieth century, especially if the nonhuman speakers are only slightly anthropomorphized. One of Job and Derib's main strategies is to represent nonhuman experiences in many forms, while including a certain number of non-anthropomorphized "animal objects" that cannot speak, and preferring anthropomorphic projection for the talking animals. The result is a vision of the world and child-animal relationships that reflects, to a certain extent, a Western ethological perspective, distancing itself from an outdated naturalism that considered animals as objects and not subjectivities.

From the perspective of modern naturalism, which is very much a Western phenomenon, this series and its transpositions across media question European readers' relationship with "others". In classic French-language comic books, some of the "others" speak a little-valued language: the indigenous peoples of North America, French-speaking Africans, non-native immigrants speak rudimentary French. From a colonialist perspective, "others", such as the Native Americans, are given the opportunity to become more "civilized", provided they use the verbal language in a more standard fashion and curb their (so-called) instinct to communicate with animals. The fictional bias adopted by *Yakari and Great Eagle* is much less conventional. By depicting the Great Plains as a timeless land, far removed from Western civilisation, "others" such as the Sioux and the wild animals can be virtually removed from "the situation of contact" ["*la situation de contact*"] on which ethnology depends (Désveaux 436), although "the presence of horses […] suggests that *Yakari* is set in the post-contact era" (Meyer 88). By talking with the animals in a French that is even more standard than the French spoken by the adults in his tribe, Yakari gives them a status equal to his own, and a status even more civilized than that of Sioux adults, because the animals—unlike the other Sioux—talk back to the child in good French. Although the child enables some animals to communicate, and thus bestows them with a certain individuality, he inevitably seeks to reinforce their otherness, by maintaining an anthropocentric outlook, despite his desire to be their friend. Having said that, these animals talking to humans produce a fictional world that has carnivalesque tones; the

corresponding ability to talk to animals appears to be only permitted in children's stories, or even for a single child in these stories.

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# Graphic Cross-pollinations and Shapeshifting Fables in Matthew Forsythe's *Jinchalo*

Laura A. Pearson

> It is nearly standard wisdom that fables are not actually about animals, that the allegorical purposes of these figured beings, their comic and simplistic characters, that they are made to speak, make them entirely imaginary creations, solely in service of human culture.
>
> Onno Oerlemans 297.
>
> [E]ven the tiniest life form [must be] recognized as having intrinsic worth, integrity, and autonomy.
>
> Vandana Shiva qtd. in Seager 953.

## Introduction

Though some scholars go back as far as hieroglyphics and cave paintings, others trace the formal origins of anthropomorphized animals and comics to beast fables and folktales. The funny animal genre, Joseph Witek says, takes allegorical and fabular associations to new metaphysical heights, using animal metaphors to activate different levels of sophistication and seriousness (109). An early example of this differentiation is the pioneering newspaper cartoonist Jimmy Swinnerton's comic strip "Mr. Jack". This appeared in 1903 in William Randolph Hearst newspapers, and featured cat/tiger heads on human bodies. Because the jokes in this strip focused on "Mr. Jack's attempts to commit adultery" and other acts of womanizing, it was deemed inappropriate for children and moved to the sports pages in 1904 (Rifas 235). This early illustration demonstrates the imbrication of speciesism with sexism as well as the tension between the juvenile/adult divide.

That animals are often relegated to the realm of children's literature is an obvious if unfounded conundrum for both (critical) animal studies and comics studies (McCloud 45). When animal figures are prejudicially understood as

only attached to the realm of juvenilia, this "outlaws" them in "adult writing" or potentially precludes animals that appear in more "adult" narratives from being taken seriously (Huggan and Tiffin 154). This tendency can create blinders to the significance of animals in both a) material that might arbitrarily be judged as "childish" and b) children's literature itself. The late Ursula K. Le Guin puts this a different way:

> Critical terror of Kiddilit is common. People to whom sophistication is a positive intellectual value shun anything "written for children"; if you want to clear the room of derrideans, mention Beatrix Potter without sneering. With the agreed exception of *Alice in Wonderland*, books for children are to be mentioned only dismissively or jocosely by the adult male critic… In literature as in "real life", women, children, and animals are the obscure matter upon which Civilization erects itself, phallologically (qtd. in Baker 124).

Here Le Guin suggests that the problem of ignorance is firmly rooted in pervasive patriarchal ideologies and critical theory. We may proceed to qualify Le Guin's point, noting that "[t]he aesthetic and the political dimensions of the power to discriminate are not easily separated" (Baker 125). This dimension to reading the depictions and portrayals of animals lends urgency to the projects found at the intersections of comics studies and animal studies, both inspiring uncertainties about the limitations of previous theory and criticism and lending new angles to thinking about the several invisible child-animal relationships in graphic fiction.

## *Jinchalo* and the Voguchi/Jinchalo, funny animal/serious animal nexus

As readers are told in the frontispiece to *Jinchalo*, "Forsythe's wordless comics—partly inspired by Korean comics and folk tales—are at once simple and intricately detailed, and his storytelling is compelling for all ages." The Korean aspects of *Jinchalo* take on deeper connotations when one considers Forsythe's past career as an English teacher in Seoul and that his godfather was a Korean zen monk.[1] While Forsythe is Canadian, he has also lived and worked in a number of international cities: London, Dublin, Seoul, Los Angeles, and most recently Montreal (Forsythe, "About"). He aspired to become an ornithologist at one point, and birds are central to the storyworld in *Jinchalo*. The "all ages" designation of this particular text is important in the context of Western cultural norms (touched on above) which, as Leesa Fawcett points out, increasingly encourage children's separation from animals as they grow up and encourage a "shrink[ing] amount of animalness in their lives" (262).

Already crossing boundaries between children's and adult fiction, we see similar overlaps in Forsythe's idiosyncratic characterization of his two main characters,

1. This biographical information comes from a personal email communication with the author.

a little girl and a magpie. The front matter inscription is the only place readers learn these characters' names: Voguchi is dubbed as the "hungry heroine" and Jinchalo as the "mischievous shapeshifter". Following the prologue sequence, in which an anthropomorphically rendered bird magically protects a large supernatural egg, the main storyline loosely follows Voguchi's journey to a market and her subsequent adventures there after Jinchalo—a magpie—hatches from the egg. Voguchi's initial quest begins after she has gobbled up everything in her house, consequently upsetting a humble, grandfatherly-like character. In the process of procuring new staples—including a similar looking egg—Voguchi bumps into the human-like bird. Her newly purchased egg and the paranormal egg are duly swapped. When Jinchalo soon hatches from this special egg, not only does Jinchalo begin to shapeshift, but so too does Voguchi along with just about everything else in the text: the scenery, her reality, her dreams. A closer look at Voguchi reveals that Forsythe has endowed her character with a bird-like crown of hair. When she transmutes into a magpie figure (possibly Jinchalo) at the end, this magical metamorphosis is as predictable as it is surprising. In what follows, I will examine *Jinchalo*'s intertexts, looking specifically at how cross-cultural and species similarities and differences emerge through "disobedient" visual and verbal interfaces, and connect this to the text's self-proclaimed "wordlessness".

