

## Anthropomorphism in Patricia Highsmith's Fiction

Afra Alshiban

Al Imam University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

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### Abstract

For decades, scientists objected strongly to ascribing human characteristics to animals (anthropomorphism), proclaiming that feelings and emotions belonged solely to human beings. However, prolific American writer Patricia Highsmith was adamant that sentient beings possessed cognitive capabilities and emotional capacities, a conviction held by Darwin two centuries ago. Highsmith's love for animals led her to adopt them as pets, include them in her plots, dedicate novels to them, and even to write exclusively about them. *The Animal-Lovers' Book of Beastly Murder*, is a case in point. In this collection of short stories, Highsmith's anthropomorphic imagination emerges in full swing when sentient beings are given names, characters, personalities, emotions, feelings, and biographies. Viewed primarily as a writer of crime fiction, Highsmith's liberationist stance was left unexplored until this study decided to call attention to it from the position of animal-standpoint criticism.

**Key Words:** Anthropomorphism, animals, humans, Patricia Highsmith, liberationists, animal stand-point criticism, multidisciplinary.

### Introduction:

In an essay entitled "The Zoological Connection: Animal-Related Human Behavior," sociologist Clifton D. Bryant argues that any given society imbeds in its spoken language cultural concerns. These can be words, phrases, terms, expressions, or idioms that reflect a society's preoccupations. In English-speaking societies, the fixation falls on animals. Bryant notes that the English language is laden with "zoological references, which suggest a greater influence of, and involvement and preoccupation with, animals than we are prone to recognize or admit" (399). He demonstrates thus:

In appearance, we have "buck teeth," a "pony tail,"... have "crow's feet under our eyes," or look "ratty."... In physical ability, condition or characteristics, individuals may be... "an old goat," "hungry as a bear," "strong as an ox," "smell like a goat," as "busy as a beaver," "eat like a horse," "blind as a bat," or "sick as a dog." In temperament, we may be "gentle as a lamb," or "mean as a snake," "pig-headed," "bull-headed," "stubborn as a mule," "lion-hearted," "quiet as a mouse," or a real "son-of-a-bitch." In terms of demeanor, behavioral proclivity, and/or attitudinal persuasion, one may be a "night owl," "book-worm," "silly-goose," "sex-kitten," "cool cat," "stud,"... "catty," "sly as a fox," "slippery as an eel," or "quick like a bunny." We may be "hot to trot," make an "ass of ourselves," "horse around," "cat around," "cry wolf"... be "henpecked," or "let the cat out of the bag." We live in a "dog eat

dog" world, get our information "straight from the horse's mouth"...  
[and] if we are really confronted with a problem, we may well be able to  
"weasel out of it." (401-02)

Bryant's insight denotes the impact animals have on culture and society, a point often overlooked by many in his field. Humanists, on the other hand, have done a far better job at addressing the "zoological component in human interaction and attendant social systems" (Bryant 399). Animal images abound in literature and art, whereas in sociology, hardly any references can be detected. Bryant concludes by calling for further enquiry into the subject (399).

Sociologists have indeed disregarded animals' influence on society, but then again, so has the rest of the world (Flynn xiii). Even though creatures dominate the world we live in, we hardly take note of them. Strays litter our streets, companions share our homes, and rodents repel us. Animals further appear on our television screens. They are the star actors in wildlife documentaries, films, and Disney cartoons. We also consume animal meat, drink animal milk, and eat animal produce. We don clothing made of leather and/or fur and wear shoes made of snake or crocodile skin. We sleep on pillows stuffed with bird feathers, and use cosmetics, household products, and medicines that have been tested on animals. In biology class, we dissect frogs, rats, and rabbits to advance learning. Moreover, we use animals for entertainment, visiting zoos, aquariums, circuses, and rodeos. We even root for animals at horse, camel, or dog races.

This exploitation of animals, according to art critic and novelist John Berger, is a product of the modern age, since creatures were once highly regarded. In *Why Look at Animals?* Berger explains that nonhuman beings "first entered the imagination as messengers and promises. For example, the domestication of cattle did not begin as a simple prospect of milk and meat. Cattle had magical functions, sometimes oracular, sometimes sacrificial" (13). However, much has changed since then, and the few animals "still visible to us can be only 'human puppets' as family pets or Disney characters, or else the objects of spectacle, most often wildlife books and films, where animals are always the observed." The fact that animals can also observe us "has lost all significance" (Berger 23).

For a long time, ethologists insisted that emotions belonged to humans, not animals, and what appeared to be personality in the animal kingdom was nothing more than response to stimulus (Goodall xii). However, in the 1960s, biologists studied all the species of animals and concluded that humans "are not the only creatures with minds capable of solving problems, capable of love and hate, joy and sorrow, fear and despair" (Goodall xiii). Prolific writer Patricia Highsmith (1921-1995) knew this all too well when she became caretaker to several cats and hundreds of snails. Her love for animals led the author to include them in numerous works, dedicate novels to them, and even to write exclusively about them. *The Animal-Lovers' Book of Beastly Murder* (1975) is a case in point. In this collection of short stories, circus elephants, cats, dogs, rats, rodeo goats, and even monkeys are subjected to so much psychological, emotional, and physical pain that they retaliate through murder. Highsmith's nonhuman beings have names, characters, personalities, emotions, feelings, and biographies. By infusing her fictitious creatures with human traits (anthropomorphism), Highsmith expresses her advocacy for animal rights, a point overlooked by critics.

