

REPRESENTATION OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC ANIMAL CHARACTERS IN PICTUREBOOKS

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Abstract: The article examines the psychological influence of the perception of anthropomorphic animal characters in Picturebooks on the child's mind and development. Explored the synthesis of the real and imaginary components of anthropomorphism in the aspect of ethics. Considered the relationship between the anthropomorphic representations of animals and the human society.

Keywords: anthropomorphism, perception, animal character, representation, Picturebook, artist-illustrator.

As a professional artist-illustrator, specializing mainly in books for children, in this article I would like to explore the issue of anthropomorphic representation of animal characters in Picturebooks, their perception and influence on children's mind.

Representations of animals in Picturebooks, which is the central subject of this article, play a vital role in further developing our cultural approaches towards animals, with corresponding to the real and symbolic perception of animal's characters.

As Sandra Waxman says, "Children's books provide something more than explicit information. They are cultural products that both reflect the orientations of their creators and may also affect the orientations adopted by their viewers." [6]

However, firstly, there is need to reveal the very meaning of anthropomorphism, its' historical origins and nowadays importance for children's education.

The word 'anthropomorphism' originates from the Greek language, which means *ánthrōpos* - human, and *morphē* - form. The anthropomorphic type of thinking obviously started with the earliest representations of mixture human and animal

forms at Paleolithic era - 40,000 years ago. Most of them had animal's figures with human's heads or, otherwise, human bodies with animal's heads. Since these creative works bear features of anthropomorphic thinking, they are the sign of rising human creativeness.

The developing of shamanistic and animistic types of religions, some of which still seen today, were possible due to deep connections with animals and nature in everyday life.

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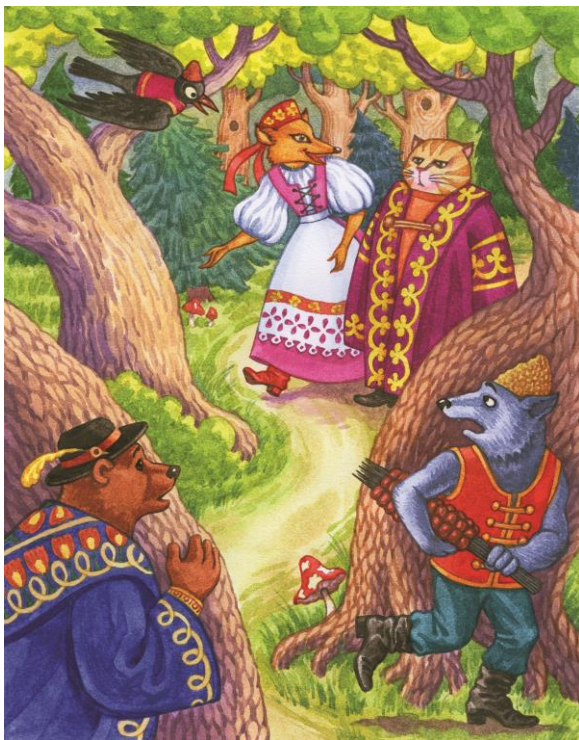


Illustration to "Hungarian Fairy Tales"

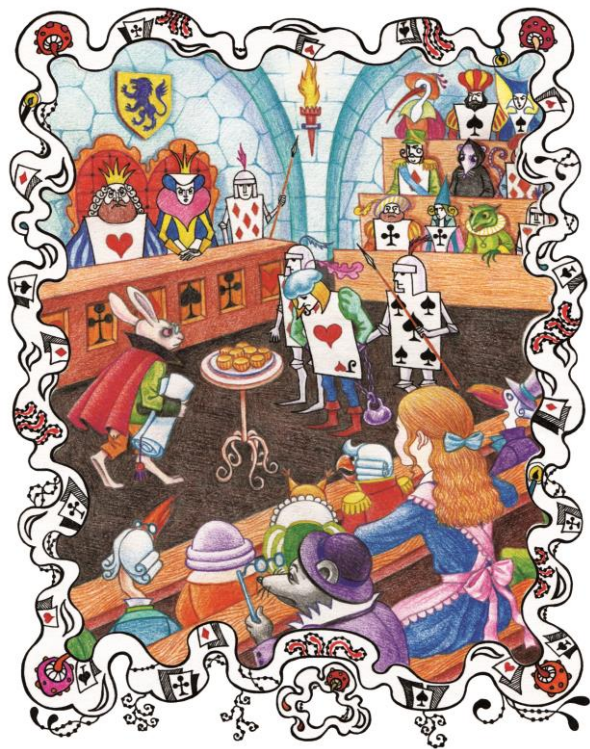


Illustration to Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland"