It seems worth pointing out here that the early American funny animals made political and cultural comments that have influenced contemporary representations. According to Leonard Rifas, "Funny animal characters were built on, overlapped with, and gradually replaced an older cartoon tradition of racial and ethnic stereotyping" (235). He cites examples of animated characters such as Warner Brothers' "Bosko", Walter Lantz's "Li'l Eight Ball", and "Thursday", "the cute but savage African child character" appearing in some Mickey Mouse stories. The repeated lesson of such comics seemed to be that children, especially black children, were "simply another species of friendly animals" (235–236). Other kinds of stereotypes overtly but differently linking racism and speciesism appeared on the covers of animal comics during World War II, with patriotic and military themed figures, such as Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo appearing suspended over hungry sharks (*Terry-Toons* #7, April 1943) (237).

From the introductory pages of *Jinchalo*, it is clear that Forsythe is intent on breaching norms and stereotypes as these are popularly known in the wider Anglo-American comics tradition. Forsythe already hints at this by using a non-English title, *Jinchalo*. This is not just the name of the shapeshifting magpie character, for "Jinchalo"—as speakers of Korean will know—is a transliteration from Korean referring to an idiomatic interjection that approximates to "really?" or "seriously?" or "is that for real?" According to the publisher's website, "that question—formulated variously as "What is and what isn't?", "What is real?" and "What is

imagined?"—is at the heart of this book" (D&Q).[2] As Forsythe says in an interview, "When I lived in Korea, I used to say it all the time to pretend I understood the conversation I was in" ("Interview"). The ambivalence of the term as it attaches to the magpie character and title *Jinchalo* permeates the text, infusing it with a distinctive trickster-like irony through which its author is able to create explicit connections between nominally different cultural and species contact zones.

As a both real and imagined "contact zone" itself, "nature" has often been used as a powerful tool in maintaining hierarchical structures built on the essentialization of groups of beings, animals and children included. As Joni Seager wryly points out, "ecofeminist discourses about women's 'special kinship' with animals […] raises specters of essentialism again" (955). Indeed, certain varieties (and there are many) of feminism and ecofeminism may inadvertently reinscribe what their philosophies aim to challenge. In her examination of North American ecofeminism, Greta Gaard writes:

> Numerous foundational articles in ecofeminism throughout the 1980s repeat the ecofeminist perspective that social injustices and environmental injustices are linked and are therefore most productively examined together. We do not exist apart from our environments. As a movement to end all forms of domination, ecofeminism is a logical development of feminism, linking "naturism" to the various forms of human domination (46 n. 8).

The foundations of North American ecofeminism are built on challenging such essential and separated dualisms. As Gaard asserts, the term "ecofeminism" has had a fraught history, and the universal notes that sound around "we" and "us" attest to this. However, guided by the axiom that oppression frequently stems from hierarchical dualisms that devalue those things that are designated as inferior—often feminine, nonhuman, or childlike—dualisms which also underlie the exploitation of nature, today's ecofeminists insist "on a more inclusive feminism, one that exposes the anthropocentrism of other feminisms" (Gaard 42). In challenging the paradigmatic nature–culture dualism, the intricately entwined story-world of *Jinchalo* strategically de-centers its human protagonist as the measure of all things. I will argue that an ethic of care unites the text's main themes, ultimately disengaging "our hungry heroine" from her own allegorical coming-of-age story to suggest liberation from the narrative traditions of anthropomorphism and misogynistic heroism.

## Shapeshifting folktales and language

Consisting of five chapters book-ended by prologue and epilogue sequences, the episodic texture of *Jinchalo* flows through a fantastic and chimerical world that

2. I can corroborate this translation from my knowledge of the Korean language (Hangul). "Hangul" is the transliterated Korean name of the Korean alphabet.

could be imagined as coming from almost anywhere. Details such as architecture—at least when Voguchi is on the ground and not in the sky—nonetheless probably suggest a setting in the countryside of Korea. The monochromatic colouring and free-floating drawings give Forsythe's cartooning a light and whimsical, sometimes a comically twisted, tenor. While typical of other kinds of transcultural graphic fictions in deploying different kinds of hybrid forms, Forsythe's panel-less approach uses a grey-blue tone to highlight the suspended pictorials and variously shade his monochromatic black-and-white images. The unpanelled layouts, sometimes rendered as splash pages (full-page images), or with two to five smaller images per page, create a deceptively simple style, both aesthetically detailed and suggestively multi-layered. Meanwhile, the cover evokes the trope of the beast fable in a compelling, multimodal framework.

Reminiscent of the famous English fairy tale, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, Forsythe presents readers with his two main characters, Voguchi[3] and Jinchalo—characters whose fluctuating fortunes readers will proceed to track throughout the text. *Jinchalo* offers much more than this, however, rewarding readers with an entire bestiary of weird and wonderful characters. Humans, in fact, are significantly outnumbered in what becomes an increasingly multispecies text. It is worth noting on the front cover that both Voguchi and Jinchalo are open-mouthed and appear to be talking, albeit via a form of wordless communication as they reach out to one another. The banner with the aforementioned play on "Jinchalo/Really?" intersects this reach while providing a metaphorical bridge between them, but the human-animal hierarchy is spatially—symbolically—reversed. (It is worth mentioning in passing here that Voguchi's hair resembles both the magpie's wings and contains the trademark white detailing found in Holarctic [black-and-white] magpies: *pica pica* or 까치—"kkachi"—in Korean.)

This play of similarities and differences is also evident on the back cover. Here, Forsythe suggests intricate relationships between language and sound that are developed throughout the text. The title, *Jinchalo*, is rendered at the top of the page in its Korean—or Hangul—version "진차로", appearing in syllabically separated word bubbles that emerge from twinned traditional musical instruments. In reading the text, I am made aware of my own ability to "read" Hangul. To the non-Hangul reader, this image might suggest the idea of sound through the iconic word bubble, yet it will still likely be rendered silent. This idea of silence, as it resonates across trajectories of similarity and difference in the text, surfaces in the double recognition of the visual texture of graphic fiction and the absence of transliteration or translation. This suggests Forsythe's interest in picturing the transcultural scenario of relational difference—for how will readers without

3. To audiences familiar with Korean cartoons, Voguchi might also recall 짱구, or "Janggu", a famous character who resembles and acts something like a Dennis the Menace with a penchant for mischief.

a working knowledge of the Korean language decide to "read" these figures? Of course, it will depend on the individual reader as to whether the characters being represented are perceived as emanating sound or silence. Nevertheless, the text makes readers entertain the factor of relationality—that the reading experience may be very different for different audiences. And it also invites reflection about translation: without such a "soundtrack", what, if anything, will be lost from the narrative as a whole?

