

ANTHROPOMORPHIC NARRATIVE: HUMANIZING ANIMALS
IN FACTUAL WRITING AND FILMMAKING

by

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ABSTRACT

Anthropomorphism, a strategy for storytelling whereby human characteristics are applied to non-human characters, has been criticized for its anthropocentrism and tendency to misinterpret animal behaviors. Evidence suggests that anthropomorphism makes an audience more sympathetic and better able to connect with an animal character since they can metaphorically see themselves reflected in said animal.

I propose that anthropomorphism needs to be analyzed in layers. In this paper I look at the first layer of anthropomorphism: anthropomorphic narration or the humanizing of animals through story. I caution against describing species as “bad”, or emphasizing behaviors or characteristics that humans do not find pleasing or particularly interesting. Misrepresenting a species can lead to social stereotypes that harm its conservation potential. Finally, I explore the use of religious themes as applied to “humanized” animals. The French documentary *La Marche de l'empereur* (2004), the graphic novel *Maus: A Survivor's Tale I* (1986), Jim Trainor's short films *The Bats* (1999) and *The Moschops* (2000), and my thesis film *Hunting the Horned Horse* (2015) are used to explore anthropomorphic narration.

INTRODUCTION

Anthropomorphism is a sociopolitical tool that has been prevalent in human culture for hundreds of years. By definition, anthropomorphism applies human characteristics to non-human entities, such as non-human animals and technology, in order to better gain a better understanding of that entity (Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo 864; Karlsson 709). One may describe an old computer as “dying” when it is running slow or not saving documents. The weather, too, can be “raging” during a storm or “peaceful” on a sunny day. Margaret King suggests that seeking cultural patterns in nature and perceiving it in human terms is an instinct that all humans possess (61). Indeed, the desire to understand nature can be found in the earliest cave paintings and in the beginning of the cinematic art. Anthropomorphism is prevalent in wildlife films, documentaries about animals and the natural world. Before I address anthropomorphism in wildlife films, though, I want to acknowledge wildlife films’ niche in the documentary genre.

Filmmakers are allowed to creatively represent the world in a documentary. John Grierson, a founding father of documentary, described the medium as “the creative treatment of actuality” (Rabiger 4). The filmmaker chooses what the viewer sees, selecting only the most entertaining shots and stories in order to appeal to audiences. Documentaries are judged on their content more than their aesthetics and, as Bill Nichols states, are only “as good as [their] content” (qtd. in Bousé 12). Story is the driving force of all communication art forms, even wildlife films, which have scientific elements. However, one important factor to consider with

documentaries is expectation of authenticity (Nichols xiii) and the obligation to maintain trust between the audience and the filmmaker. The audience needs to understand that documentaries are a window to the world, not a reflection. The best way to convey this idea is to look at the tools that are used to create a documentary. In this paper I will look at a tool that is much criticized but is essential in wildlife films: anthropomorphism.

The objective of anthropomorphism is to create empathy for an animal. Critics claim that this is not reliable when trying to understand an animal's mental state and is brimming with factual errors (Mameli and Bortolotti 84; Karlsson 708). An animal could be misrepresented if behaviors are not correctly interpreted. This is considered unethical in the documentary genre. Projecting human characteristics on an animal is also classified as anthropocentric bias, making humans the center of the natural world. Along with the human instinct to project ourselves on others, we also have a basic desire to control everything around us, especially those we do not understand (King 61). Comprehension, whether misguided or accurate, is the direct result of control and gives humans the perception of determining whether a species survives or goes extinct. Wildlife films exemplify this notion in their narratives. If an animal has good character, is "understandable", then it will most likely be prosperous and survive in the narrative, no matter its actual fate in the natural world. These films present an "ego-system", not an ecosystem, exemplifying human morality and anthropocentrism (King 62). Philosophers and scientists encourage

the public to avoid anthropomorphism (Fisher 3) so that animals can be viewed in their unbiased, natural state.

