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Page 75-83

A Novel Approach to the Interpretation and Analysis of Animals: From Genera to Genre

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Abstract

Animals as characters can bring silliness and incongruity, making a story more enjoyable. But they also add a degree of emotional distance for the reader, which is important when the story message is personal, painful, or powerful. Significant animal work in literature and animal studies is combined with in-depth readings to present a novel way of classifying animals based on tropes rather than taxonomy and a novel way of organizing literary history that emphasises genera over genres. The book challenges us to reevaluate the place of literature in a society that views it as an important art form by causing us to see animals and our relationship to them through new eyes. Human worlds are built upon animal lives and deaths, both conceptually and physically. It is difficult to imagine how we could mark ourselves out as humans without other animals, for we have become humans alongside other animals in the sense of humans and animals living parallel but separate lives. From the beginning, these were lives that have always been and remain profoundly intertwined. However, it also calls into question the many ways in which animals are portrayed and arranged in human cultures and societies throughout the world, as well as how these connections might be altered for the benefit of both the individuals and the communities in the matter.

Keywords: Animal phobia, commercial filming, human-animal relation.

There is a wide range of ways that animals are portrayed in movies. Sometimes they are depicted as cute and cuddly companions, while other times they are shown as fierce predators. Where all animals in movies can be portrayed in a variety of ways, depending on the genre, tone, and message of the film. However, it is important to note that movies like any other form of media have the power to influence public

perception and attitudes towards animals. Some movies may portray animals negatively, which could lead to animal phobia or fear. It is important to remember that movies are fictional and should be taken as a representative of reality. Though it is fictional the over-exaggerated and scary details added by the filmmakers may lead to a wrong idea about animals and people may end up with the wrong perspective of the animal world.

When taking into account some of the moves like the *Piranha*, and *Deep Blue Sea*, *The Grey*, kind of gives a wrong image of these animals. It is true that the wild is scary and it is not easy to tame it but in the movies, it is somewhat exaggerated to an extreme level making people really feel so scared of the animal making them think that these animals should be removed from the face of human residing places. Fear is a common thing everyone has the reasons for that may be a bad encounter with an animal in their childhood or present time may lead them to be more conscious the next time whenever they come in contact with that animal. However, films and other media also play a significant part in this by portraying certain creatures, particularly carnivorous animals and fish, as the deadliest animals who are waiting to prey on you whenever they get the chance. Humans are the most dangerous kind on the planet and may cause destruction to the entire globe, yet these poor animals are mistreated in the name of their consumption category.

Any of the more than 60 species of razor-toothed predatory fish found in South American rivers and lakes have a reputation for ferocity that go by the names piranha, caribe, or piraya. The piranha has been portrayed as a hungry, indiscriminate killer in films like *Piranha* (1978). However, most species are scavengers or eat plant matter as food. Most species of piranha never grow larger than 60 cm (2 feet) long. Although piranhas can be found from northern Argentina to Colombia, 20 different species are found in the Amazon River,

which has the most variety. The red-bellied piranha, which has the strongest jaws and teeth of all, is the most infamous. This species, which may reach a maximum length of 50 cm (about 20 inches), hunts in packs that can number in the hundreds. If a huge animal is attacked, several groups may come together, but this rarely happens. In order to find prey, red-bellied piranhas typically disperse in groups. However, most piranha species never kill large animals, and piranha attacks on humans are uncommon. Red-bellied piranhas prefer prey that is only slightly larger than themselves or smaller. Although piranhas are attracted to the smell of blood, most species scavenge more than they kill. Some 12 species called wimple piranhas (genus *Catoprion*) survive solely on morsels nipped from the fins and scales of other fishes, which then swim free to heal completely.

In this fictional Hollywood tale, the fish were escaped stock left over from a decommissioned military experiment and had been genetically modified to be exceptionally good at finding and devouring human flesh. But what turned into horrors was the fiction turned into a real one when the seventy-weekend holidaymakers were attacked by a close relative red-bellied piranha in Rosario, Argentina, unlike the Hollywood version, no one was killed, although bathers sustained a variety of unpleasant injuries to their limbs and digits. But it is so sad to see this malicious news coverage about these harmless creatures that picture them as ferocious killers and are viewed as terrifying pack-hunting flesh-eaters. The truth that is unknown to the world through these media is that the majority of species of piranha (there are more than thirty) are vegetarian. Even the so-called ‘carnivorous’ types are at best omnivorous, consuming a wide and varied diet, with a ‘meat’ component consisting of insects and small fish rather than cows and people. It is undeniable that some species have extremely sharp teeth, but the most common ‘victims’ of their bite are the fishermen who have to remove hooks from their

mouths. However, what happened in Rosario is that the situation appears to have been exceptional since it occurred during an exceptionally hot year, in addition to concentrating the fish into a smaller amount of water and also encouraging a significantly higher density of bathers. The shoal may have started feeding when one bather was unintentionally "nicked" by a passing piranha, but they were not actively seeking out human flesh at that point. It is challenging to persuade the general public that piranha shoaling behaviour is anything other than nasty because Hollywood ideologies have permeated popular culture so thoroughly to believe in that way.

