

Introduction

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Alice Munro's works have unleashed a large critical coverage which, surprisingly, tends to overlook or elude the animal question. To try and redress this oversight, a literary symposium dedicated to her œuvre took place on January 8, 2016 at the University of Toulouse and adopted an angle of vision inspired from literary and language analysis, philosophy and eco-criticism to explore the potentialities of the presence of animals in most of her stories. The present volume gathers some of the papers which were delivered during this symposium and a few others have been added subsequently so as to present a more complete panorama of the animal question, ranging from the first volume, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968) to her last one, *Dear Life* (2012).

References to animals loom large as early as *Dance of the Happy Shades* which introduces the character of Ben Jordan's daughter, a young girl born on a farm in southwestern Ontario, who is also a persona for the author. In "Boys and Girls" her father raises silver foxes and she describes the killing and skinning and selling of their pelts to the Hudson's Bay Company. She makes her brother participate in a voyeuristic scene, peeping through a hole at a horse being killed to provide fodder for the foxes, and she tries unsuccessfully to rescue another horse from a similar fate. The narrator in "Walker Brothers Cowboy" compares the roots of maple trees to crocodiles while her father evokes the presence of dinosaurs walking on the plains where the small town is now expanding. In "Images," the narrator's father has a trapline for muskrats and she accompanies him in his forays along the river. In "The Time of Death," Patricia Parry screams because of the horror she has apparently unwillingly committed, the scalding of her baby brother, who will shortly afterwards die in the hospital. Patricia has "tiny pointed teeth faintly rotten at the edges" which "make her look like a ferret, a wretched little animal insane with rage or fear" (Munro: 1968, 99). In "Sunday Afternoon," Mrs Gannett walks so delicately that she looks like a

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bird, the bird whose name is encapsulated in her own patronym. In "the Office," Mr Malley has pictures of a puddle and a bulldog dressed in feminine and masculine clothing on the walls of his study and through the way he behaves towards his tenants, he shows himself to be a bastard. In "The trip to the Coast," May uses a little stick to prod toads in the belly until her grandmother makes her quit this act of sadistic cruelty.

The realistic description of the interaction between man and animal to be found in the first volume posits more than a relationship of similarity between the human world and the animal world. It sets up a contract based on an alliance, a process shown by Gilles Deleuze to be irresistible because it situates human beings on a line of deterritorialization which cancels all possibilities for them to reterritorialize themselves in the world of human beings only. Once a correspondence between animal and human is detected, it cannot be annulled, because it is not immediately established upon filiation and descent. The man who suffers is a beast, the beast who suffers is a man: this is the common fact between man and animal, says Deleuze, in his analysis of the logic of sensation in Francis Bacon's works (Deleuze: 1996, 21).

The purpose of the symposium of January 2016 and that of the subsequent volume is to try and confront the heterogeneity of the representation of man and animal throughout Munro's works, while stressing the similarity of the underlying common fact to be found in each of her stories. The ramifications of affects de-stabilize a unitary conception of the unified self. The process of individuation, as it is represented through the growth and development of her mostly female narrators, fosters a discovery of their multiple and proliferating sense of belonging and self-identification. In Munro's short stories, to become human is to acknowledge the world of animals and to acknowledge its multiplicity. As demonstrated by Deleuze, the multiplicity of the pack has little to do with the sentimentality of our relationship with domesticated animals: it is characterized by something seething and ineffable and it is linked with a return to a more archaic temporality, although it is not a regression but a creative "involution" (Deleuze: 1980, 292). "

In all of Munro's stories we find an attempt at recovering what Jean Christophe Bailly calls "a lost intimacy with the animal world," (Bailly 22), we find what Deleuze also calls "le devenir animal de l'homme," which translates uneasily as "the becoming animal of mankind." The French title of the symposium was originally: "devenir animal, devenir humain: la question animale dans l'œuvre de Munro." For this volume, the title has been shortened

to the animal question but the main endeavour is to try and capture one facet of the principle of reversibility that dominates Munro's work. This facet is concerned with the reversibility of humanity and animality. Munro's stories resist logocentrism: they resort to a logic of sensation based on the use of screams and onomatopoeias, they concentrate on affects and testify to the fact that writing is a corporeal activity which affects the body in evolution, always becoming otherwise. By highlighting the inextricable tissue of animality and humanity, her stories ultimately illustrate the force of an encounter through which all firm distinctions between species cease to obtain.

The five chapters that constitute this volume have been arranged in a loosely chronological manner with a view to contrasting early and late production. Starting from Munro's first and last but one collections, they move towards her last volume without adopting a strictly linear progression, if only because many contributions investigate more than one story or one collection at a time.