Coming back to modern children, looking at animal characters mostly only in Picturebooks, when all interactions with animals are virtual, children have very little experience of real animals and thus the problem arises that using imaginative animal descriptions influence on children's mind. Anthropomorphic animal representations dominate over real animals' images.

Winnicott in '*Playing and Reality*' states that animals support the growing child in both psychological and sociological progress. The child forms an attachment that create a safe environment for growth. [7].

Picturebooks reflect an evolution in living with animals. However, the most interesting is that the majority of child-animal relationships that we find in Picturebooks grounded in a humanist tradition.

The idea of how these representations might affect child's mind became the principal theme of psychologists' works. There is an element of ethical responsibility prevailing in any discussion on this topic. The Picturebooks provide models for communications with animals and, consequently, when artist depicts them he obliged to portray their presence truly. The Picturebooks have a deep impact on readers' socialization progression, because they read at a very early age.

The visual and verbal dimensions of Picturebooks' stories have a cultural background giving meaning to the animals comparatively to humans. One of the main ways to convey the anthropomorphism of animal characters is clothing. On the sample of anthropomorphic animal characters in *Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter Nikolajeva defines the importance of clothing in their depiction as the main aspect that shadows the boundary between humans and animals:

“Characterization by means of clothes is of great significance in Potter's work. Besides the notion of clothing an animal as part of the animal/human dichotomy, clothing also used generally in Picturebooks to communicate a great deal of information about the character, including aspects of social status, age, occupation and self-image. In terms of the animal/human spectrum, Potter focuses in several of her tales upon the conflict between human, civilized expectations and animal urges.”

[4]

The meaning of anthropomorphism in Picturebooks and the role it plays in the importance of animals is the key problem. Observation shows that there exists consent about the socializing purpose of Picturebooks for children.

Regarding the importance of animal representations Case writes, “Animal images can encompass the ambivalence we hold to our own desires and appear when the conflict between heart and head, passion and thought, nature and civilization, conscious and unconscious, is raging. Conversely animals can also appear as an

image of spirit, when the will to live has been low and an anthropomorphic guide from within needs to be externalised to give tangible form to a faint impulse” [2]

During the investigation of scientific works on this theme, I found that researchers mostly concerned of the misperception that can appear when children suffer a setback seeing the differences in behavior between human and animals, which then may lead to false conclusions concerning real animals. Examples below show that the researchers approve an apprehension that anthropomorphism obstruct children’s development and education.

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Illustration to “Hungarian Fairy Tales”

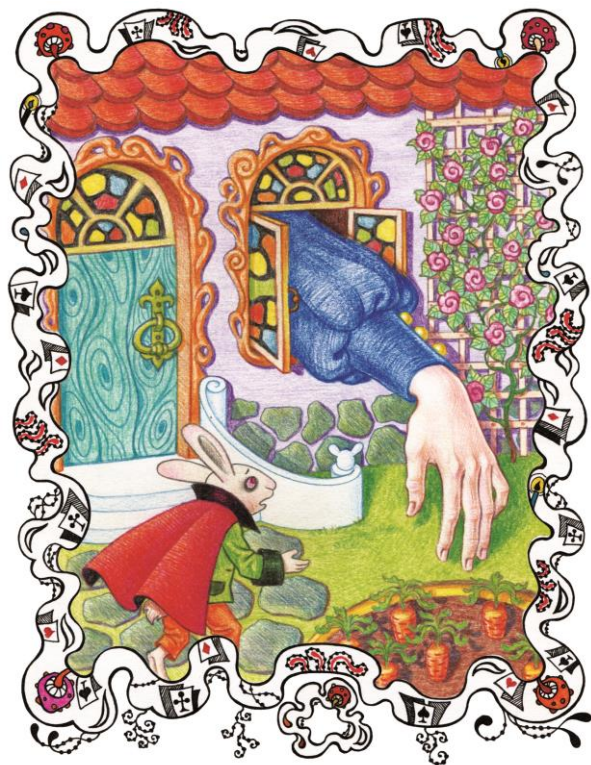


Illustration to Lewis Carroll’s “Alice in Wonderland”