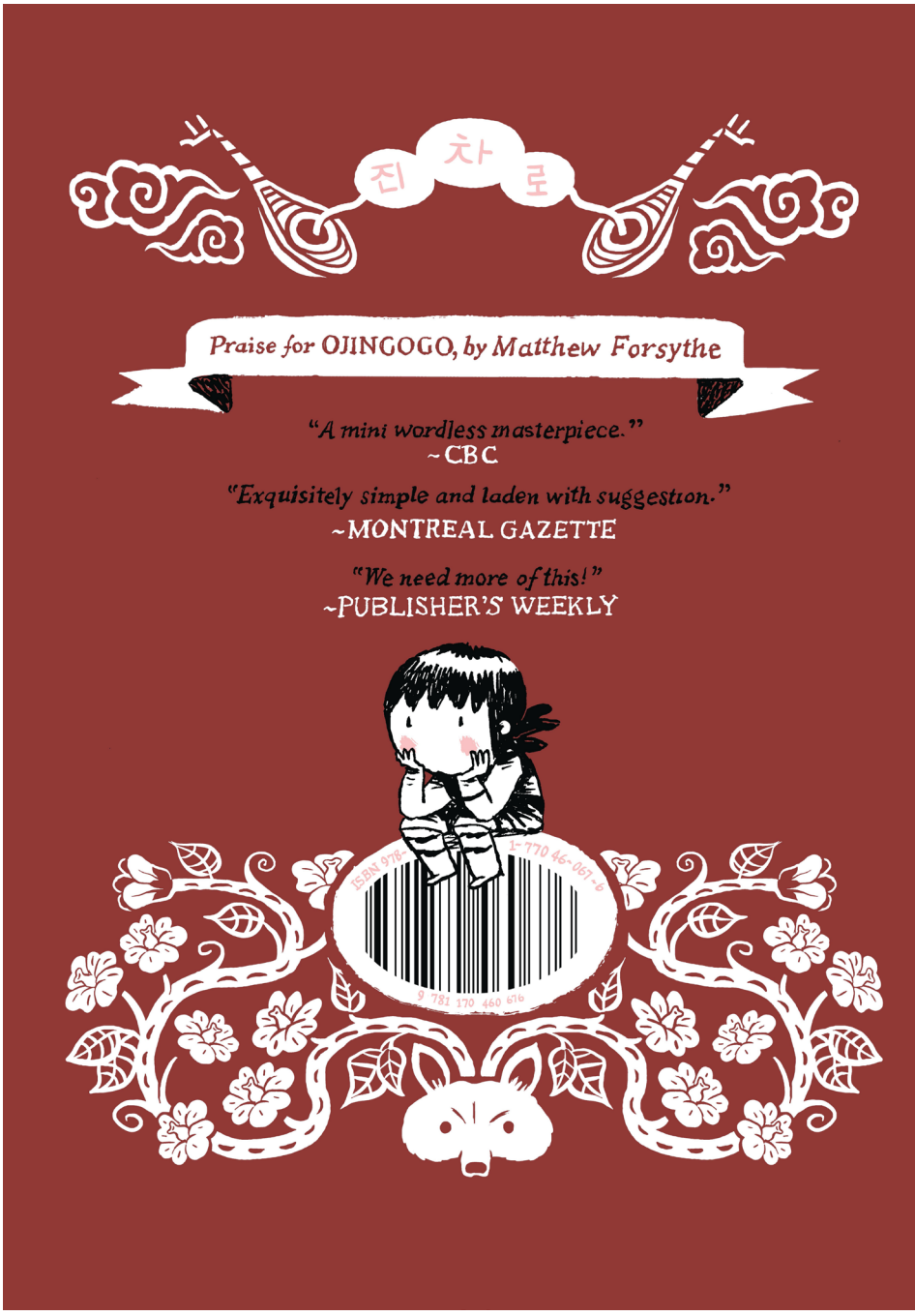
The issue of incommensurable translation also arises in the perhaps understandable misconception of *Jinchalo* as a "wordless" text. Admittedly the front and back covers both offer readers (false) clues about the text, explicitly calling it "wordless", while almost every single review designates *Jinchalo* as a "wordless" comic/graphic novel. But *Jinchalo* is not wordless; nor is it a comic or graphic novel in the traditional Anglo-American sense. Although verbal language might seem minimal at first glance, a closer inspection reveals that words are in fact integral to what remains an image-dominant text.

Dubbed as a story for all ages by its publisher Drawn and Quarterly, *Jinchalo* inhabits unconventional comic territory, for some even bordering on the category of experimental.[4] This industry categorization is earned by the text's apparently unique transcultural blending of styles, languages, and influences. Arguably, however, this blend is offset by the text's commitment to shapeshifting of all kinds, which implicitly challenges the idea that identities and differences are stable, containable, and locatable. According to Elizabeth El Refaie, "the notion of culture as territory-based" is as troublesome as the "idea of a fusion of separate parts underlying the biological metaphor of hybridity" (35–36). For her, "the metaphor of shape-shifting […] avoids many of these problematic connotations" (36). While I disagree that the idea that culture as tied to place is necessarily problematic, I can appreciate the value of shapeshifting as a metaphor for identity, especially insofar as it draws attention to the issue of "embodiment as operating across a limited set of socially constructed categories" (36). Drawing on the work of N. Katherine Hayles and Brian Massumi, among others, El Rafaie points to the existence of embodied identities which, in addition to discursively performed bodies (Butler), ensure that identity itself is "necessarily multiple, contradictory, and constantly changing" (36).

Fig. 1a and 1b. Front Cover and Back Cover. From *Jinchalo* ©Matthew Forsythe. Used by permission. Image courtesy Drawn & Quarterly.

4. Forsythe's first comic, *Ojingogo*, which debuted his main character of *Jinchalo*, won a Doug Wright "Pigskin Peters Award", "which recognizes experimental, unconventional, and avant-garde Canadian comics" (dougwrightawards.com). See www.dougwrightawards.com/seth-beaton-deforge-tamaki-bell-and-rancourt-lead-nominations-for-2016-doug-wright-awards/.


JINCHALO
matthew
forsythe


진 차 로
Praise for OJINGOGO, by Matthew Forsythe
"A mini wordless masterpiece."
~CBC
"Exquisitely simple and laden with suggestion."
~MONTREAL GAZETTE
"We need more of this!"
~PUBLISHER'S WEEKLY

In *Jinchalo*, however, it is not just bodies that regularly change shape; so too does language. Along with often freely associated Hangul (Korean) "letters" used as emanata, Forsythe uses the Hangul alphabet as an onomatopoeic device. The first instance of this occurs in the prologue, when we see "크크" as a repeated sound, something equivalent to the first syllable in the word "colour" in English, which represents the sound of walking. In the second instance, "가"—equivalent to the sound of the first syllable in "garage"—which still belongs to the category of onomatopoeic emanata, but because it has a word balloon around it takes on the function of representing "language". In this and other ways, the text deliberately blurs the dividing line between the visual and the verbal, the material and the discursive, and the sensory and the non-sensory. At the same time, the iconic comics elements of emanata and word bubbles signal at best partial parcels of interpretation. How might this interpretation differ between readers with a different knowledge base? What might be gained from knowing what particular sound or sounds these characters make? Might it be more liberating for non-Korean-speaking readers to imagine and insert a sound of their own choosing? In highlighting the play between sound and silence as well as its various potential reverberations, Forsythe suggests analogies between transcultural communications that are often frustrated, asymmetrical, and incomplete (McLeod).