In the first section entitled "Of Fowl, Fur and Fish," Oriana Palusci concentrates on "The Shining Houses" and "The Turkey Season" respectively from *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968) and *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982). Through an eco-feminist approach, she strikingly sheds light on the last line of "The Shining Houses" by adumbrating the fundamental alliance between a hen and a woman who walks with her hands in her pockets and keeps a disaffected heart, because she is little more than a chicken herself. Similarly, in "The Turkey Season," the implications of the polysemy of the word "turkey" are shown to be essential to understand the enigma of Herb Abbott. Corinne Bigot concentrates mostly on Munro's last but one collection *Too Much Happiness* (2009) with the analysis of two stories, "Face" and "Child's Play," to demonstrate the alliance that children make with animals or fish. In the latter story, she lays the emphasis on Marlene's alliance with "the marlin," one of the biggest fish in the world, which can be called an "anomalous" animal. Because of its anomaly it suggests a connection to and a resemblance with the girl who is said to be "special," thus casting doubt as to who the monster is: the mentally handicapped child or the ethically challenged ones?

The second section is dedicated to foxes and stuffed animals and demonstrates their fictional and metafictional dimension through the study of three canonical stories. Biancamaria Rizzardi examines the presence of foxes in "Boys and Girls" (1968) and "Working for a Living" (2006). Lucile

Bentley analyses the stuffed animals in "Vandals" (1994). The former enhances the link between the representation of foxes and that of the father and makes a series of revealing allusions to paintings to develop her point, notably allusions to one painting by Franz Marc: *The Fox* (1913), as well as a bas-relief carving of a fox in Beverly Minstrel in Yorkshire. The latter shows that animals are used as something more than mere representatives of the natural world. In "Vandals" they are used as tools for the narrator to give flesh to the enigmatic Ladner and taxidermy becomes an apt metaphor for the act of writing itself—a metaphor that underlines the potential violence of writing.

The third section, gives pride of place to dogs, whether bitches or bastards, with three stories which mix memory and desire in a poignant way. Héliane Ventura examines "Bardon Bus" (1982) while Sabrina Francesconi investigates "Save the Reaper" (1998) and "Floating Bridge" (2001). The former argues that Munro renews the medieval tradition of courtly love with the figure of the St Bernard and rewrites the chivalric romance in a burlesque way, and that her ambivalent depiction of a magnificent bastard who is not a bastard but a St Bernard can be interrogated through Donna Haraway's concept of the inappropriate or "inappropriated" other. The latter conducts a functional stylistic analysis and carries out a close inspection of the language of the short stories, to foreground the grammar system of transitivity. Text analysis demonstrates that narrating the growing awareness of some characters alongside the hopeless, static indifference of others, Munro's zoopoetics ultimately weave a polysemic, polymorphic and polyphonic narrative space.

In the fourth section, "Of Horses, Goats, Wolves, and Other Animals," Janice Kulyk Keefer focuses on "The Bear came down the Mountain" (2002) to demonstrate that the bear of Munro's title seems more a bumbler than a predator which can't be viewed as anthropomorphized à la Goldilocks, but can easily be linked to the cruelly-treated dancing bears of European fairgrounds. He can also, as in "Rose Red and Snow White," be compared with the prince-inside-the-bear-suit, whose nobility is sadly travestied by his fur and claws and lumbering gait for there is something undignified in being this kind of bear. Walter Hesford argues that three stories in the bulk of Munro's oeuvre use the same first name for their female protagonist. Flora, the Roman goddess of spring and flowers, is a horse in "Boys and Girls" (1968), a friend of the narrator's mother in "Friend of my Youth" (1990), and a goat in "Runaway" (2004). He argues that this textual cross-referencing is not fortuitous and encourages one to investigate the relationships between a

runaway horse, a maiden lady and a scapegoat. Francesca Gianfranca Balestra specifically concentrates on the little goat Flora, and the presence of a few other animals in the Juliet trilogy (2004) to argue that mimetic desire and scapegoating as theorized by Girard form a crucial subtext in Munro's "Runaway."

The fifth section of the volume is dedicated to a single story in the last volume of Munro's œuvre, "Pride" (2012), which is analysed from two contrasted points of view. Héliane Ventura studies Munro's representation of the skunk as a Canadian response to two former canonical poems, "Skunk Hour" by Robert Lowell and "The Skunk" by Seamus Heaney. She opposes the proud and Presbyterian Canadian skunk to the depressed American and erotic Irish skunks. Jean-Jacques Lecercle focuses on the tradition of the emblem to envisage Munro's story as a twenty-first century resurgence which interrogates the meaning of pride. Is it arrogance, satisfaction or self respect? Is it a sad or a joyous passion? Does it decrease the power of the body or does it increase it? And how does Munro respond to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*?

Thus, the volume interrogates the functioning of Munro's stories through her treatment of animals, whether the animal exists as a literal character accompanying man's actions, or whether it appears in the text through metaphoric, mythic or emblematic allusions. By focusing on her entire œuvre, it investigates the processes of variation animals and human beings are submitted to from her initial stories to her latter developments. It simultaneously explores the stylistics, the thematics, and the ethics deployed in her narratives to recapitulate her art of the portrait as an art based on the animal presence. Her art of the portrait is simultaneously prosaic and poetic and it makes us wonder because it makes us see "*l'animal que donc je suis*" as "*mon semblable, mon frère*."

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