Film theorists have worked on categorizing anthropomorphism into different forms. Mameli and Bortolotti separated anthropomorphism into two types: critical anthropomorphism and uncritical anthropomorphism (87). The critical type refers to an objective knowledge of an animal's behavior and physiology (87). This approach is more scientific and explains an animal based on observable data. Even if the interpretation is wrong, it is still based on empirical evidence, making any errors scientific rather than ethical. The uncritical type refers to an uninformed interpretation of an animal (87), meaning the observer sees a behavior and makes an inference based on what he or she thinks is happening, usually projecting a familiar human quality on the animal. For example, a lioness may be called "caring" if she does not immediately kill an antelope calf, but in reality she is using the calf to teach her own cubs hunting skills.

Fredrik Karlsson broke down anthropomorphism into three types: physical, psychological, and cultural anthropomorphism (710-711). Physical anthropomorphism is mainly spiritual and prevents the incorrect interpretation of deities. Psychological anthropomorphism gives human-like emotions and thoughts to animals, such as describing an animal as "sad" when its face has tear streaks (that is more than likely the result of another factor besides emotion). Cultural anthropomorphism uses human culture to explain animal behavior. One example is the use of stereotypes. A female beaver can be described as a "happy wife" when

she's left at home (the dam) with the offspring while the male is a good father and husband while he chops down wood or forages for food. Karlsson's psychological and cultural anthropomorphism types can be identified in wildlife films as the narrative attempts to describe animal behavior in human terminology.

While the criticisms and the different categorizations of anthropomorphism are valid, I say that wildlife films need anthropomorphism in order to effectively engage an audience. Evidence suggests that anthropomorphism not only increases concern and empathy for animal welfare (Bousé 99) but also concern for the environment and conservation as well (Waytz, Cacioppo, and Epley 223; King 68). By projecting ourselves on an animal and recognizing similarities, we are more motivated to understand and protect what we see as reflections of ourselves.

The question isn't whether anthropomorphism should be used or not, it's a matter of *how*. I propose that the term "anthropomorphism" is too broad to analyze critically. In order to understand anthropomorphism, we need to look at its layers and see what components create this cinematic tool. There are a number of components that create anthropomorphism, such as visuals on the screen from camera decisions (which I propose be called "anthropomorphic representation"). However, for the purposes of this paper I will discuss what I am calling "anthropomorphic narrative", or how animal characters are humanized through narration and story. I will also break anthropomorphic narrative down into the "characterization tool", which turns an animal into a character by applying human morality and virtue on the subject. Then, to exemplify the depth of

anthropomorphism, I will look at the “spiritual application” that can be used when humanizing an animal character. Characterization is not the only ‘tool’ that creates the anthropomorphic narrative and spiritual application is neither the only application that can be applied to characterization. However, by breaking anthropomorphism down into these layers and sub-layers, I can demonstrate how and why anthropomorphism needs to be analyzed deeper. First, though, I will introduce the four different films and art mediums that will be looked at in this analysis.

THE ARTWORK

La Marche de l'empereur is a French documentary directed by Luc Jacquet and released in 2004. It follows the journey of emperor penguins as they go to their breeding and nesting grounds for the winter. The documentary was also translated into English and released in the United States as *March of the Penguins* in 2005. However, the narrative structures of both films are significantly different. Whereas the English version has a single omniscient narrator, the original French version has three voices that personify a female, a male, and a juvenile penguin. The male and female voices of the adults tell the story of the penguins as a whole in a metanarrative and of this particular mated pair. For the purposes of this paper, I will only be looking at the French version and will be referring to it as "*La Marche*".