These questions all imply that the text is transgressing the traditional beast fable by using emanata and onomatopoeia as tools to destabilize the conventional figure of the talking animal. It also raises the ecological possibility of imagining relations with others—with *another* instead of "*an other*". Parsing some of Julia Kristeva's ideas, Patrick D. Murphy writes:

> We need to emphasize the *relational difference* of human beings, a recognition that accepts alterity on a heterarchical plane rather than along a hierarchical axis of power, control, and expropriation. For such a relational difference among beings of the same species and even among beings of varying species, we need to incorporate the concept of *Another*, the other that is proximate and made familiar through recognition and dialogue (75, original emphasis).

This passage, as I read it, articulates a transcultural and multispecies ethic of relational difference; it also suggests an interest in historical revision that corresponds to the fifth phase of Peggy McIntosh's classic model of "Interactive Phases of Curricular Revision: A Feminist Perspective" (1983), which envisages "history revisioned [so as] to include us all" (qtd. in Gaard 661 n. 4).

An early scene in Forsythe's text attends to Voguchi's another / "an other" conundrum in closer detail. The scene below (Fig. 2) occurs just before Voguchi is sent out on her mission to the market.

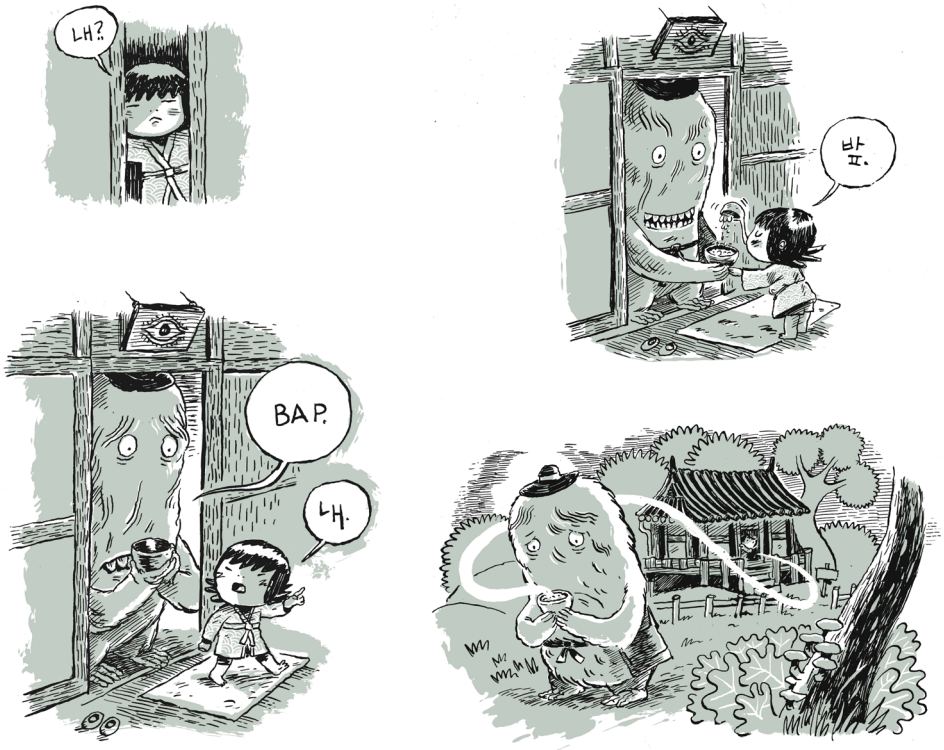



Fig. 2. Voguchi and Monster. From *Jinchalo*, 24-25 © Matthew Forsythe. Used by permission. Image courtesy Drawn & Quarterly.

This scene depicts Voguchi's first encounter with "an other" character—a large furry monster with a tight-fitting hat. In this exchange, Voguchi answers the door using the Korean word for "yes?"—"내?"—for which the English transliteration is "nae". The monster answers with the Korean word for "rice", but the word is transliterated into English—"Bap".[5] Voguchi seems to understand, however, and responds with the affirmative "yes", again written in Korean "내". When she ladles out a large spoonful of rice into his bowl on the next page, she repeats the word "Bap", but this word, too, is written in Korean "밥".

Forsythe works a strategic blend of visual-verbal languages. Here, though, the text refuses a certain level of translation, weaving bewilderingly between sound and language and dislocating words from their fixed positions. Words such as "Bap" are part of the non-sensory diegetic and not visible to Voguchi—they are only present to the reader. At the same time, readers are made aware of the sensory aspects of this communication—they know that words will make a sound even if they are unfamiliar with the specific Korean sounds and meanings of the words.

5. The "all-caps" typeset of the original text has been changed to be consistent with this chapter.

## "Other" puzzles

In the same scene, Forsythe expresses a rich symbolism of the gaze that gives the reader the sense of being a witness—a symbolism exemplified in the seeing-eye omen above the door. As the monster walks away, the steam from the bowl quite literally connects him to Voguchi. However, as the monster's expression turns from happiness to sadness, readers are given to understand that the transaction is also about incommensurable disconnection. On the following page, the monster dumps out the bowl of rice, accompanied by another form of emanata, this time English onomatopoeia "shlp". Voguchi sees this, gets angry, and in the next scene proceeds to consume everything in sight—and much more than just rice.

What this puzzling sequence of events suggests is that the encounter between Voguchi and the monster results in frustration (for Voguchi) and sadness (for the monster), both of which are borne out of failed communication. This reading relies of course on fairly conventional sociocultural constructions of body language; still, there is also a transcultural epistemology at work here that sets up contact zones between similarity and difference, self and other, language and image. Even though it all seems to add up—the monster asks for rice and Voguchi gives it to him—the rendering of different languages suggests a mismatch. Readers of other languages might also pick up on the potential confusion between "nae"—meaning "yes"—and the similar sounding "nej" in Swedish and "nee" in Dutch, for example—meaning "no". Forsythe's language games pit such linguistic and cultural incommensurability against any natural tendency towards cross-species empathy, with mutual frustration and sadness being the two most obvious results. Whatever readers make of this first chapter, the incommensurability of visual and verbal communication across cultural and species borders turns into a main generative theme, which, in turn, also brings up the idea of logocentrism—a "persistent but morbid centering of *Logos* (meaning thought, truth, law, reason, logic, word, and the Word) in Western thought since Plato" (Harmon and Holman 296).