Viewed primarily as a writer of crime fiction, Highsmith's liberationist stance was left unexplored until this study decided to call attention to it from the perspective of animal-standpoint criticism. Critic Josephine Donovan states of this new approach:

[It] begins from the premise that animals are seats of consciousness-subjects, not objects; that they are individuals with stories/biographies of their own, not undifferentiated masses; that they dislike pain, enjoy pleasure; that they want to live and thrive; that in short they have identifiable desires and needs, many of which we human animals share with them. (204)

Although Highsmith's animals do not speak in most of her fiction, their thought processes are revealed nonetheless through a third-person narrator who translates their worlds into words comprehensible to the reader. The narratives expose the private interior of various animals, the environments that surround them, the abuses most endure, and the revenge they take on those who have wronged them. The slave/master situation is highlighted in each instance where a creature is marginalised, neglected, suppressed, and silenced. Even though Highsmith at times projects upon the animals things that might not be there, still, her meaning is clear—animals, like humans, are entitled to rights.

Despite the recent interest in animals, the majority of studies have been anthropocentric, focused solely on animals' influence on humans. By contrast, Highsmith's stories are anthropomorphic, centred on the creatures themselves. For example, in "Chorus Girl's Absolutely Final Performance" (the first story in *The Animal-Lover's Book of Beastly Murder*), the author reveals that an elephant can snap after years of mistreatment, a reaction confirmed by comparative psychologists who have studied the behaviour of traumatised animals. What makes Highsmith's stories interesting, then, is her anthropomorphic approach to writing stories, especially since she wrote them at a time when practices such as hunting, livestock farming, scientific experimentation, and wearing fur were very much the norm. Highsmith, however, challenges such practices through her fiction.

Apart from her interest in sentient beings, Highsmith explored other themes as well, most notably the socio-political situation of America in the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the status of women, existentialism, criminality, fantasy, domesticity, madness, homosexuality, misogyny, and lesbianism. In her lifetime, she produced over twenty-two novels including *Strangers on a Train* (1950), *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955), *The Cry of the Owl* (1962), *The Two Faces of January* (1964), *Ripley Under Ground* (1970), and *The Price of Salt* (1990), all of which have been adapted for film. She further published seven collections of short stories, and "left 250 unpublished manuscripts of varying lengths, as well as 38 writer's notebooks" (Schenkar Introduction xii). She also drew, sketched, and sculpted.

Despite Highsmith's talent as a storyteller, it was her highly publicised novels rather than her short stories that received the most critical attention. Joyce Carol Oates attributes this disregard on the author's failure to make her short stories appealing to readers. In *Uncensored: Views & (Re)view*, Oates maintains that "Highsmith seems to have had little patience, had perhaps little natural skill, for the short story" (46). Fiona Peters, however, challenges this opinion, reasoning that Highsmith's short stories "can be viewed

as a series of reflections originating from and developing her particular viewpoint on the human condition" (37). Although this study too believes that the short stories deserve recognition, still it argues that it is not so much the human condition that concerned the author as much as the animal condition. *The Animal-Lover's Book of Beastly Murder* demonstrates this point. The stories show that in Highsmith's world animals are not mere symbols that function as representations of something else; they "have rich emotional lives and... are capable of suffering—mentally as well as physically" (Goodall xiii).

It was said that throughout her life, Highsmith had a "skewed view on humanity," and as a result preferred the company of animals (Schenkar *The Talented Miss Highsmith* 426). When in 1967, Patricia Schartle, Highsmith's then-agent, informed the author that her novels were not selling in the United States because they lacked a likeable character, the author vehemently responded, "Perhaps it is because I don't like anyone. My last books may be about animals" (qtd. in Schenkar 24). True to her word, in 1975 she published *Animal-Lover's*.

In truth, Highsmith's devotion to sentient beings began decades before *Animal-Lover's* was even considered. In *Deep Water* (1957), for example, the author provides a lengthy passage about how snails love in contrast to how humans love. Snails are loyal to each other. This is in stark contrast to the Van Allens, Victor and Melinda, a married couple who neither care for nor respect one another. When Melinda's affairs continue, Victor retaliates by murdering his rivals, and when Melinda confronts him he kills her too. Victor, although a cold-blooded killer, loves snails. He raises hundreds of gastropods in aquariums in his garage:

The snails loved the rain. He bent over one aquarium, watching the snails he called Edgar and Hortense as they slowly approached each other, lifted their heads, kissed, and glided on. They would probably mate this afternoon, in the light rain that filtered through the screen. They mated about once every week, and they were genuinely in love, Vic thought, because Edgar had eyes for no other snail but Hortense and Hortense never responded to the attempt of another snail to kiss her. ... That was true love, Vic thought, even if they were only gastropoda.  
(*Deep Water* 111)

Victor is interested in snails because he perceives them as loyal, unlike his faithless wife Melinda. His sentiments echo Highsmith's to a great extent, as she was known to collect them by the hundreds. Schenkar quotes the author as saying of the molluscs: "Watching the 'mating process' of two living organisms that 'can go on for fourteen hours' was 'relaxing' because their copulation had 'an aesthetic quality, nothing more bestial in it than necking, really'" (qtd. in Schenkar *The Talented Miss Highsmith* 251).