Maus: A Survivor's Tale I is a graphic novel written and illustrated by Art Spiegelman. It was published in 1986 and was the first graphic novel to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1992. Although not a wildlife film or a documentary in the traditional sense, *Maus* is a work of non-fiction, a classification that Spiegelman fought for when the *New York Times* listed it as fiction (Doherty 68), that tells a first-hand account of the Holocaust. Art Spiegelman's father, Vladek Spiegelman, recounts his experiences as a Jew during World War II, experiencing terror and betrayal. Another aspect of the narrative is the somewhat wobbly relationship between Art, called "Artie" in the novel, and his father as Vladek recounts his story and Artie records and listens. In the graphic novel, though, all of the characters have animal faces: Jews are mice, non-Jewish Poles are pigs, and the Nazis are cats. Instead of

projecting humanism on animals, animals themselves are projected onto people.

This graphic novel gives a unique look at anthropomorphism and narrative. Please note that *Maus* has two parts, but only Part 1 is analyzed in this paper.

Jim Trainor is an independent filmmaker and animator known as the “anti-Disney” (Poast). He uses a Sharpie and white paper to create shorts that exemplify the harsh realities of the natural world. His animal characters do have voices, though they do not physically ‘talk’ on screen, and express emotions regarding natural behaviors. For example, in *The Bats*, released in 1999, the main bat character expresses “I love to defecate, and comb myself, and drink water”. Trainor’s aim was to show the bat living in its world of “carnal pleasure” and having no moral qualms as it goes about its natural life (Gottwaldt). Much of the humor in his works spawns from the seemingly emotional indifference the animals express when speaking of their behavior. His inspiration comes from his belief that natural history films misrepresent nature as a whole and his desire to show his audience the true “destructive force of nature” (Poast). The two short films I will be looking at are *The Bats* and *The Moschops* (2000).

My thesis film, *Hunting the Horned Horse*, released in 2015, is an animated short film about poaching and extinction through the allegory of unicorns. I use unicorns as symbols for real poached animals, such as rhinos and elephants, and connect them with real species through symbolism and background text. An omniscient narrator tells both of the unicorn’s extinction and its behaviors, which are based on real animals. The unicorns themselves do not have voices or express

emotions. The objectives of the film were to use science to describe a fantastical animal and to give a conservation message in the narrative. I will be discussing my film after looking at anthropomorphic narration, the characterization tool, and spiritual application.

ANTHROPOMORPHIC NARRATION

Anthropomorphic narration is the humanizing of animals through story. The desire to understand animals has been a part of human storytelling since the beginning of human civilization. It has been argued that the desire to capture animal movement was the origin of art itself, displayed in our ancestors' cave paintings (Bousé 39). From observing animal movement came the desire to understand the animals themselves. Storytelling is a characteristic unique to the human species and is also where the most humanizing of animals occurs (Bousé 135). All narratives, whether fictional or not, have dramatic characterizations. Audiences now expect strong characters and interesting stories in narratives, including wildlife films. It is no wonder that animal stories are some of the earliest pieces of literature.

Animal fables were already established before becoming associated with Aesop in the fifth century BC. They are the very foundation of animal humanization. By putting human vices and virtues on animals, they can be confronted, examined, and satirized from a safe distance (Bousé 92). Observing how animals are used in these stories can tell a lot about an individual or a culture, such as what was most valuable in terms of character, such as bravery or loyalty. Over many years of translations, animal fables are most likely no longer in their original form. It is believed that fables may have been crudely humorous, much like Jim Trainor's short films, rather than associated with morals like they are today (Bousé 92).

The origin of cinema is also associated with the origin of wildlife films. Many of the first films were made to capture animal movement (Bousé 41). The

fascination with animals during this period of the late 1800's corresponded with Darwin's *Origin of Species*, published in 1859. The Darwinian paradigm shift led to more sympathy towards animals (Bousé 96). People were enchanted by the idea that humans are related to animals. Stories from animal points-of-view became popular in natural history literature and these themes of characterization, which will be discussed more in the next section about the characterization tool, were carried over to natural history films. Animals became protagonists and nature became a landscape of drama. By the 1900's, the idea of human-animal kinship was widely accepted throughout the Western world due to Darwinism (Bousé 99).