Returning now to the back cover (see Fig. 1 above), we can find a specifically Korean example of a human-animal myth. Forsythe's design of the fox head appears to be imagining a flowering vine, which connects directly to Voguchi. Such symbolism recalls the Korean mythical *gumiho*: the supernatural fox character of Korean folklore. According to Sung-Ae Lee, such stories are an integral "part of Korea's intangible cultural heritage", and tales of the "Gumihos have coalesced into a common, readily recognized fox-woman script. Since the end of the 1980s, the fox-woman script has become a focus for cultural conflict" (135). She continues:

> For over a thousand years, folktales about fox spirits have been recorded in China, Korea and Japan and constitute a tradition in which some imaginary beings are identified as an alien element within society and thence signify both the attraction and the repulsion that can be generated by a society's conception of its others, and especially the dangers threatening social fabric (136).

As Lee points out, there is a specific transcultural element underlying the fox spirit across such East Asian countries as China, Korea, and Japan. Broadly speaking, as Lee describes them, such folktales are also linked to the abject and the grotesque—figurations that can be used alternatively to exclude others or to queer hegemonic structures. Such concepts encapsulate contradictory ideas of cultures and identities that exist in simultaneous conversation and conflict. While it is not made clear in the text whether we can read Voguchi as a "fox-woman" (like *gumihos*, she subsequently shapeshifts), it seems likely that Forsythe is intentionally reinterpreting this myth.

White foxes also appear in the prologue of the text, where they threaten the anthropomorphic bird's egg. The egg, which we see Voguchi sitting on on the back cover (cleverly doubling as the book's ISBN code), also appears throughout the text as a source of comical misunderstanding. Jinchalo hatches from it in Chapter III, and so too—strangely—does the grandfather character in Chapter IV. This egg is significant because, as Yves Bonnefoy (translated by Wendy Doniger) suggests, "the miraculous birth of a legendary hero is nearly always connected, in Korean mythology, with the light of the sun and an egg" (296).

Since the opening of *Jinchalo* foregrounds an unnamed bird character protecting a mysterious egg, readers may well assume they are in anthropomorphic beast fable territory. Yet this mode is disrupted by the two human figures who co-exist in this world: Voguchi and her (apparent) grandfather. Forsythe further alters the orthodox narrative of the anthropomorphic fable by refusing to identify a clear antagonist. What we *do* know is that the protagonist-antagonist nexus has something to do with the recurring egg, and is also tied up with Forsythe's refusal to shapeshift the traditionally female *gumiho* figures into women.

Regardless of readers' awareness of Korean *gumiho* or the hero's birth by egg, throughout all of the text's moving parts unruly rivalries come to the surface, practically all of which revolve around miscommunications and false attempts at control that come back to the egg as 1) a source of consumption and 2) a source of life. For example, when Voguchi's story begins with her eating everything in sight, this grotesque episode can be read as an act of defiance. As Rana Kabanni contends, "in Western art and literature, the Asian female body has historically been depicted" as being in "need of rescue from her male counterpart": "The villainy of Oriental men is aggravated by the fact that they are portrayed as traders in female bodies […] This idea was highly important in distinguishing between the barbarity of the Eastern male and the civilized behavior of the Western male. One tied women up and sold them at slave auctions; the other revered them and placed them on pedestals" (qtd. in Smith 12 n. 2). While Voguchi as shapeshifter manages to break the stereotype of the objectified Asian female body, so too does Forsythe's text succeed in vanquishing any sort of comparable "male counterpart"—one that invariably shows up in the tales mentioned above as well.

With the entrance of an initially upset but then patient grandfatherly-like character—the only other human in the text—again a patrilineal narrative is shifted. However, as he gives Voguchi money to replenish their meagre stocks, which consist of one large egg, rice, and "김치" ("kimchi", a Korean spicy cabbage dish), there is hardship written on his face. Readers can infer from this that Voguchi must learn to be more attentive to the lives of other beings; that her economics of selfishness has an obvious impact on the others around her. Her quest in the text extends well beyond retrieving groceries from the market; rather, it is about gaining worldly knowledge and learning about care and concern for others.

Still, readers learn much more than Voguchi's "lesson", and we know this because there are complete episodes in the book where the two human characters are entirely absent from view. In the middle of Chapter III, for instance, we witness a headless monster capturing and re-attaching his head. This amusing mind-body interlude interrupts Voguchi's flight into the sky, carried by a giant stork that drops her at the base of a Buddha statue. The text also includes appearances by sundry robots and furry monsters, all placed in a vibrantly free-floating realm against the whitespace in the background. In another instance, Chapter IV features a robot talking in binary code (albeit only behind Voguchi's back). Along with the addition of yet another language to the tale, this episode likely reflects Forsythe's experience as a database programmer in Dublin. From still another perspective, we can read this in terms of the excavation of a common Asian stereotype. As Jared Gardner asserts, contemporary images of "Asian American students as mechanized alien robots" derived from early nineteenth-century popular imagery in the US (135). In this context, Forsythe's text is interested in picturing spaces of "graphic alterity" (Gardner's term) that work towards debunking ready-made cultural identities built on subject-object dichotomies.

Scenes such as this one (Fig. 3), which represents Forsythe's only page-bleed (edge-to-edge execution) in the text, say much about Voguchi's multispecies education, recalling Vandana Shiva's words that "even the tiniest life form [must be] recognized as having intrinsic worth, integrity, and autonomy" (qtd. in Seager 953). As David Herman has pointed out, "Animal comics have functioned, in effect, as a narrative technology for modelling [mutual ecologies and coproduced] niches, and for (re)imagining the dynamics of self-other relationships that cross the species boundary" (12). What we see in this particular case is an affective, non-verbal imaginary that elicits a sense of wonder about nonhuman agency. The minute world of pollinators and pollination is far from simple or insignificant; on the contrary, it implies that Voguchi's selfishness at the beginning of the text is gradually becoming subordinated to *another* world of understanding. While readers are left—here as elsewhere—to fill in the details, there is another clear instance at work of cross-species—cross-pollinating—empathy which questions assumptions of "the animal" as an (inferior) "other" as well as the notion of human superiority in the text.

Fig. 3. Voguchi and Multispecies. From *Jinchalo*, 97 © Matthew Forsythe. Used by permission. Image courtesy Drawn & Quarterly.

## Material and symbolic magpies

In human terms, magpies are among the world's most intelligent animals. They are also reputedly among the most aesthetically sophisticated species (Poliquin). Known as a scavenger, a trickster, a restless collector, a peerless mimic, the magpie, says Rachel Poliquin, "has its own aesthetic tastes that defy humans' sense of value and worth". Symbolically, the magpie exists in various incarnations across different world cultures. Straddling "Eastern" and "Western" cultures, it might be seen as the ultimate shapeshifter. In contrast with the Western view of the magpie as a thief or a creature of ill omen, for example, in Korea the magpie is often associated with good luck.