Highsmith's fascination with snails led her to identify with the little creatures, whose bonds with one another surpassed human bonds. She was quoted as saying: "The mother snail gives [the baby snails] no assistance and never appears to even see them.... [But] I have never found an adult snail damaging a baby snail by crawling over it" (qtd. in Schenkar *The Talented Miss Highsmith* 251). Schenkar believes the dig was aimed at her own mother, who had deprived her daughter of any real affection. Gastropods

interested Highsmith to a point where she wrote several stories about them. Her first story had been "The Snail-Watcher," followed by "The Quest for Blank Claveringi" (published in 1970, and later renamed "The Snails"). She also titled her collection of short stories *The Snail-Watcher and Other Short Stories* (1970).

In addition to gastropods, Highsmith further showed a preoccupation with birds. In "Two Disagreeable Pigeons" (1981), for example, the author introduces two English pigeons that bicker and argue constantly. The author anthropomorphises the birds to the extent that they have names, Maud and Claud, and a long history. They also grumble, argue, experience bad moods, get bored, show indifference, have contempt for humans, and consume unhealthy diets. Although the story appears simple on the surface, its message still supports animal rights activists' claim that animals should not be removed from their natural habitat. Highsmith's pigeons live in Trafalgar Square and would rather peck at peanuts and popcorn than worms. Also, they forget how to fly "because it was hardly necessary any longer" (Highsmith *Selected Novels and Short Stories* 585).

Birds are also the topic of "The Day of Reckoning" (*Animal-Lover's*), a story that attacks battery chicken farming. In the tale, chickens are de-beaked and trapped in rows in their pen, and since they are unable to move or turn without injury, "their white breasts dripped blood where the horizontal bar supported their weight" (*Animal-Lover's* 134). One chicken dies because the coop was pressing on its breast so tightly. While Ernie, the owner of the farm, is pleased with his new business, his wife Helen (believed to be the mouthpiece of the author), opposes the practice. Helen maintains that chickens should run free. When she visits a neighbouring farm, she notes the difference: "Here were Rhode Island Reds, big white Leghorns, roosters strutting and tossing their combs, half-grown speckled chickens, and lots of little chicks about six inches high." She is elated at the sight, proclaiming that the chickens are like the ones she "knew when [she] was a kid," adding, "They can see the sun! They can fly!" The chickens can also "scratch for worms—and eat watermelon!" (*Animal-Lover's* 139). Helen's conviction that chickens should run free leads her to open all the pens in her husband's barn and release the birds. The story ends with the hens trying to scratch in the grass, and Helen joyfully observing, "They don't know what grass is! But they like it!" (*Animal-Lover's* 149). Highsmith's chicken story echoes moral philosopher Peter Singer's views on "the fate of sows in today's industrialized hog farming, where the goal is to use all available manufacturing techniques to produce as many as possible pigs per sow per year" (56). In "The Day of Reckoning" the author shows a concern for cruelty to animals in industrialised farming, saying that people tend to normalise this type of cruelty.

Highsmith's concern for animals further manifests itself in *The Blunderer* (1954), *Deep Water* (1957), *This Sweet Sickness* (1960), *The Cry of the Owl* (1962), *The Glass Cell* (1964), *The Tremor of Forgery* (1969), *A Dog's Ransom* (1972), and *Small g* (1995). Several novels are also dedicated to animals. For example, *The Glass Cell* is dedicated to her cat Spider, and *Deep Water* to her friend's poodle Tina (Schenkar *The Talented Miss Highsmith* 426). In 1975, Highsmith's devotion to creatures reached its peak when she published *Animal-Lover's*, short stories about sentient beings marked by anthropomorphism.

### **Anthropomorphism and Animal-Standpoint Criticism:**

Historians of science Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman maintain that most pet owners believe that their pets understand them better than their own family members. The pet serves as a surrogate human, filling voids that other humans cannot fill (1). Interestingly, Darwin held the same conviction almost two centuries ago, as he believed that sentient beings could assume the role of stand-ins for humans in social settings. Darwin was adamant that dogs sympathised with their masters. He further maintained that animals possessed characteristics similar to humans. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), the naturalist provides numerous examples to demonstrate the thinking abilities of animals, arguing "Any one [sic] who is not convinced... that animals can reason, would not be convinced by anything that I could add" (47). He discusses animal individuality, asking "Can we feel sure that an old dog with an excellent memory and some power of imagination... never reflects on his past pleasures of the chase? And this would be a form of self-consciousness," concluding with "animals retain their mental individuality" (63). George Romanes, Darwin's disciple, also believed in the mental abilities of animals, proclaiming that "If we observe an ant or a bee apparently exhibiting sympathy or rage, we must either conclude that some psychological state resembling that of sympathy or rage is present, or refuse to think about the subject at all" (9). Evolutionists believed that mammals in general possessed intelligences, consciousness, and a moral sense, an opinion shared by comparative psychologists like Wilhelm Wundt, Edward Thorndike, and James Baldwin.