Today, wildlife films use formulas from traditional narratives to create anthropomorphic narration. These formulas generally consist of following an individual animal as it experiences triumphs and failures in its quest to survive and/or keep its offspring alive. *La Marche*, which uses a more traditional formula, opens its narrative with a classic storytelling line, referencing back to animal fables: "Once upon a time, there was a garden. A fertile, generous land where life was easy. That was many moons ago before winter came along." Later, as the male penguin guards his egg from the cold winds, he states that the aurora will fetch the sun "that has forgotten them". The female and male narrators, who tell the story interchangeably, establish a land where survival is difficult. The environment as a character is a common foil to animal protagonists in wildlife film formulas. This allows the audience to empathize with and reflect themselves on the penguins as they experience a challenging environment.

Metanarrative is also common in the anthropomorphic narrative formula. A metanarrative tells an overarching story in addition to the personal narrative of the characters. In wildlife films, the metanarrative gives more information about the entire species or the species' environment. In *La Marche*, the metanarrative discusses the penguins' pilgrimage to the mating site and other aspects of penguin biology. The film could have just included the personal narrative of the male and female pair and their chick. However, as a wildlife film, it is expected that the narrative stays true to the biology of the penguin and give some insight into its natural history.

Jim Trainor's *The Moschops* also includes a metanarrative, but it is integrated with the moschops' personal narrative. One example is the following dialogue: "When I was a moschops, another male bashed into me and broke my rib. I wanted to tell him 'I thought you were my friend', but back in those days, the three little bones of our ear were still part of our jaws and we couldn't hear a thing." The audience feels empathy for the injured moschops, but then the narrative switches to referring to the whole species. This change does not affect the audience's emotion, though, because the audience still sympathizes with the moschops after learning that its anatomy is preventing it from communicating. Because the film opens with a personal narrative, referring to the species as a whole by saying, "the moschops did not have ear bones" would actually take the viewer out of the narrative. In *La Marche*, the penguins also refer to themselves as "we" when describing the biology of their species. Many times when a wildlife film is about an individual animal, that

animal is given a name and its life narrated by an omniscient narrator. By allowing the animals to tell their own stories, the penguins and moschops are able to develop a 'personal metanarrative' in addition to the individual's narrative.

Spiegelman also uses metanarrative, in addition to personal narrative, in *Maus*. Like in *Le Marche* and *The Moschops*, the metanarrative and personal narrative interweave throughout the story. In the metanarrative, Artie is interacting with Vladek, his father, and Artie sometimes interrupts his father as he is telling his personal narrative of his experience in the Holocaust. The chapter breaks happen when the metanarrative derails the personal story because Vladek is tired (40) or he is distressed with his current wife, Mala (67). *Maus* also has a third layer of narrative when Vladek finds one of Artie's past comics, *Prisoner on the Hell Planet*, about his mother's suicide. The comic is included in the text, but instead of animal faces, the characters are fully human (100-103). There is also a real photograph of Art as a child with his mother (100). These cues bring the reader back to reality after viewing the animal-like humans throughout the rest of the narrative.

Spiegelman also stays true to historical accuracy by drawing diagrams of the gas chambers and concentration camps his father experienced (Doherty 81). Just like natural history films have an obligation to include real, accurate science in its anthropomorphic narrative, Spiegelman is also obligated to present the Holocaust and his father's story accurately. In addition, he does not alter his father's second-language accent throughout the piece. Vladek traditionally spoke Yiddish, but the

broken English throughout the narrative creates a sense of trust between the reader and Spiegelman that he is actually relaying his father's story word for word.