In 2008, "magpies were added to great apes, dolphins and elephants on a list of species that have passed the 'mirror self-recognition' (MSR) test. MSR involves the capacity to recognize one's reflection in a mirror as being oneself and not another individual" (Balcombe 282). Such mirror images of East-West and self-other are central to Forsythe's text: one that raises uneasy questions in relation to anthropocentric core narratives. Of course, if Forsythe is conflating ideas of cross-cultural and cross-species fertilization, this is problematic in the sense that he is writing from a dominant position (generally) in terms of Western culture as well as from an inevitably human (male) point of view. Yet, insofar as the text instructs readers to read Voguchi's selfishness as the impetus behind her quest, it also undermines her search for knowledge as this pertains to essentialist forms of truth or reality. Her attempts at control are continually thwarted, and *Jinchalo*'s main theme of learning empathy through cross-species concern and interaction is mirrored in the act of reading a text that continually frustrates the reader's search for stable meanings.

Herself an embodiment of the queering of the human-animal boundary, Voguchi simultaneously draws attention to the fluidity of identity politics along ethnic, racial, and even species lines. It remains moot, however, as to how we read her "Korean-ness".[6] Arguably, Forsythe's representation of Voguchi can be read as another transcultural dimension of the text that disrupts any easy reading of identity politics. This works on a nonhuman level as well: her hair, for example, perceptibly gives her a cross-species association with Jinchalo's wings.

Whereas traditional fables are generally known to impart a human lesson, Forsythe's *Jinchalo* gestures both to deconstruct this notion and to widen its realm of concern. Some of the orthodox virtues of fables, such as gaining (human/adult) knowledge and experience over (nonhuman/childish) innocence, come under question and the slipperiness of paradigms in the overlapping realms of

6. As Mark Berninger points out, "The depiction of Asian characters in non-Asian comics indeed highlights the problematic relationship of comics and graphic racist stereotyping" (253 n. 23). I have to wonder here however—not least with the example of *Jinchalo*—how we might go about definitively classifying "Asian" and "non-Asian". See also Gardner .

language, culture, and species are repeatedly exposed. These themes culminate in the closing—silent—scene when Voguchi transforms into a magpie, ostensibly another Jinchalo, and flies away on the text's final page. Reviewer Nicholas Köhler describes this moment as a "terrifying metamorphosis". But I would want to ask what makes it so terrifying to imagine zoomorphism? What is it like to be a magpie? The text leaves readers to ponder whether Voguchi and Jinchalo might be the same shapeshifting character after all. In keeping with Forsythe's language games (both Korean and English), we may choose to read this as a general concept-metaphor for the shapeshifting qualities of transcultural experience. Or is it rather that both experience and imagination teach us something about the constructed nature of absolute boundaries: those boundaries that are variously naturalized and erected between individuals, generations, cultures, genders, societies, and species alike? Does the text show us the violence of the inherently unknowable?

Multispecies thinking also opens out onto ethological details about magpies. According to the ornithologists Helmut Prior, Ariane Schwarz, and Onur Güntürkün:

> Comparative studies suggest that at least some bird species have evolved mental skills similar to those found in humans and apes. This is indicated by feats such as tool use, episodic-like memory, and the ability to use one's own experience in predicting the behavior of conspecifics. It is, however, not yet clear whether these skills are accompanied by an understanding of the self (1642).

What is more, "mammals and birds inherited the same brain components from their last common ancestor nearly 300 million years ago" (Prior *et al.* 1642). While it would no doubt be asking too much to glean all of this from Forsythe's text, his proposal for readers to critically examine human-centric origin stories steers them away from the easy moralism of the beast fable, while *Jinchalo*'s multiple metamorphoses make nonsense of any sort of ontological purity in the text. Still, another possibility may be that *Jinchalo* represents Forsythe's critical commentary on "the animal that therefore I am" (Derrida). Upsetting the Cartesian idea of the individual human being as the starting point for language, observation, and thinking, Derrida claims that thinking starts from the gaze of his cat: "something that philosophy perhaps forgets, perhaps being this calculated forgetting itself—it can look at me" (380). And we are invited, too, to look into ourselves: as Michael A. Chaney has pointedly asked, "What does the comic animal think and what, in thinking it, are we permitted to see in ourselves?" (145). Imaginative possibilities of these kinds are at the heart of multispecies thinking, which consciously seeks to decenter anthropocentric frames and habits of thought.

## Conclusion

Not only does *Jinchalo* abjure cohesive readings of the "human culture" Oerlemans mentions in the quote that began this chapter, it also adheres to transcultural traditions of ecofeminism that suggest the importance of making connections by inspiring a readerly sense of curiosity and a continually broadening ethics of care. Through its different forms of shapeshifting, Forsythe crafts a text that cleverly explores the idea of attempting to imagine *another*. In its attention to language and its revisions of the conventional beast fable, the text leaves its reader unable to say for sure what category or culture or even species it belongs to. Along the way, Forsythe consistently puts cultural, species and generational boundaries to the test, asking the reader to consider provocative processes of shapeshifting that are clearly beyond Voguchi's control. According to Terry Hong, "*Jinchalo* is a shape-shifting treat for the imagination. Every time you read it, you [are] bound to discover something new, something different. And you [will] soon enough be asking yourself, '*Jinchalo*?'".

In this and other respects, *Jinchalo* works to queer the standard comics figure of the talking animal, while its calculated compilations of unstable fable elements do away with the succinctness and brevity traditionally expected of the fable genre. In fact, while *Jinchalo* seems to be primarily or even exclusively about Voguchi as she navigates a continually transforming storyworld, the narrative eventually takes her far beyond the market errand on which she had originally set out. The significance of the preface and the mystical bird of the prologue returns, and the plot appears itself to shapeshift, especially at the end when Voguchi transforms into a magpie, leaving readers to wonder whether Jinchalo rather than Voguchi might be the main character after all. Indeed, if readers have learned anything at all from the Voguchi-Jinchalo child-animal nexus in the text, it may well be that the "adult" language of ontology, both in the world at large and the world of comics, is not containable by words—*or by humans*—alone.

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# Postscript


Fig. 1. Kodak ad (ca. 1952).

# *Boule & Bill*: Unwrapped

Philippe Capart*

> Boule & Bill can be compared to photo albums.
> The tragic moments, we prefer to leave them out.[1]
>
> Jean Roba

*For more than 50 years, Boule and Bill have epitomized the boy-dog tandem in Francophone comics. Jean Roba authored a series of family albums that transcended the private sphere to enter the collective one.*

For Christmas 1959, a friendly duo appeared in the children's weekly *Spirou* : Boule and Bill.[2] Boule, a red-haired boy attached to Bill, a red English cocker spaniel, complemented by parents straight out of a soap ad dwelling in the green suburbia of Brussels. This harmonious dog and child duo immediately became a favorite with the readers and continues—more than half a century later—to resonate with the very young. At their source is Jean Roba.

