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Portrayal of Beast and Man in Colin Dann's *The Animals of Farthing Wood*

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Introduction

In Colin Dann's 1979 novel *The Animals of Farthing Wood*, the reader follows a group of wild animals as they flee the destruction of their native habitat, seeking refuge in a far-off nature preserve. During their journey, they face a wide variety of perils, the vast majority of which are in one way or another man's doing. The animals who band together in this bid for survival are of a variety of species, prey and predator alike, and they must work together in order to make it to their goal with a minimum of casualties.

This essay will examine the book especially with respect to the portrayal of species. There are several aspects of this issue which will be addressed, primarily the way in which species correspond to the major characters' personalities, but also the question of whether animal or man is portrayed as more human, and how domestic animals play into this balance of the wild and the civilized. Finally, a suggestion will be made as to a possible motivation for the handling and portrayals of species and humanity in the book.

Brief introductions to anthropomorphism and to a literary tradition which in one aspect bears considerable semblance to this work despite the years between them, interesting because of the similar patriotic undertones, will be given. The human traits of the animals as a group will be discussed and compared to scientific studies of animal behavior which are used as a rough baseline for a general view of the human-animal divide. Then, when looking at the relationship between species and personality, the focus will be on the preconceptions the target audience may have had from previous exposure. Such exposure could have come from many sources, but the focus in this essay is on idioms, folklore, heraldry, and similar animal symbolism which can be expected to have seeped into society.

The portrayal and characterization of predators and domestic animals in the book will then be discussed, bridging the gap between the wild animal and man, whose actions in many cases are portrayed as somewhere between thoughtless and willfully cruel. But just as the predators of Dann's countryside are not created equal, neither are all humans, and in discussing the book's portrayal of man the exceptions will be mentioned along with what seems to be perceived by the animals as the norm.

A History of Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism, from the Greek *anthropos* ('human') and *morphos* ('to make') (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*), originally referred to the picturing of deities as human in appearance, but is in modern day more used to refer to the practice of assigning human

characteristics, mostly emotions and motivations, to animals or abstract concepts (Tyler 268). The most common context in which this occurs in science is the attribution of human emotions or motivations to the actions of animals in studying animal behavior. Outside of the scientific world, we instead find human-like animals in fiction – in everything from old folktales such as the North American stories describing the coyote as a heroic trickster (Rowland 76-77), the African folktale explaining why Rabbit lives tail-less by the hills (Abrahams “How Squirrel Robbed Rabbit of His Tail” 185-186), or the storytelling traditions of the Australian aborigines (Briggs 15), to *Aesop’s Fables* which are attributed to a Greek slave living around the turn of the 6th century BC, to modern works intended for an adult audience such as Richard Adams’s *Watership Down*, as well as in popular children’s literature where animals might speak or wear clothing.

Historically, the use of anthropomorphized animals has had varying target audiences and purposes. Lerer talks about Aesop’s fables starting out as nursery tales, and advancing to being used in schools, surviving through the ages and getting adapted to the ideals of the time. In these revisions they were largely used to teach morals and to some extent language, but also for the purposes of satire (35-40). Rowland even gives an example of the case of political satire, naming the French stories about the ingenious Reynard (77). An argument can be made for the stories of Reynard starting to approach what Carpenter calls “the modern animal story” (111), in that the animals are referred to not simply by their species but presumably also receive at least some rudimentary characterization, though they may still largely represent roles rather than being persons in their own right, and thus would not be quite there yet.

Animals with human thought or speech have also appeared in countless children’s novels, including some of the classics of a literary tradition which developed following the industrial revolution. This tradition is often referred to as the Golden Age of Children’s Literature, and featured characters such as the White Rabbit in Lewis Carroll’s 1865 children’s novel *Alice in Wonderland*, which carries a pocket watch and worries about being late. Aesop had already by the middle of the 18th century started to inspire such stories, in which animals are used as a vehicle to make observations about humans (Carpenter 144). The tradition of using animals to talk about human society clearly evolved, as characters such as Beatrix Potter’s Peter Rabbit, who first appeared in the 1901 children’s book *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, have little in common with the archetype-driven fables of old. Potter, in turn, by her success made certain that even more children were exposed to such tales, and may well

have been a significant inspiration for Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (Carpenter 154), first published in 1908.