However, Spiegelman does break a promise to his father. Vladek asks him to not include the story of him and his ex-girlfriend, Lucia (23). He says that it is too personal of a story and "has nothing to do with Hitler or the Holocaust" (23). Artie tries to convince him to allow him to include it because it "makes everything more real-more human" but Vladek insists that such private stories should not be included and Artie promises to promises not to include the story (23). Of course, the story is included, making Artie less likeable to the reader. This is reflective of a wildlife filmmaker forcing a narrative about a species. Oftentimes, cinematographers will go into the field with a prepared shot list in order to obtain visuals for a script that is preconceived. The story does not come from the footage, but rather the footage is manipulated to serve the story's needs. These animal behaviors can eventually be staged or the animal provoked into doing the behavior. Manipulating a story and losing trust between the audience and artist is a way to lose the power of the anthropomorphic narrative.

Story is the most important component when humanizing animals. Creating challenges (such as weather), including a metanarrative, and staying accurate to the field are what make anthropomorphic narration effective. However, the key tool to humanizing animals is developing characters.

CHARACTER TOOL

The character tool is using character development to describe an animal. Characterizing an animal can be beneficial for the species' welfare and to gain empathy for animals in need, however it can also be detrimental, especially to predatory species.

Species stereotypes can be the basis for humanized characterization and can at times lead audiences into believing those stereotypes are real attributes of a species. For example, wolves can be described as "deceitful" and "ruthless". The negative stereotyping of wolves has led to a decimation of the species and it is difficult to advocate for their protection because of the stereotypes society has placed on these animals.

When the character tool is used properly, various animal species are shown in balance. A predator is not condemned for killing its prey because it is not murder; it is essential for survival. However, animals that are considered aesthetically pleasing or have juvenile development similar to humans (large eyes, protruding cranium) are generally well liked while animals with extra senses, non-human-like characteristics, and slow or violent killing methods are generally not liked (Burghardt and Herzog Jr. 140). When looking at animals that are considered "other", such as snakes and sharks, the audience is invited to gawk rather than understand. Misunderstanding animals misguides empathy and invalidates justification (Karlsson 719).

In *La Marche*, the female penguins encounter a leopard seal on their return to the ocean for food. With clever editing and a frightened voiceover, it is implied that the leopard seal eats one of the penguins. However, the leopard seal isn't even called by its name. Instead, it is called "the monster". However, in multiple parts of the film, the penguins talk about turtles, an animal that the penguins surely have never seen. In fact, turtles live on every continent except Antarctica. How can the penguins be able to refer to turtles and not give the proper name of their leopard seal neighbor? This is a case of negative use of the character tool. The leopard seal is not given a name because it is an "other" to the penguin colony, and not just any "other", but a predator that threatens their lifestyle. Leopard seals are rarely shown positively in media, and never in a movie about penguins. The negative representations of this species could be detrimental in the future if the need ever arose to provoke empathy for leopard seals. Many would also probably consider them not particularly aesthetically pleasing with their large reptilian-like heads and large teeth. This is a scenario where the criticisms of anthropomorphism are fully in the right.

As certain as many animals become "villains" through characterization, a good number also become "heroes" (Bousé 135; King 66-67). Animals are considered successful when the narrative can project human virtues on the individual or species (Bousé 105). These virtues consist of humanistic qualities such as bravery, sacrifice, monogamy, family, patience, good judgment, and hard work. Animals with these "virtues" are honored for their reflection of human nuclear

families. Birds, and penguins in particular, often exemplify these traits (Bousé 173). As seen in *La Marche*, penguin pairs mate (or “marry” in *La Marche*) for the duration of the season. Each parent sacrifices food and comfort in order to care for their offspring, from egg to juvenile. This “devotion to family” is appealing to audiences and garners public support and sympathy. However, if a penguin is “bad” then it will be unsuccessful. A penguin that does not journey to the mating grounds with the ‘tribe’ will most certainly perish on the white Antarctic desert. Also, hasty and inexperienced parents will lose their egg to the cold if it is not transferred carefully from mother to father. The penguins are not “villains”, but they certainly do not possess the virtues needed to “earn” their right to live. Nature culls the weak and sick, but wildlife films cull the “bad” (Bousé 165).