Darwin's theory of evolution suggested a certain continuity of characteristics and traits between animals and humans. In *Images of Animals: Anthropomorphism and Animal Mind*, sociologist Eileen Crist argues that Darwin's evolutionary views "provided the study of animal behaviour with its most fundamental theoretical framework" (11). Darwin contributed to the establishment of ethology with his book *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*. In this work, the naturalist introduced "the scientific study of human and animal behaviour and mind in light of an evolutionary viewpoint" (Crist 33). In spite of his insights into the study of behaviour, Darwin's approach in aligning animal conduct with human conduct was considered anthropomorphic and therefore unscientific. Daston and Mitman elaborate on the term thus:

[Anthropomorphism is] the word used to describe the belief that animals are essentially like humans, and it is usually applied as a term of reproach, both intellectual and moral. Originally, the word referred to the attribution of human form to gods, forbidden by several religions as blasphemous. Something of the religious taboo still clings to secular, modern instances of anthropomorphism, even if it is animals rather than divinities that are being humanized. (2)

Animal behaviour specialist John Kennedy adds, "Anthropomorphism in the context of animal behaviour means 'the ascription of human mental experiences to animals.'" Kennedy explains that mental implies three kinds: "(subjective, conscious) experience: feelings—pleasure, pain, the various emotions and sensations (sense-impressions), motivations—the goals and purposes of our actions, and thought

more or less independent of motor action" (9). Nonetheless, in his view, none of these can be applied to the animal world, since there is no scientific evidence to prove that animals are capable of mental experiences. Kennedy alludes to seventeenth-century French philosopher Rene Descartes, who "broke with tradition by arguing that animals were, in principle, machines. Their behaviour, he thought, could be explained straightforwardly by the material mechanisms inside them." Descartes viewed animals as "stimulus-response automata" (Kennedy 1, 2). Although his observations were rejected at the time, in the 1960s students of animal behaviour still embraced his theory of animal automatism and rejected traditional anthropomorphism (Kennedy 1). In this, they were supported by radical behaviourists such as B. F. Skinner, who in turn influenced such thinkers as zoologist William T. Keeton. Keeton strongly opposed anthropomorphism, stating that "we must constantly guard against unwarranted attribution of human characteristics to other species. Anthropomorphic or teleological thinking has no place in a scientific study of animal behaviour" (452).

The view of radical behaviourists dominated the scientific field for the first half of the twentieth century. However, in the latter part of the century, their ideas were challenged by the neobehaviourists, who suspected consciousness in animals and returned unwittingly to traditional anthropomorphism. Thus, for many years two schools of thought dominated the world of animal behavioural science: neobehaviourists and radical behaviourists. Neobehaviourists, unlike their predecessors, concluded that "consciousness is a widespread feature of animal life," and regardless of their attempts to remain purely scientific, they nonetheless fell "victim to" anthropomorphism. Kennedy calls unintentional or unwitting anthropomorphism "neoanthropomorphism," and maintains:

Anthropomorphic thinking... has presumably been "pre-programmed" into our hereditary make-up by natural selection, perhaps because it proved to be useful for predicting and controlling the behaviour of animals. It is therefore useful, incidentally, in scientific research on the adaptiveness of their behaviour.... [However] If the study of animal behaviour is to mature as a science, the process of liberation from the delusions of anthropomorphism must go on. (4-5)

Crist opposes Kennedy's view, believing that "in the hands of impeccable observers of animals the anthropomorphic perspective deserves serious attention, for it discloses the nature of animal life" (7). In the hands of a great thinker such as Darwin, anthropomorphism was used to confirm the ancestral connection between humans and animals. Naturalists also subsequently gave anthropomorphic accounts of animals, bringing to the study of animals "the point of view of the actors themselves" (Crist 8). They "credited bees with monarchies, ants with honesty, and dogs with tender consciences, all on the basis of firsthand observation" (Daston and Mitman 1). Comparative psychologists also applied "anthropomorphism with the fewest reservations" (Daston 49). Margaret Floy Washburn believed that anthropomorphism was necessary for understanding animals, asserting that "whether we will or no, we must be anthropomorphic in the notions we form of what takes place in the mind of an animal" (12).

Whereas naturalists and comparative psychologists sought to understand and deliver the meaning that is intrinsic to animal life, ethologists specialising in animal behaviour insisted instead that mental

states belong solely to human beings (Daston and Mitman<sup>3</sup>). Consequently, "post-Darwin anthropomorphism became almost synonymous with anecdote and sloth and opposed to scientific rigor and care" (Daston and Mitman 3). Ethologists used language that portrays animals as oblivious to the results of their behaviours and without control over their actions. Hence, "animals' behaviors emerge as involuntary...steered by (interior-physiological and/or exterior-environmental) stimuli beyond their control and comprehension" (Crist 9).

Anthropomorphism continued to be a hot topic of debate among scientists, and some still to this day reject it, insisting that animals cannot think or feel and that "to believe otherwise is considered a mark of childishness" (Daston and Mitman 13). Therefore, with the advancement of modern science, anthropomorphic thought regarding animals decreased. Although anthropomorphism in the sciences has been denounced as being too subjective, in literature it was embraced but often confused with personification, a literary device defined by literary critic J.A. Cuddon as "the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects" (702). The term is akin to the pathetic fallacy, the ascription of human feelings to the inanimate (Cuddon 692).

While personification and pathetic fallacy have much to do with the false appearance of things, anthropomorphism, by contrast, presents things as they truly appear to the observer. Lawrence Buell, a self-proclaimed animal-standpoint critic and advocate of anthropomorphism, defines the term as:

The attribution of human feelings or traits to nonhuman beings or objects or natural phenomena. Anthropomorphism implies an anthropocentric frame of reference, but the two do not correlate precisely. For example, a poet's choice to personify a bird or tree might betoken what Victorian critic John Ruskin called the "pathetic fallacy," a projection of human desire to make nature sympathize with humankind; or, oppositely, it might be done in the interest of dramatizing the claims or plight of the natural world. Often, both motives are at play in, say, animal stories and animal folklore. (134)

In Buell's opinion, using these literary devices to represent animals is a form of anthropocentrism, "the assumption or view that the interests of humans are of higher priority than those of nonhumans" (134). Buell objects to such forms of degradation. In this he is supported by fellow animal-standpoint critic John Simons, who also opposes the symbolic use of animals in literary texts, asserting that "animals are not symbols" (7). David Perkins similarly disputes the figurative use of animals, stating that animals are not just metaphors "with little character" of their own (147).