The Walt Disney productions electrified Roba, a child of the 1930s. First in small doses through comic strips and short films and then by the immersive feature-length film, *Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs*. In this movie, the dwarfs, like the animals, notwithstanding their age, are child-like; neotenic creatures, bursting with life, populate the Disney screens. Jean longed to join the prestigious Disney Studios as an animator. At the end of the war, he was again massively confronted with all things North American, from Jeeps to Bambi. He left school at 15 in 1945.

The Roba's were not very rich; the 1929 market crash had decimated their savings. Jean's older brothers were resourceful and landed jobs at a very young age.

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* The author would like to thank Luce Roba and Alexandre Rosmarin.

1. Philippe Cauvin, *Roba* (entretiens), Paris: Toth, 2005: "*Boule et Bill peut se comparer à un album de photos. Les événements tragiques, on préfère les oublier*".

2. Titled *Billy & Buddy* for the English market by Cinebook Ltd.

Like them, Jean had to quickly learn to be a breadwinner. Through an apprenticeship and a local evening art school, Jean developed numerous graphic skills from religious stained-glass design, retouching photographs to nude chalk drawing. His future wife, Louise Dock immediately saw his potential. A glorious branch of her family had launched an industrial porcelain business in Belgium and she collected all things round, cute and fragile. The couple married in 1951 and had their first and only child, Philippe. Jean started to bring money home as a graphic designer at an advertisement studio, CRÉAS.

Advertisement: the poetry of optimism.[3]

Guy Dessicy


Fig. 2. Advertisement by Roba (uncredited) at the CRÉAS studio (not dated).

3. Quote from Guy Dessicy, head of Publi-Art, the advertisement department attached to the famous comics publishing house Le Lombard.

Belgium, unlike France, England or Germany, rose very quickly from the ruins of the war, its economy boosted by American imports. New products needed the creation of new types of consumers. Jean Roba helped to introduce these novelties into his compatriots' homes. Posters, packaging, flyers and snappy slogans formed the core business of his studio and he was soon appointed head of department. Advertising was treated more and more as an art. A good salary was flowing in, but Roba was not completely satisfied. Since the Liberation, he avidly followed the development of the comic strip creations of André Franquin, Morris and Peyo. Creators that were, like him, under the Disney spell.[4] He asked to try out and moonlighted as a comics author and artist. The real break came in 1958 when the star of *Spirou* magazine, Franquin, asked Roba to join his small studio. With the blessing of his wife, he took leave of advertisements and embraced comics.

> Comic strips: something for laughs.
>
> André Franquin[5]

After a few runs with short-lived characters, Roba decided to take his immediate entourage as models : his wife, his son who was now eight and the newly adopted cocker spaniel. He couldn't fail to notice the strong, almost telepathic, complicity between the furry four-legged creature and his son. Fusional tandems had already left their marks in the world of comics: Buster Brown & Tige, Orphan Annie & Sandy, Tintin & Snowy, Charlie Brown & Snoopy, Rusty & Rin-Tin-Tin. Adding to these regular species, comics introduced imaginary creatures, such as E.C. Segar's Eugene the Jeep or Franquin's Marsupilami. The dog imagined by Roba, with his long, large ears, seems to have inherited a touch of that fantasy. Not feeling at ease with scripting the whole story, Roba asked Dupuis's art director, Maurice Rosy, to chip in. After the first adventurous run, "*Boule contre les mini-requins*" [*Boule Versus the Mini-Sharks*], Roba began his marathon of producing a one-page gag of *Boule & Bill* every week. In 1962, an album uniting the first gags came out and gave the series a continuous and reassuring presence in homes.

4. This is not unlike the influence of Disney on American cartoonists such as Henk Ketcham, Walt Kelly and Brad Anderson.

5. "La bande dessinée : un truc pour rigoler", André Franquin in a 1966 interview with Thierry Martens for Martens' MA thesis in social and political science: *Réalisme et schématisme dans les bandes dessinées hebdomadaires belges contemporaines (1945-1965)* [Realism and Schematism in Contemporary Belgian Comics Weeklies].

My son Philippe, who inspired Boule, had the nickname Bouboule[6] at school, because he was a little round. As far as Bill is concerned, it was the name of my dog.

Jean Roba[7]

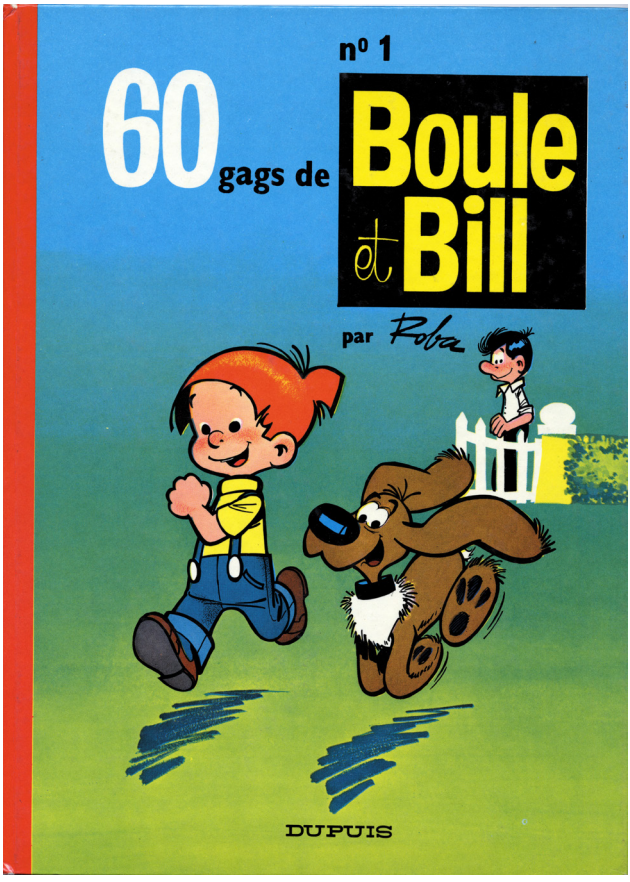


Fig. 3. Cover of the first *Boule et Bill* album by Jean Roba (Dupuis 1962). Boule et Bill 1 – *Tel Boule, tel Bill*. © Dupuis, 1962, 1979, 1985, by Jean Roba. © Studio Boule & Bill 2020. www.bouleetbill.com. All rights reserved.

In light of Roba's words, it would be easy to consider *Boule & Bill* as his own family album and Jean Roba a stereotypical middle-class man with an ordinary, eventless life. An attentive reading of interviews and the testimony of close ones, including his widow, Luce Roba, provide a different story. When Jean Roba started his career, he was poor and living with his wife, her mother and her grandmother.

6. *Boule* is French for ball.

7. Cf. Olivier Delcroix, "Boule et Bill, les 'Peanuts' à la française", *Le Figaro* 27 June 2008.

All three were only children and the financial pressure on him was intense. At the end of the Fifties, his young wife, Louise, got multiple scleroses and was trapped in a wheelchair. And very soon, Philippe outgrew the sweet Boule character and gave his parents adolescent and adult-sized troubles. As for Bill, a dog's life is all too short and he passed away. Very few of the original ingredients that assisted in the birth of *Boule & Bill* remained in Roba's life by the mid-Sixties.