Jim Trainor’s use of the character tool is much different than what is seen in *La Marche*. There are no “heroes” or “villains” in his anthropomorphic narratives. Instead, there are rival species and rival males, which are found in the natural world. In *The Bats*, the bat protagonist says, “We got along with most of the pitches (referring to the other bat species in the cave), but every once in a while, a low pitch would come along and kill one of our babies.” The bat does not reflect emotionally on the low pitches’ actions nor does he acknowledge the eventual extinction of his species in the cave. Instead, he wishes to live forever so he can enjoy the pleasures of life.

However, “bad” individuals are still culled. The bat recalls his brother’s first flight in which he fractured his skull and drowned. An individual’s inexperience

often leads to its demise. This personifies Darwin's idea of "survival of the fittest". Only those individuals that are resourceful enough to reproduce and raise young can be called "successful". Applying virtues to a species implies that an animal has to "earn" its right to live. However, the last line of *The Moschops* states, "Nothing on Earth has a right to live, only a chance." Removing virtuous applications allows the audience to comprehend the animal's own thoughts and emotions, rather than those projected on them by human perception. Trainor's animal characters portray a good use of the character tool by using anthropomorphism to give thoughts and emotions that could very well be expressed by an animal if it had a voice.

The characterization of "heroes" and "villains" continues in Spiegelman's *Maus*. Spiegelman's inspiration for representing the Jews as mice came from anti-Semitic art that depicted Jews in cartoons as Untermenschen, rodent-like creatures known as "human vermin" (Doherty 74). One of the better-known enemies of mice is the cat, so it was only natural that the Nazis be depicted as such.

In addition, all of the animal characters look similar within a species. There is nothing to distinguish one mouse character from another other than human clothing and dialogue. Not only do the animal features help protect the images of the people in the story, but also allow Spiegelman the creative freedom to interpret each individual while still remaining faithful to accuracy. Spiegelman states, "The mouse heads are masks, virtually blank, like Little Orphan Annie's eyeballs-a white screen the reader can project on" (Doherty 77). Just like humans projecting emotions onto

real animals, they can also connect emotionally with these animal-like human characters.

The character tool is essential for the emotional connection that anthropomorphism inspires from the audience. However, this tool needs to be wielded with care, especially when describing predators or any species that an audience may have difficulties showing sympathy. Word usage, particularly, can be the difference between a positive and negative emotion from the audience. For example, even when a bird species is monogamous, promiscuity can still occur. Mating with multiple individuals insures that a bird's offspring are the best fit for survival. However, if a narrative says that a bird character is having an "affair" rather than doing what is best for the species, then the audience's viewpoint of that species may change (Bousé 161). Moral judgment can harm a species and audiences can be misled in the understanding of natural systems. Removing an animal character's virtue, as seen in Jim Trainor's *The Bats* and *The Moschops*, is not a detriment to the human emotional connection. Audiences are still able to experience emotions and thoughts as potentially expressed by the species itself, rather than human personification. Ultimately, just like with using anthropomorphism as a whole, the *method* of using the character tool is the most important aspect of creating empathy between the animal character and the audience.

SPIRITUAL APPLICATION

Spiritual application is a sub-layer of the character tool that acknowledges the use of religious themes when representing animals. Ironically, “anthropomorphism” was originally a term used to explain God in human terms (Fisher 3; Guthrie 6). By using humanization to explain God, it was implied that God was not perfect and made errors like humans. This was viewed as a “vulgar mistake” (Fisher 3) and Christianity now attempts to not describe God, relying on faith instead.

While looking at the different pieces of artwork presented in this paper, I could not ignore the common theme of religion and spirituality in all three works. *Maus*, as a whole, is completely based on religious discrimination as a Holocaust story. The entire Jewish population of Poland was threatened because of their religion. Vladek and other Jewish characters attempt to wear pig masks in order to symbolically blend in with the non-Jewish Poles and hide their beliefs. Religious persecution is the driving force for Vladek’s narrative.