Donovan calls animals the new "oppressed group," and argues that in literary texts, "one of the most common devices that exploit animal pain for aesthetic effect is the animal metaphor, or, more specifically, the animal 'stand-in' or proxy, where the animal is used as an object upon which to project or act out human feelings" (203, 206). For some authors, the depiction of animal pain or death is used as a fictional device to allude to or reflect upon the situation of the human protagonist. Donovan believes this form of exploitation is unnecessary and degrading because the suffering of the animal is given little



consideration, since the focal point is ultimately the human. Animal-standpoint critics thus protest the representation of animals as allegorical figures, symbols, or metaphors (Donovan 206).

Animal-standpoint criticism differs significantly from “animal studies,” a field of thought that centres on the interactions between humans and animals. Central to animal studies “is an exploration of the ways in which animal lives intersect with human societies.” Hence, it “is not the study of animals—except insofar as the focus of [the] study is both nonhuman and human animals” (DeMello 2). Advocates of animal studies believe that by focusing on animals, humans can better understand themselves. Dawne McCance considers the field “speciesist, anthropocentric, subject-centered, and dualist at once” (1). Animal-standpoint criticism, by contrast, focuses on the animals themselves regarding their abuse, exploitation, and oppression, placing animals in the foreground instead of, humans. Moreover, they object to an artist producing or creating a literary piece out of animal cruelty such as bullfighting or cockfighting or even sacrificial images of animals. They also oppose violating “the animal's bodily integrity and thereby its inherent dignity,” and believe that when an artist presents a brutality as an artistic expression, he is in a sense denying “the subjecthood of the animal[s]... cruelly reducing [them] to the status of object[s] to be manipulated for human aesthetic purposes” (Donovan 206).

The field, marked by its interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary nature, is relatively new in academia, having appeared only in the last four decades. Nonetheless, it has advanced rapidly in the past few years. Cary Wolfe declares that a large number of literary academics view the new field as political, believing that scholars “are now forced to make the same kind of shift in the ethics and interpretation that attended taking sexual difference seriously in the 1990s (in the form of queer theory) or race and gender seriously in the 1970s and 1980s” (568). Literary critics, Wolfe contends, learned only recently that animals lead rich “mental and emotional lives,” and have complex “forms of communication and interactions,” a conviction held by Highsmith decades ago (567). Consequently, examining Highsmith’s fiction through an anthropomorphic lens serves the purpose of animal-standpoint critics, as it confirms the belief that animals have a moral dimension, thoughts and feelings, and active mental and emotional capacities (Donovan 212). Through *Animal-Lover's* in particular, Highsmith shows a remarkable understanding of the feelings and emotions of animals by relying heavily on the theories of ethology, comparative psychology, zoology, and the diverse animal behavioural fields that she most likely studied in 1942, when she majored in literature and zoology, respectively. The stories show insight into animal behaviour, emotions, and consciousness. More importantly, they show the author conjoining her two specialisations, proving that an interdisciplinary approach to literature is not only feasible but useful as well.

### ***The Animal-Lover's Book of Beastly Murder:***

Chorus Girl, the only elephant at the circus, reminisces about her past as she stares through the bars of her cement cage. She remembers happier times when she was young, following her mother around in the vast jungles of Africa. She further recalls the day when she followed her mother up a wooden board that led to a boat. At the time, she was too young to understand what was happening. She remembers in vivid detail men swarming around her mother with a huge net and then shooting her. Chorus Girl recalls

"screaming shrilly like a baby" (*Animal-Lover's*15). Moments later, she too is shot with a dope gun and confined in a dark box for several days. Once she recovers, she finds herself in a place with "no forest, no grass." She is then transferred to another box and hauled to a place with solid ground and bars. Chorus Girl describes her state at the time as one of loneliness, with "No little creatures [her] own age. No mother, no friendly grandfather, no father. No play. No baths in a muddy river. Alone with bars and cement" (*Animal-Lover's*15). Now, although much older, the loneliness remains, especially since she is the only elephant at the circus, a spectacle for people to gaze at.

The scene where Chorus Girl reminisces about the past marks the beginning of Highsmith's "Chorus Girl's Absolutely Final Performance." The tale ends tragically for Chorus Girl, who is shot to death after she murders Cliff, her new caretaker, and briefly escapes her solitary confinement. The story is a clear condemnation of society for abusing wild, free-ranging animals in the name of entertainment. Highsmith uses her zoological knowledge of "the matriarchal structure of elephant groups, their prodigious memories, fascination with their... own species" to raise awareness of elephants in captivity (Garrard 158). Her approach to the story is consistent with that of ecocritics who believe that certain animals, "like humans," are "self-aware, intelligent beings with emotions, personalities, and the capacity to control their actions" (White 330).