The Wind in the Willows also exemplifies another trait of Golden Age literature, which is of some relevance for this essay. The importance of the setting at the River Bank is part of a more widespread tendency of celebrating an idealized version of the British countryside, the Arcadia that Carpenter claims the Golden Age authors were all seeking in some form. Therefore, what is celebrated might not be the countryside itself, but the *idea* of it. Arcadia seems to be found most clearly in the most fairy-tale-like settings of them all – Grahame's River Bank, the Never Never Land of J. M. Barrie's 1904 play and 1911 novel about Peter Pan, and the Hundred Acre Woods where A. A. Milne's 1926 and 1928 novels about Winnie-the-Pooh are set. Similar patriotic love for an idealized England can also be found in *The Animals of Farthing Wood*, not least in the demonizing of the humans who destroy nature. It can be argued that this idealism puts Dann's novel, written in the wake of the environmental movement in Europe, into the tradition of these mostly pre-World War I works.

Beast Turned Man

This section, discussing the possible presence of human-like qualities in Dann's characters, will be comparing the animals' behavior to what the natural sciences have demonstrated animals to be capable of in a laboratory setting. My purpose in doing so is largely to avoid bias in what feats the general public would consider it possible for an animal to perform by introducing an objective baseline. As findings about animal behavior published outside of scientific journals are often presented with an air of marvel at how unexpectedly clever the animals in the study were, it can also be reasonable to consider that the general public, if anything, expects less of animals than they are really capable of. As such, any fictional animal surpassing the performance of real lab animals could reasonably be expected to also have surpassed the average human's expectation of it, possibly by a wider margin, making it safe to conclude that this animal has been given human traits by its creator.

In Dann's work, the capacity of the animals, when faced with the impending destruction of their home, to plan for a journey which originally took Toad just over a year to go through with, based on his account of being abducted in the jam-jar in March, spending four weeks in a tank in a garden, and eventually returning to Farthing Wood in May (16-17), already suggests human-like qualities in the characters. It has long been thought that the ability to plan ahead is unique to humans, and while research has shown that some corvids are

capable of planning the future (Raby et al.), the results of these trials were published long after the publication of the book. This means that regardless of whether the capability for planning the future is unique to the species tested or not, the decision of the Farthing Wood animals to flee *before* man destroys what remains of their forest goes against what was known or supposed about animals' cognitive abilities at the time. The uncharacteristic insight into the future thus shown by the animals is therefore an instance of anthropomorphization.

Throughout their journey the animals show a capacity for planning and reasoning; the rabbits and hares, for instance, refrain from eating the crops on a field which has been sprayed with insecticide, after noting that nothing living moves among the plants, and Badger and Fox serve as stepladders for, or outright carry, some of the smaller animals for various purposes at various points in the plot. At an early stage of their travels, Fox also breaks off a stick and uses it to get Adder out of a swimming pool. Heinrich and Bugnyar cite several studies which have shown that tool-making requires an understanding of causality; there is a possibility of using objects as the means to an end (962). The use of a piece of string connected to a food source only obtainable by pulling this string is often used to test understanding of such causality, and while primates and corvids have been shown to master such tasks (Heinrich & Bugnyar; Osthaus et al.), Osthaus et al. have shown that dogs do not seem to grasp the connection between a tool (the string) and the goal (obtaining food) (42). This suggests that Fox's actions at the poolside, not merely using a tool but also providing it himself, significantly depart from the natural capabilities of his species, as dogs and foxes are relatively closely related, both being members of the family *Canidae*. As it would be no stretch for a human to break off a branch to pull a friend out of the water, this can also be said to be a case of the animals' behavior being human-like.

It is clear from the above examples that the animals in the book possess human-level cognitive abilities, which is what allows the Farthing Wood animals to undertake, and for the most part survive, their long journey. The animals have, in a way, been brought up to the level of the human reader and become characters that the reader can more easily sympathize with, though the most important consequence of giving them high intellects must still be making the story at all possible. It can even be argued that the animals are not just on the same level as humanity, but above it, capable of drawing conclusions from events which it is doubtful any human would ever do. For example, the inhabitants of White Deer Park are able to tell Toad a great deal about nature preserves and Naturalists, as well as knowing that their own home is a preserve, and why, but how they came across this knowledge is never explained in the narrative. No indication is ever made that the animals of Dann's countryside

can read, so the only possible explanations for this are either that the animals have overheard humans explaining the concept to each other, or they possess some sort of limited omniscience. If the latter is the case it would in a sense make the animals better than humans, as the animals do observe that humans do not seem to understand or care about their habits.