In *The Bats*, the bat protagonist is visited by his god. In their first encounter, she says, “Sometimes you have to kill more than you can eat” after the bat catches a large worm that he is not be able to finish and begins to weep over the wasted meat. The bat’s god acts as a half-instinct, half-conscience entity for the bat. Their second encounter is where the god says, “You must only have sexual intercourse with your own species” after the bat mates with a few females that are not his own species. The god has a valid point that reproducing with another species would more than

likely not lead to viable offspring. In the bat's final encounter with god, she says, "Low pitches are eating all your babies...in another thirteen generations, you lower to mid-pitches will become extinct." The bat's god could also be a personification of nature itself. She appears as a disembodied bat head, a form the bat character would understand and identify. It is interesting to think of animals perceiving an aspect of life in a spiritual fashion. After all, nature can be identified as a very spiritual and moving force for many people.

Le Marche, too, has hints of religious themes in its narrative. The first leg of the penguins' journey to the mating grounds is called the "Journey of the Long Caravans". The terminology and visuals are reflective of religious pilgrimages to destinations of worship. Except, in the penguins' case, their pilgrimage is a journey to life and love. The English version of *Le Marche*, *March of the Penguins*, became an allegory for Christian belief and evidence of intelligent design in the United States (Wexler 274-276). Although director Luc Jacquet denied any religious influences in the film, Christians continued to believe that the penguins in the film could survive only because of a higher power and that it also promoted heterosexual monogamy (Wexler 274). While I do recognize some of the religious motifs in the film, especially when the penguin form has an uncanny resemblance to a human form, the idea that the penguins' intricate behavior could only be possible with a higher power is preposterous. However, religious belief is one aspect of the characterization tool that can be used in anthropomorphism.

Christianity does not only look at penguins, but also other birds as well through “Christian ornithology”. In this activity, birds are observed for moral and ethical lessons (Bousé 99-100). In a similar fashion that animals are considered “heroes” or “villains” with the characterization tool, Christian ornithology separates bird species into “good” species and “bad” species based on virtues and attributes. “Good” species are those that have pleasant songs, attractive plumage, and create intricate nests. Each of these species is also associated with a specific virtue, such as the kingbirds for bravery, herons for devotion and dignity, and thrushes for modesty. “Bad” species, on the other hand, are raptors that eat other birds and birds like the cuckoo that rob other birds’ nests. Once again, these “bad” species are being marginalized for perceived deficits of character rather than the behavior of the species itself. Religious scrutiny brings up the familiar issue of villainizing species and deflecting any empathy the species may need from the audience.

Spiritual application provides a deeper layer to the character tool that may not fit all works of anthropomorphism. However, it can be used to create a greater connection between an animal and the right spiritual audience. There are certainly other applications that can be analyzed in relation to the character tool, such as scientific character development.

HUNTING THE HORNED HORSE

My thesis film, *Hunting the Horned Horse*, is an animated short film that uses an omniscient narrator to tell the story of a fantastical animal, the unicorn. By mixing unicorn myth and characteristics from real animals, I explain how the unicorn was poached to extinction because it was believed its horn held magical healing properties. The horns glowed with bioluminescence and were a key component to communication amongst unicorn herds. The unicorns themselves do not express thoughts or emotions; though the narration does explain how a unicorn is shunned if it cannot communicate with its herd after its horn is cut off. The emotion is expressed through the narrator and the multiple visual connections that are made with real animals.

The story and science bring the unicorns to life through anthropomorphic narration. I chose to make the science as accurate to natural history as possible. The credits explain some of the animal behavior I used to create the unicorn, such as having a unicorn matriarch lead the herd similar to elephants. I also chose to not give my unicorns a personal narrative because I did not want to detract from the conservation message of the film with a talking unicorn. I am asking a lot for my audience to accept the unicorns as 'real'. The film is comedic with just the idea of the unicorns' existence, but then reality hits when the audience realizes that some animal products are believed to have healing properties, such as rhino horns and tiger bones. Much like Spiegelman's *Maus*, I use a unicorn mask on top of various poached species to allow my audience to detach from reality, but bring them back

with a strong conservation message. Through accurate science, giving numerous hints that unicorns are not actually real, and comparing the unicorn to real animals, I maintain a trusting relationship with my audience.