In his article on dolphins hunts in the Japanese town of Taiji, Thomas White objects to the slaughter of thousands of dolphins annually. White further objects to the "captivity of dolphins in the entertainment industry," and the "unethical treatment" of the animals (329). He argues:

Dolphins should be regarded as "non-human persons" and valued as *individuals*. Even if [they] were to die swiftly and painlessly in the hunts, their deaths would still be the moral equivalent of the murder of a human being. However, not only do these dolphins typically die in a slow and agonizing way, they also witness the similar deaths of those around them. Even dolphins who survive are likely to be traumatized by the event. This is quite clearly abuse and brutality. (330)

White's statement with regard to dolphins could easily be applied to Chorus Girl, who continues to be traumatised by her mother's death. Chorus Girl is also subjected to severe forms of cruelty, causing further distress. The elephant lives alone in a small cage. The spectators at her shows are mostly men with large hats, carrying "short guns on their belts" (*Animal-Lover's*16). "Once in a while," she says, "one pulls a gun and fires it into the air to try to scare me or the gazelles who live next door to me and whom I can see through the bars. The gazelles react violently, leap into the air, then huddle together in a far corner of their cage. A pitiable sight" (*Animal-Lover's*16). The allusion to the gazelles here shows that elephants are not the only victims at zoos and circuses; other animals are subjected to similar acts of cruelty.

The torment continues for Chorus Girl, who is one day fed a round object that resembles an apple. Once she tastes it, her mouth begins to sting. The pain leads to total fury, so she takes water in her snout and begins to spray people. This enrages the crowd of spectators, who throw sticks and rocks at her. A man from the crowd then pulls out his gun and shoots the elephant, knocking the end of one of her tusks

off. A wounded Chorus Girl then knocks a stack of hay on him, after which a second shot is fired at her and she is hit in the side. Two men then enter the cage and subdue the elephant. She dreams of animals, her mother, family, and green trees. When she awakens, she finds Cliff standing above her head with the intention to subdue her once more. She fights him off by kicking him. Cliff falls to the ground and dies.

Having murdered Cliff, Chorus Girl escapes from her cage and enjoys her short-lived freedom. The park is empty and pleasant. She looks at the blue sky and the green leaves, pauses to pull some off the branches of trees, and eats them. She then heads to the fountain and takes a long drink. When she observes the caged monkeys, she wonders if they would like to ride on her back. "From somewhere I remember that" she says (*Animal-Lover's* 24). She then pulls the bars off the monkeys' cage and frees them. They play mischievously around her; one goes up her back using her tail as aid, and two climb up a tree "with delight." Two men with rifles approach and fire three shots. She falls to the ground and "strike[s] the cement" before a fourth shot is fired between her eyes (*Animal-Lover's* 25). As she takes her final breath, she sees Steve, her first keeper whom she loved dearly, young and smiling, surrounded by forest trees. "Steve is my friend," she says before dying (*Animal-Lover's* 26).

Highsmith's anthropomorphised elephant has a name, a collective unconscious, and a biography. Furthermore, Chorus Girl has the ability to love and hate. For example, the elephant's relationship with Steve is that of loving intimacy, whereas with Cliff, it is one of contempt. Of the former, she states "[he] could talk" and "I could soon understand what he said, or at least what he meant" (15). Steve took good care of her, especially when preparing her for a show, unlike Cliff. Sometimes Steve would take her to the park to give young children rides on her back. Although the park had been nice, still, it was no forest, "just a few trees growing from rather hard, dry soil" (*Animal-Lover's* 17). She says that her temper was better in those days, and she would avoid the low branches so as not to hurt the children. But now her temperament is different. She states resentfully, "What have people, except Steve, ever given me? Not even grass under my feet. Not even companionship of another creature like myself" (*Animal-Lover's* 17). Now she is older, heavier, and with a shorter temper. The people dress differently now, she notes, and no one ever carries a gun. Also, Steve is replaced by Cliff, a young keeper who whips her mercilessly if she does not perform. She compares the two: "Steve approached me as one creature to another, making acquaintance with me and not assuming I was going to be what he expected. That is why we got along. Cliff doesn't really care about me, and does nothing to help me against the flies in summer, for instance" (*Animal-Lover's* 18). Chorus Girl misses her human caretaker and looks for him whenever she sees a group of people approaching. Nonetheless, Steve is never among them. "Sometimes I raise my trunk and bellow my chagrin and disappointment because Steve doesn't come. It seems to amuse people, my bellowing—just as my mother bellowed on the dock when she couldn't reach me," she says (*Animal-Lover's* 19-20).

In "Chorus Girl" Highsmith fosters anthropomorphism, believing it to be the only device to communicate to the reader about animals and their states. Chorus Girl's ability to understand English humanises the elephant and makes her relatable. The elephant is "thoroughly individualised, but along axes that seem plausible for elephants specifically, and this anthropomorphism 'paradoxically liberates [Highsmith's elephant] from metonymic, metaphorical or fabular enclosure in the text'" (Garrard 158-59).

Highsmith's anthropomorphic approach is not moralistic as in Aesop's fables; nor is it the forced anthropomorphism profited from by Disney movies. The anthropomorphism she employs is inspective, analytical, careful, cognisant, and methodical. It is an instrument of discovery, unearthing the temperament of animal minds. Her ability to assume other perspectives is commendable. For Highsmith's elephant, life in captivity is by far less pleasing than life in the jungle.