For the young reader who lacks a perfect family—that is everyone—*Boule & Bill* is a refuge. A place to nest from the cutting edges of reality with light, soft and round figures. A place to go back to, ever-present on paper. It is the crystallization of a special period of youth when conversing with animals is easy and the reverse is also true. A place where money is not a survival concern and school a place to meet friends; where affection is abundant and cold anger quick to dissolve. There is no cynicism in Roba's approach, because the young reader's craving mirrored the creator's own desires. The readers and the author met on this common ground of escape into a blissful family life. It is a form of sincere escapism not unlike the kind offered by James Matthew Barrie's and Disney's worlds.

> For me, a dog is just like another child.
>
> Jean Roba[8]

For Boule, the censorship from France and the self-censorship of his Belgian catholic upbringing, restricted his instincts. This is not the case for Bill, the cocker spaniel, who enjoys much more freedom than his creator and seems to have been the creative gateway through which Roba, the adult, integrated the world of children. The more the years went on, the more Bill seemed to communicate Roba's direct feelings and moods. A dog can be perceived as an adult trapped in children's features and heavily dependent on his masters. Under constant scrutiny at home, Roba, with Bill's help, could go for a stroll and make his way through a crack in the wooden fences, behind the bright poster ads. Away from grown-up hassles and pettiness, the small heroes and their creator have their own oxygenated playground, vacant lots that serve as gigantic sandboxes. Jean Roba agreed with André Franquin's remark about children's magazine cartoonists being "failed adults".

8. "*Pour moi, un chien, c'est comme un enfant en plus.*" Jean Roba interviewed by Olivia Billington in *Comme chien et chat 50* (February 2002).

> A comic strip that thinks, is not a comic strip anymore.
>
> Jean Roba[9]

Roba felt a bit estranged by the growing academic interest in comics and the rise of adult themed comix. Roba's family strip had no connections with sex, violence and politics. Like a cubmaster or an elementary school teacher, Roba felt a natural responsibility to keep a neutral sphere around young readers. The magazine *Spirou* was an educational organ filled with wholesome entertainment and a touch of anarchic poetry. But at the end of the Sixties, a new editor-in-chief took hold of *Spirou*, Thierry Martens. Martens wanted to introduce gun-blazing detective stories and sexy heroines, preferring quantity over quality. Roba stuck firmly to his course and *Boule & Bill* rubbed shoulders with *Archie Cash* (inspired by the Charles Bronson films) and prevailed over the new arrivals. The preservation of youth from coarse reality was indiscriminately stigmatized as a very conservative view. An editorial for an Amnesty International publication even created a new verb from Roba's creation: "*Boulébilliser*". Such attacks on him and his creation led Roba, like many of his successful colleagues such as Uderzo or Peyo, to move away from the self-declared intellectuals.

> Happy nations have no interesting stories to tell in comic strips. They Luckyluke, Boulebille, Ricochet year after year for the joy of the fanatics of small Mickeys that don't appreciate that people mix the rags of politics with the napkins of lenified unrealities. A tacit consensus that permits Tintin, Asterix, Modeste et Pompon to stay themselves in a world that forgets to evolve.
>
> Georges Renoy[10]

9. Interviewed by F.X. Burdeyron in *L'Âge d'or du Journal Spirou* (Paris: Bédésup 1988).

10. From the editorial of "Pétitions : à la recherche d'Oesterheld et de beaucoup d'autres", Amnesty International, 1986: "*Les peuples heureux n'ont pas d'histoires intestines à raconter en bande dessinée. Ils luckylukent, boulébilent, ricochètent à longueur d'année à la grande joie des fanas de petits miqués qui n'apprécient guère que l'on mélangea les torchons de la politique avec les serviettes de la lénifiante irréalité. Consensus tacite qui permet à Tintin, Astérix, Modeste et Pompon de rester semblables à eux-mêmes dans un monde qui oublie d'évoluer*".

> Boule & Bill… what more charming image than that of a boy and a dog to give a product a nice touch? […] They can be associated to all that is pleasant. Is there anything better to present candies than the greedy face of Boule & Bill?
>
> Dupuis Advertisement[11]

*Boule & Bill*, this capsule of over-vitamined sunshine is a godsend for sales. Slow to cash in on by-products, Dupuis tried latex and vinyl toys of porcelain appeal in the 1960s, then a series of action-packed animated cartoons in the 1970s. A first step aimed at opening the doors to all types of merchandising following the path of Disney, Schulz or Roba's colleague Peyo. Big success came in the early 1980s when a clothing line was launched by Alexandre Rosmarin. Beyond numerous school supplies decorated with *Boule & Bill*, kids began to wear branded sweatshirts, T-shirts and pants. Soon children were transformed into small sandwichmen. From the *Boule & Bill* license, Rosmarin switched to Disney's *101 Dalmatiens*, confirming the parallels between Roba and Disney. Roba, once in the advertising business, was thrust back into it. He broke away from weekly duties of the magazine *Spirou* by signing with Dargaud Publishing. Losing more and more ground as *Boule & Bill* licensed more and more products, his health slowly altering, he accepted to be fully replaced by an assistant, Laurent Verron. Roba's branded characters started to lack spontaneity and became rigid stamps. Second and third-hand visions of his creations are what remain on the shelves today. That's why it's useful to turn to originals once in a while!

> I don't want to bury Boule and Bill with me!
> I would like Boule and Bill to continue living after me.
>
> Jean Roba[12]

11. Propaganda, probably written by Yvan Delporte, for Dupuis in 1976 : "…*Quelle image plus charmante que celle d'un garçon et d'un chien pour donner d'un produit une idée sympa ?* […] *ils se prêtent à tout ce qui est agréable. Quoi de mieux pour présenter des friandises que la mine gourmande de Boule et Bill ?*"

12. Cited from memory by Luce Roba interviewed in June 2018 for this text.

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**Philippe Capart** was born in Brussels in 1973 to a ceramist mother and a physicist father. Enjoys seeing and making drawings. Went from strict Jesuit education in Europe to a more relaxed private school in North America. Trained in comics at Woluwé-St-Pierre's evening academy and in animation at ENSAV-La Cambre (Brussels). Has an obsessive interest in the specificities of fixed and moving images that led to the documentary, *Belvision : La mine d'or au bout du couloir* (2002) and the book, *Morris, Franquin, Peyo et le dessin animé* (2005, with Erwin Dejasse). Oscillates between self-expression, collective work and exploring his predecessors' creations. Launched, in 2011, a vintage newsstand in the Bortier Arcade connected to a magazine, *La Crypte Tonique*, both axed on narrative images. Likes juxtaposing the old with the new, the dead with the living.

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**Nicole Eschen Solis** is a lecturer in English and queer studies at California State University, Northridge. She studies comics, film and queer performance in order to examine the role of memory and nostalgia in shaping gender and identity in contemporary culture.

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