The Beasts and Public Conception

Many of the conflicts within the group of Farthing Wood animals stem from their natural differences, such as differing diets, instincts and abilities. There is Adder's menacing of the mice and voles, Mole's guilt over having to be carried by Badger not to slow them all down, and the antipathy by the other animals towards the rabbits after their actions result in Fox's presumed death. The question is how strongly the animals' personalities, and the differences between them, personality-wise, correspond to the cultural context which would have colored the target audience's perceptions of the species.

To judge this correspondence to cultural context, aspects of the animals' personalities will be compared to traditions in animal symbolism, heraldry, idiomatic usage, as well as how they were portrayed in the scope of *Aesop's Fables*, as Briggs note the fables had a wide spread in England after their introduction (15-16). The animals selected for comparison are chiefly those which play major roles in Dann's novel, as their personalities are the most well-developed.

If the animals' personalities and behaviors are more human than animal, or more incidentally individual than typical for their species, this stands in contrast to Richard Adams's likely aims with *Watership Down*, published seven years earlier. *Watership Down* is also about animals undertaking a long journey to escape destruction at the hands of humans, but as is implied by the thanks given to R. M. Lockley, the author of the non-fictional *The Private Life of the Rabbit* (Acknowledgements 8), Adams also strived to portray the rabbits' behavior realistically. It is true that the animals in both works speak and think in ways comprehensible to the reader, which arguably would make those thoughts adjusted to human perception anyway, but that is in most ways where the similarities end. After all, the primary antagonists in Adams's work are not men, but other rabbits.

Fox

In *The Animals of Farthing Wood* Fox, elected leader of the party of animals at Badger's suggestion for his qualities of being "courageous, and able to make quick decisions" (29), is

portrayed as a conscientious, responsible soul. He is the first to suggest an Assembly to discuss the encroaching humans and the loss of drinking water for all the animals (4-5), he is worried more about his companions than about himself when he is separated from them, and he is deeply affected at every life lost in the party. Maybe especially hard on him is the death of the hedgehog on the highway, as his decision to cross it then was influenced by the approach of fox hunters. Though it was the most logical decision he could have taken at the time, he feels guilty about the possibility that he could have been more worried about saving his own skin than about the safety of his charges. This concern of his friends' well-being ahead of his own leads him to put himself into harm's way for their sake on more than one occasion.

Fox is also clever and crafty, which may be part of what Badger refers to in the later part of his description when he praises Fox's quick decision-making. Not only does he, as previously mentioned, think of a way to get Adder out of the swimming pool, which is a feat no fox in nature could have equaled, but he also manages to talk the farmer's dog, intent on killing him and presenting his corpse to its master, into leaving him alone. The dog is clearly a threat to him, as well as to his companions, being larger and stronger than any of them, so by turning back to meet the dog Fox is not only reinforced in his role as the self-sacrificing leader, but his quick wits are emphasized by his conscious decision to do so.

Such victory of the fox's wits over brute strength was also a popular motif in 12th century French beast epics, where it was used to imply the victory of resourceful common folk over the more powerful landowners. It is interesting to note that the symbol used for these landowners, Ysengrim the wolf, belongs to the species that is the ancestor of our domestic dog, who is defeated by Fox in this story. Also worth considering is that the dog is essentially acting as an extension of the farmer, who presumably owns his land, making this parallel all the more striking.

Idioms and fables tell a quite different story of the fox. Like the Fox of Dann's novel, the proverbial fox is crafty, but his craftiness is self-serving and deceitful, a perception that led to it being ill liked in the medieval ages (Gwynn-Jones 37). Rowland mentions that because of the low opinion held of foxes, the fox hunt, which is a recurring theme in the novel, only became a noble pursuit as it is described by the hunter horse in the 18th century, prior to which it had merely been a matter of exterminating vermin. The idea of the fox as an enemy to the farmer certainly lives on, in effect giving Fox enemies on two fronts: one which wants him dead for the sport of hunting him, and one which mistakes him for a thief and wants revenge for his lost fowl.

The origin of the perception of the fox as a clever, quick-witted animal is likely quite old; Rowland suggests that in looking for reasons behind animal behavior, the primitive man assigned to many animals one principal human trait which he then illustrated in lore “because he thought these creatures possessed such characteristics” (XV). Early characterization of the fox includes the fables of Aesop, in which the fox shows willingness to sacrifice others for its own gain, even if it sometimes, as in the fable of “The Ass, the Fox and the Lion” (Aesop 43) ends up falling for a very similar trick itself in turn. This twist on the fox’s wiliness is also exemplified in the proverb “[e]very fox must pay his skin to the furrier”, though that seems to hold a stronger connotation of one’s past acts eventually catching up with one (*The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 449-450). This view seems to be held by the humans in the novel as well, as it is taken for granted by the farmer and his wife that the good, honest Fox must be the same fox as the one that has been stealing their chickens, when he has done nothing of the sort.