Other animals in Highsmith's collection include rats ridiculed and tortured in "The Bravest Rat in Venice," camels severely beaten and overworked in "Djemal's Revenge," dogs forced to live with despicable "masters" in "There I was, Stuck with Bubsy," pigs starved and forced to search for truffles in "In the Dead of Truffle Season," and cats tormented by jealous boyfriends in "Ming's Biggest Prey." The point each story makes is that animals should not be harmed, neglected, exploited, used in industry, or held captive in entertainment facilities.

In *Animal Liberation*, Singer calls the ill-treatment of and prejudice towards animals "speciesism," and identifies it as the basis of our different treatment of animals and humans. He continues, "Just as women or Africans have been mistreated on the grounds of morally irrelevant physiological differences, so animals suffer because they fall on the wrong side of a supposedly 'insuperable line'" (Singer 8).

The philosopher's conviction that the mistreatment of animals is akin to racism and speciesism is shared by Highsmith, whose story "The Bravest Rat in Venice" (*Animal-Lover's*) shows a rat being treated with contempt simply because it is a rodent. The scene is the Palazzo Cecchini near San Polo. A family of eight, the Mangoni family, serve as caretakers for an English-American couple who own the Palazzo, and since they are away for the summer, the family had free reign of the house. The owners' dog Rupert, a Dalmatian, is left in their care. However, they neglect the beast by tying him to the foot of a stove and feeding him leftover pasta and risotto, as they thought it absurd to feed a dog "bistecca," arguing that "A dog was a dog, not a human being" (*Animal-Lover's* 96). The parents' attitude toward animals is passed on to their children, including Luigi, their ten-year-old son.

One day, while wandering around the streets of Venice, Luigi and his friend Carlo spot a rat in the water. Luigi is amused and hits the rat several times with a stick. He then orders Carlo to get a knife. Carlo obeys and returns with a huge meat knife that his friend uses to slice the rodent's neck. He misses and stabs one of its eyes instead. Still not satisfied, Luigi attempts to decapitate the creature, but he misses and slices off a left foreleg instead. "For a few seconds the rat was motionless, with open mouth. Blood flowed from its eye, and Luigi came down with the blade on the rat's right hind foot which was extended with splayed toes, vulnerable against the stone" (*Animal-Lover's* 98). The disfigured rat retaliates by biting Luigi's wrist, and he releases it at once. The rat then swims away until it arrives at the cellar of an abandoned grocery store, infested with fellow rats. It is there that "the rat nursed his wounds for two days, unassisted by parents who did not even recognize him as offspring, or by relatives either" (*Animal-Lover's* 99).

The violation of the rat's "bodily integrity and thereby its inherent dignity" is what the author wants the reader to note. The boys cruelly reduce the mammal "to the status of object to be manipulated" for their own selfish purposes (Donovan 206).

Highsmith attacks this treatment of animals by providing the subjective viewpoint of the rat through anthropomorphism. The rat is young, about five months old, with “no family as yet, but was indifferently accepted in the house or headquarters of several rat families where he had been born” (*Animal-Lover's* 99). Furthermore, throughout the story the rat is referred to as a “he” rather than an “it” and his perseverance is highlighted, as well as his strength, ferocity, cleverness, and contempt for the boys who harmed him.

Although Highsmith’s story is pure fiction, infusing a rat with so much personality is plausible nonetheless. McCance recalls a time when she was forced to work with rats as part of her Master of Science program in biochemistry. McCance’s observation is noteworthy: “the rodents favored for laboratory experimentation are not always counted as animals having a strong moral claim,” she reports (ix). For some people, rats have “lower ontological and moral status” than other animals. Although McCance did not name her rats, she still learned a great deal from working with them, as “each had a ‘personality,’ temperament, and behavioral features all its own” (x). McCance then refers to ecologist Marc Bekoff who “reporting on the work of neurobiologist Jack Panksepp, suggests that rats are social, experience joy, and laugh when tickled.” She adds that they can also “squeal and scream in pain” during laboratory experiments. “They also demonstrate intelligence—the sort of intelligence a rat needs to determine how one’s own cage might be pried open, and in turn the cages of one’s fellow rats” (McCance xi). Such observations ultimately led her to discount a future in experimental science and opt for a degree in religion instead.

Despite the ample proof of intelligence, perception, individuality, personality, and activity in animals, many in the scientific community continue to reject anthropomorphism because it lacks objectivity. Clifton P. Flynn explains:

The irony, of course, is that the more we have studied other animals, even in this detached way, the more we have learned about their complex cognitive and emotional capabilities. We have learned that many animals do have preferences and intentions, can solve problems, do display emotions and read our own, are self-aware and do have an active mental life, and can create shared meanings with humans. (xv)

Clifton’s statements about nonhuman beings can be noted in Highsmith’s story “Djemal's Revenge” (*Animal-Lover's*), where a camel is self-aware and alert to the point of branding his master as deceitful. Djemal is shown to “have sophisticated cognitive and effective abilities” (White 335). Moreover, although the camel is abused, overworked, and considered property by his callous master, Mahmet, still he perseveres. For Highsmith, anthropomorphising Djemal leads to a greater understanding of the creature’s situation, provides motives for his murder of Mahmet, and appeals to the reader to reconsider the status of work animals.