Now let's talk about the movie *Jaws*, which is another made-up scenario that has raised a lot of controversy among the public regarding shark attacks on humans. Attacks on humans by sharks are extremely rare and tend to be the result of highly unusual circumstances. Behavioural research confirms that shark distribution is determined by environmental conditions and prey abundance, not by the presence of humans in the water as depicted in the movies. Science is most important when it can challenge deeply held public perceptions with facts, but it is the responsibility of scientists to communicate this information more effectively than Hollywood sensationalism. Since the release of *Jaws* in 1975, shark populations have only fallen catastrophically. Over the last half-decade, populations of sharks and rays (a close evolutionary relative) have decreased by 71%. More than 100 million sharks are killed each year, and over 30% of all shark and ray species are considered threatened.

Why are more than 100 million sharks murdered annually, and more than 30% of shark and ray species are deemed threatened? The answer lies in the terrible depiction of these animals as ferocious, blood-hungry monsters that appear on movie posters. Most of the posters nearly 75% showed the shark's teeth. Bull sharks and great white sharks were the next

most commonly featured sharks, which was quite consistent with how the mainstream media depicts sharks. In every movie, there were terrifying sharks, shark bites, or shark-fearing characters. And there are more than a hundred shark films and the piteous thing is that sharks are consistently portrayed in a scary way. The lasting effect of *Jaws* is well known. In 2015, Christopher Neff from the University of Sydney, Australia, proposed the term the “Jaws effect,” positing that the film’s storyline has had a massive influence on people’s framing of shark encounters. The three basic tenets of the “Jaws effect” are the belief that sharks intentionally bite humans, that human-shark encounters are always fatal, and that sharks should be killed to prevent future attacks.

The media alters how we see the world. It can occasionally highlight a point that is rarely seen. Other times, the media can substantially distort the truth, instilling unjustified misunderstanding, hatred, or dread. There have been reported thirty-eight provoked shark attacks and it is not that *Jaws* was wrong in showing shark attacks, yet 88 attacks is a remarkably low figure given the billions of people that use the water every year. *Jaws* suggests that sharks are more terrifying and dangerous than they actually are by turning them into monstrous caricatures of themselves. According to National Geographic, 100 million sharks are killed by humans each year, raising the question of who is the more horrific of the two. But no bothers to know about the effect of these films on the animal all they care for is the annual income they could get out of it. It does not matter if a mass number of sharks, rays, or other predatory animals are wiped out from the surface of the world it would make any difference to them. Still, for the environment yes, because every creature is meant to play a role that is more important than human beings, and without them the whole ecosystem could collapse.

Newer films like 2011, *The Grey*, starring Liam Neeson portrays controversial and endangered wolves as uncharacteristically killing machines. The hero works in Alaska for an oil company protecting workers from wild animals. When he and others are in a plane wreck, they must fight to survive against a malicious pack of giant wolves. One by one the characters are killed off, leaving only Neeson standing for a last fight with the wolves. In a 2012 piece for *Psychology Today*, Marc Bekoff, professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado reports that only two wolf attacks on humans have been recorded in North America in recent years. There are strong oral traditions of wolf attacks but nothing comes close to the gross exaggeration of *The Grey*. Today wolf attacks on humans are rare enough to be almost non-existent and wolves have never caused any ambush as shown in the film. In 2011, wolves were delisted as endangered species, pushed mainly by legislators seeking re-election in western states. Science didn't support delisting wolves, and it's easy to see how films like *The Grey* can fuel more wolf-hating and then newly legalized wolf slaughter.

The issue of how the media portrays wildlife and the environment is as old as the narrative itself. Although many fairy tales have a pessimistic view of untamed wilderness and wild animals, it's easy to overlook the underlying messages in tales like *The Jungle Book*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Three Little Fish*, and *The Big Bad Shark*. Another illustration is *Hansel and Gretel*, who encounter the frightening, perilous forest where cannibal witches dwell. The portrayal of animals and wild places as evil endures in film, despite the fact that these are among the more thoughtful stories recently told to children.

In addition, the media significantly influences how we perceive the natural world. It is true that a single movie has the power to strangely capture the imagination over actuality.

Given that we are language-based animals and that language affects our thoughts and behavior on the most fundamental levels, it is almost impossible to view nature without the influence of media. You can sift through the media you take in and temper it with personal experience. Put the remote down and go outside to understand the world and nature. Numerous other instances of animal demonization can be found in well-known movies. Since there is nothing wrong with making commercial movies about animals and it is true that they are entirely fictional while using some facts, the issue arises when these portray these creatures in a negative light, inspiring people to fear for their lives and kill them while ignoring the fact that, like humans, all animals have the right to live on this planet as it is their home. What matters is how fictional depictions of animals influence and how people think about, more importantly, treating other animals. A key component of pop culture is film. One common subgenre of horror films is animal horror, which has produced some of the highest-grossing films ever. The majority of the films included a natural origin for the animal's aggressive behavior. In the majority of movies, animal and human contact resulted from human action. In particular, in 58 movies, humans invading the animal's territory set off the conflict, whereas, in the remaining 90 movies, humans brought the animal into a human environment either unintentionally or deliberately suggesting that, in the end, it is we humans who are the root of all evil.

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