Another aspect of the fox’s craftiness, again suggesting deceit, and no more appropriate for describing Fox as a character, can be found in the idiomatic expression of “[a] fox’s sleep”; the act of pretending not to care about events (*The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* 449). This play at indifference also is part of the idiom “sour grapes”, a reference to Aesop’s tale of the hungry fox who, when unable to reach a bunch of grapes, declared that “[t]he grapes are sour, and not ripe as I thought” (vii; 225). Finally, Rowland also makes mention of an outlier, a story in which the fox is a symbol not simply for craftiness, but for “the essential ruthlessness of life” (79), something which even less resembles the self-sacrificing Fox of the novel.

Toad and Badger

Toad, being the animals’ guide to White Deer Park, and Badger, acting as Fox’s deputy on several occasions, are clearly very important characters to the story. However, these animals are far less common in lore than any of the others discussed here, and thus the public’s ideas about their species cannot readily be determined. Both are depicted in illustrations in Gwynn-Jones’s book on heraldry, but neither is touched on in the text, making the symbolic value of either no more clear. This lack does not mean that Toad and Badger do not receive adequate characterization in the novel, though, so for that sake and that of completeness, they will be briefly discussed here.

Toad’s personality is much affected by the weight of the office he is burdened with when the animals set out on their great journey. He shows signs of being a rather jovial

and carefree character, especially when water comes into the picture, sometimes to the point where it puts him in danger, as when he goes swimming in the old quarry where the animals meet Whistler the heron and Toad is almost drowned by a hungry fish. He also shares Mole's passion for good food. This cheerful nature, however, has to give way to seriousness and even guilt when his mission as the animals' guide comes up; he is very distressed to find the highway which was only starting to be built when he last passed through is in heavy use on his return, and when he gets turned around midway between Farthing Wood and White Deer Park, he suffers from guilt and self-doubt. That he feels his mission to be such a heavy burden, yet still willingly shoulders it, may be explained by the word "faithful", which is used to describe him in the scene where the animals all arrive at White Deer Park (288). *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* does make mention of a supposed "toad-stone" that was said to be extracted from the head of a toad, and which would make it possible to either cure or detect poisons (1081), but this does not seem to have influenced Dann, as it is Fox and not Toad that ends up voicing his misgivings about the pesticide-sprayed fields the rabbits are tempted to eat from as they pass through.

Badger serves not only as a stand-in for Fox when this is necessary, but also as a mediator and peacemaker in the group. This role may have come to him due to his kind nature; he is the one who talks Mole into coming along on the journey at all, and ends up carrying him most of the way so that he will not slow them all down. Likewise, while Hare scolds Rabbit for his fear of the motorway, Badger goes in to mediate, and when Rabbit admits that he is frightened, the narrative notes that "[o]nly to Badger would the animals admit their faults" (229), suggesting that he is so reliably kind as to make even the nervous Rabbit drop his guard that little bit. Along with his kindness, he has one other major quirk: Badger is incredibly nostalgic, remembering and reminiscing about the days before humans started to intrude on the woods, and about the deeds of his father once this had started happening. The only reference to badgers to be found in *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* is a mention of the term "*to badger*" being a reference to badger-baiting, but like the mention of the toad-stone, that says more about how the badger was treated than about its supposed temperament.

Badgers do, however, appear in two very influential works of animal-centered children's fiction from the Golden Age tradition, namely Beatrix Potter's animal tales and Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. But Carpenter describes Potter's badger character Tommy Brock in the 1912 book *The Tale of Mr. Tod* as "turn[ing] ogre when [the rabbits] are off their guard" (146) and Grahame's Badger as possessing a "gruff common

sense” and a “dislike for triviality” (160). Grahame himself repeatedly describes Badger as “kindly” (70; 72; 78), but regardless of which interpretation of Grahame’s Badger is used, the two have little in common and cannot reasonably have formed public opinion about the species. Nor does Potter’s portrayal come off as similar enough to Dann’s Badger to have served as a particular inspiration for the character, while Grahame’s character may have had some influence. The two Badgers share both a paternal, caring attitude towards other animals and a tendency to reminisce about the badgers that came before them.