Highsmith’s skill in transcending the self and thinking like an animal occurs again in “Engine Horse.” The story highlights a strong point emphasised in Ashley Pryor's essay “Heidegger and the Dog Whisperer: Imagining Interspecies Kindness”—that of kindness among the species. “A long-standing Western idea [is] that animals are capable of neither kindness nor cruelty,” proclaims Pryor. However,

this belief is refutable, as "kindness occurs not only between humans but between species" (Pryor 289). In "Engine Horse," a twelve-year-old mare named Fanny befriends a stray kitten and nurtures it as a mother nurtures a child. The two bond in an endearing way: "TO THE LITTLE GRAY CAT [sic], Fanny the horse had become a protectress, a fortress, a home. Not that Fanny did anything. Fanny merely existed, giving out warmth in the cold of the night before dawn" (*Animal-Lover's* 121). Fanny assumes the role of surrogate and becomes protective of the little creature playing mischievously around her. When the kitten is killed by the farm owner's grandson, Fanny witnesses the crime but remains motionless. Nevertheless, as soon as an opportunity presents itself to avenge the kitten by harming the man, Fanny seizes it and tramples him until he dies. The mare's behaviour clearly demonstrates sympathy between species, a feature also noted by Romanes, who mentions stories of monkeys experiencing immense grief at the sight of other monkeys being killed by hunters. The evolutionist maintains that sympathetic responses to other animals are not alien to nonhuman species (476). Daston also remarks that animal emotions exist, "elevat[ing] the animal highest in moral estimation" (51).

Other stories in which Highsmith probes nonhuman minds through the mechanics of anthropomorphism include "Hamsters VS. Websters," "Eddie and the Monkey Robberies," "Ming's Biggest Prey," "In the Dead of Truffle Season," and "Notes from a Respectable Cockroach," where an insect begins with "People Think That Roaches Can't Understand English, Or Whatever is the Going Lingo in their Vicinity" (*Animal-Lover's* 154). Peters argues that when reading a Highsmith story, the reader is "denied the pleasure of identification with her characters" (17). But the author is able to manipulate her readers into identifying even with a cockroach, who longs for the good old days when people were civilised (*Animal-Lover's* 154).

### **Conclusion:**

In *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*, Philip Armstrong praises authors such as Lawrence, Kafka, Findley, and Atwood who go "beyond reading animals as screens for the projection of human interests and meanings, which until recently was the predominant way of treating cultural representations of animals" (2). Despite Armstrong's insightful observation, nowhere does he mention Highsmith, even though her contribution is paramount. Through her fiction, Highsmith employs anthropomorphism "carefully, consciously, empathetically, and biocentrically" (Bekoff 125). She uses imaginative literature to argue for the rights of animals who cannot speak to tell their stories of oppression. At no point does she use a situation of cruelty for her own aesthetic purposes, as Donovan proclaims of scores of authors for whom an "animal's death is of interest only for its effect on the human characters and/or as a vehicle to dramatize human relations and feelings" (208). Also, unlike other authors, Highsmith rejects the philosophy of speciesism, presenting the subjective viewpoint of creatures instead. It is the animal's position rather than the human's that she takes into consideration. In spite of Highsmith's insight on the subject of sentient beings, her works remain relatively unexamined, and so too does her concern for the planet as a whole. Schenkar states of the latter:

Pat's notebooks in France throughout the 1970s wince at the world's wastage, and are punctuated by her eccentric plans for improving life on

earth.... [The author's] mind was beginning to turn from the cracks in character to the crisis in the cosmos.... Nature, Pat imagined in her notes, "revolts—at its rape, at its reversed rivers and cut down trees—and erupts in volcanoes, collapses in earthquakes, everywhere gobbling, burning, crushing people." (*The Talented Miss Highsmith* 495-96)

In Highsmith's short story "Please Don't Shoot the Trees" (1979), for example, the author shows an interest in the preservation of nature that proves contemporary. Her appeal for a safer environment, like her appeal for animal rights, warrants further investigation.

## تجسيد الحيوانات بصفات بشرية (انثروبومورفيزم) في الأدب الروائي

للكاتبة باتريشا هايسميث

عفرا الشيبان

جامعة الإمام، الرياض، السعودية

### الملخص

اعترض العلماء منذ عقود مضت على تجسيد الحيوانات بصفات بشرية (انثروبومورفيزم)، زاعمين أن المشاعر والعواطف تنتمي فقط لذوي البشر. إلا أن الروائية الأميركية باتريشا هايسميث أيقنت تماماً أن المخلوقات الحية لديها قدرات إدراكية وعاطفية، تماماً كما اعتقد داروين قبل قرنين من الزمان. وقد ظهر حب باتريشا للحيوانات جلياً عندما احتضنت في منزلها العديد من هذه المخلوقات الأليفة، واحتوتها في حبكة رواياتها وأكثرها شهرة، حتى إنها قد كرسَتْ بعضاً منها لحيواناتها المدللة. ويتجلى خيال هايسميث في تجسيد هذه المخلوقات بصفات البشر تجلياً واضحاً في كل حكاية من حكايات مجموعتها القصصية إذ إنها تنعتها بأسماء وصفات ومشاعر وعواطف وسير ذاتية خاصة. وباقتصار النظر لهايسميث على أنها مؤلفة روايات جريمة، فإن ميولها لمناصرة حقوق الحيوان لم تلقَ اهتماماً حتى لفتت هذه الدراسة الانتباه إلى هذا الجانب من كتاباتها من مفهوم النقد الحيواني.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تجسيد الحيوانات بصفات بشرية، الحيوانات، البشر، باتريشا هايسميث، المطالبين بحقوق الحيوان، النقد الحيواني، تعدد المجالات.

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