In her article, Sonia Vogl clarifies this problem: “Animals have long been popular subjects in literature, especially children’s literature. However, they have often been treated anthropomorphically, to the dismay of biologists who feel that endowing animals with human emotions and motives presents misleading pictures of such creatures and may lead children to false impressions and expectations of real life animals” [5].

The misconception that real animals behave like their imaginary equivalents might lead to hazardous states for both sides, when people contact with real wild animals. There is always the balance between acceptance of interspecies differences and their cultural adaptation in anthropomorphism. On the other side, the positive sides of anthropomorphism in Picturebooks can be lost, if we concern too much on the dissimilarity between species.

According to recent experiential psychology researches, the use of anthropomorphic representations in Picturebooks impends to prevent children from obtaining realistic understanding about animals. ‘Realistic understanding’, in this meaning, interpreted as understanding originating from the real life. According to this view, anthropomorphism causes children to encounter with reality. They denote that child’s mind is not capable to differentiate narrative from truth and consequently unreal fiction might distort children minds. Psychologist Patricia A. Ganea in her researches writes about impact on children of ‘realistic’ as opposed to ‘anthropomorphic’ characters’ representations then they think of real animals: “Books that do not present animals and their environments accurately from a biological perspective may not only lead to less learning but also influence children to adopt a human-centered view of the natural world.” [3].

The boundaries that are central to the anthropocentric worldview distorted with the appearance of anthropomorphic animals in Picturebooks. Bruke and Copenhaver in ‘*Animals as People in Children's Literature*’ [1] emphasize the importance of anthropomorphic animal representations in human culture, encouraging the anthropocentric belief.

To the contrary, other scientist Sandra R. Waxman in her article points out that there is linking between animal representations in Picturebooks and the ideas that children forms about animals in the real world. “What is the relation between humans and non-human animals? From a biological perspective, we view humans as one species among many, but in the fables and films we create for children, we often offer an anthropocentric perspective, imbuing non-human animals with human-like characteristics.” Moreover, “children’s books provide something more than explicit

information. They are cultural products that both reflect the orientations of their creators and may also affect the orientations adopted by their viewers.” [6].

This view on research theme acknowledges anthropomorphism as a powerful instrument in childrens’ education. Animal behaviors, sometimes, can enlighten better with the support of anthropomorphism for young readers than with any scientific analyses.

Anthropomorphic animals are not always a symbol of anthropocentrism - due to their position as dimorphic creatures; they potentially can encounter human hegemony.

The analysis of anthropomorphism helps to reveal the ethical aspect of the Picturebooks, by questioning where the boundaries between the human and the animals found. Moreover, whether it is possible for children or not, to obtain truth about animals when these animals represented anthropomorphically. Anthropomorphized animal characters provide readers with idealistic vision on the human-animal connection and this special feature can lead to further transformation of children’s development.

Visually and verbally, anthropomorphism in Picturebooks sustain the anthropocentric view, contemporaneously confusing the boundaries between species. Thus, anthropomorphism motivates critical thinking in views on social dissimilarity and grading in human society.

In conclusion, I would like to summarize that anthropomorphic characters confront archaic and prejudice ideas about subordinate position of animals and human superiority while their bodies defined with features of both species. With the understanding that their precise form defies the nature-culture separating, these animals become thought provoking. They cannot reflected unconnectedly without losing substantial data since their bodies are the synthesis of natural and cultural phenomena.

Anthropomorphism, consequently, is an integrated approach to the expression and perception of human characteristics and behaviors in animals with the aim of

depiction parallels with the social aspects of life and universal values, while discussing the matter of animal and human interaction.

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