The character tool is essential when developing the unicorn. I do not assign human virtues to the unicorn, although it is already “a symbol of purity, healing, and love” in human culture. The unicorn is already extinct, so the only way for it to be ‘successful’ is to prevent what happened to the unicorn from happening to other species. Because the unicorn was poached to extinction, the ‘villains’ in this story are humans themselves. I did not want to patronize my audience because I still want to maintain trust with my viewers. I also did not want to single-out a specific culture for poaching because all cultures are responsible for the fate of each species, whether by being the one to actually poach the animal or by demanding a product through consumerism. I represent multiple cultures by the use of currencies. I suggest that “maybe it is not the poachers who need a change of heart, but the ones who crave the prize” after declaring that all poached species are victims of demand. Humans, as the ‘villains’, are given an opportunity to become the ‘heroes’ just with a simple lifestyle change.

Another aspect of character development in *Hunting the Horned Horse* is the idea of scientific character development. The unicorns’ science and behavior continuously builds on itself throughout the film, beginning with the unicorn’s scientific name and the basic bioluminescence of the horn, to how hunting lead to a decrease in horn length, and finally ending with the biological and cultural

comparison to other species. The science drives the narrative and the audience discovers new information about the unicorn throughout the story.

Although the religious aspects of unicorns were not addressed in the film, unicorns are connected to Christianity through spiritual application. The unicorn has been used as a symbol of Christ and purity. According to legend, only a maiden could tame the unicorn. It was said that the maiden was a symbol of the Virgin Mary and the unicorn was a symbol of Christ himself. In addition, the King James Bible mentions the unicorn multiple times. However, it has been discovered that this is due to a mistranslation. According to scholar Chris Lavers, when the Bible was translated from Hebrew to Greek in the mid-200's BC, the word "reem" was translated to "monoceros", meaning "one horn" (49-51). "Monoceros" was further translated to "unicornus" in Latin and finally to "unicorn" in English. The true identity of the reem was popularly associated with the rhinoceros (51). However, after much deliberation, it is now accepted that the reem was the now extinct aurochs, the wild ancestor of the domestic cow (56-57). Many versions of the Bible translate "reem" to "wild ox" now, but the fact that the unicorn is mentioned in one version of the Bible is still cause for curiosity.

My thesis film is one that pushes the boundaries of natural history and fiction into a conservation story. By using science as a character, I introduce my audience to a scientific critical thinking exercise. The anthropomorphic narration does not use the same formula as *La Marche*, Jim Trainor, or *Maus*, but this exemplifies the

depth of anthropomorphism that can be analyzed. Each film or piece of literature uses anthropomorphism in a different way.

CONCLUSION

Anthropomorphism will always be present in media as long as humans continue to seek an understanding of non-human entities. Rather than asking whether anthropomorphism should be used, we need to continue to analyze how it's used. Condemning all of anthropomorphism is unrealistic, but anthropomorphism is not always used properly, either. The biggest challenge is representing undesirable species in a way that will not hinder society's impression of said species. Better word usage will take animals from 'villains' to 'strategic hunters'.

Every piece of literature and film uses anthropomorphism differently with diverse anthropomorphic narration formulas. Metanarrative is an effective tool to tell both an overarching and personal narrative, fully encompassing multiple views of a topic. The metanarrative also integrates natural history or historical information that is expected of non-fiction pieces. Anthropomorphic narration is not the only layer that anthropomorphism can be broken into. Also, the character tool is not the only component that makes up anthropomorphic narration. This paper is just one small look at the big picture of anthropomorphism.

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