Tawny Owl

Tawny Owl is repeatedly, in varying ways, described to be of a proud and ambitious nature; when Fox is lost and presumed dead, he wants to co-lead the group towards White Deer Park along with Badger, and early on in the book, Fox remarks that Tawny Owl “can’t bear anyone else to arrange anything” (5), also suggesting an element of pride. This does not mean that Tawny Owl lets his pride get in the way of the good of the party, but in private discussion with Adder he fishes for compliments, presumably to console an ego bruised by getting what he considers to be too little credit for his intelligence.

The owl was indeed credited with great wisdom by Aesop, and it is possible the owl of “The Owl and the Birds” (259) also possessed some of Tawny Owl’s pride, as after being ignored once, it refuses to offer the birds further advice. *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* also mentions that “[o]wls are *proverbial* for their judge-like solemnity” (809, emphasis added), which could plausibly have been derived from the reaction of Aesop’s owl. Unlike that owl, however, Tawny Owl does (sometimes grudgingly) do what he is asked to do, even when he resents the suggestion.

Adder

Adder appears to take great delight in being perceived as malicious and untrustworthy; not only does he terrorize the smaller animals such as the field mice and moles at practically every chance he gets, including at the Assembly in Badger’s set, but he also beats around the bush and feigns ignorance when Tawny Owl looks to him for affirmation. Even when he does do things which benefit the group, he will claim that his motives were purely selfish, supporting the theory that he actively cultivates his image as the cruel, untrustworthy viper. The help he lends to the group is also the kind of help that befits that sort of character; while his strength is not brute force, he does in a sense act as the muscle of the group. It is Adder who keeps the farmer’s dog distracted as the other animals dig their way out of the shed

where they have been trapped, and it is also he that by hiding in the grass and biting one of the horses ends the fox hunt that almost costs Fox's newfound lady-friend Vixen her life. Even if he later tries to explain his interference away, and the animals indulge him that far at least, no one appears to really believe that his actions were anything but deliberately helpful. He seems to possess a not inconsiderable amount of greed or gluttony, considering his persistent fascination with the edible frogs in White Deer Park.

The mask Adder wears in many ways matches the symbolic significance of the adder as described by Rowland (17); traditionally it has been used to symbolize cunning in possibly an even more pejorative light than the fox, as well as being a symbol of envy and of the devil. While adders do not specifically appear in Aesop's fables, many of the stories he does tell about different kinds of snake involve the serpent biting one that has just offered it help or shelter; a comparison to Adder's desire to taste some of the edible frogs for himself does not seem very far-fetched, considering White Deer Park is the salvation of the Farthing Wood animals and the presence of the frogs is one of several factors that lead to the area being turned into a nature preserve in the first place.

The Predators

There are two events in *The Animals of Farthing Wood* which feature animals that stand out due to their behavior. Most other wild animals the group from Farthing Wood meets during their journey are curious about them, and welcome them for as long as they care to stay, but the shrike kills all the newborn field mice and voles, and two of the adult voles, saving them for later on the thorns of a bush. The bird is portrayed as cruel and lacking empathy, even seeming triumphant about having managed to secure a small mouse for itself, and Badger's remark that the species is "more dangerous than Adder when it comes to hunting small creatures" (152) in reference to a pair of shrikes that once made their nest near Farthing Wood implies that the horror at its collection of small prey is not born solely out of the companionship the animals feel for one another after having travelled together for so long.

The second incident does not have the same strong undertones of distaste for the predator, even though the results of it would have been far more disastrous for the group as a whole. The old carp that catches Toad as he takes a swim is described by Whistler as "wily" (213), and Whistler also mentions that it has eluded him for as long as he has hunted it, in a parallel to the stereotypical fisherman's stories about an old, crafty fish which never seems to take the hook. The carp, however, is never described as being particularly cruel for seizing on the swimming Toad, and Toad even asks Whistler to return it to the pond rather than let it die

on land, in a display of mercy for the beast that only moments earlier was trying to drown and eat him. This can be interpreted as an understanding on the animals' part that the carp was merely acting out of hunger, an excuse that they are not willing to grant to the shrike.

This unapologetic attitude to catching prey animals is not unique to the carp and shrike, however; when Tawny Owl returns to fetch Adder from the farmstead after the animals escape from being shut in the shed, they quite casually make dinner of a pair of rats without apparent remorse, and Fox and Vixen hunt together several times without the species of their prey being specified in any detail. In fact, Adder and Tawny Owl's rats are very much the exception; all other instances where the predators' dinners have been named by species, those meals have consisted either of invertebrates or fish, neither of which there is any conclusive evidence in the text of possessing the level of sentience ascribed by the narrative to mammals, birds, and reptiles.

That it is Adder that catches the first specified mammalian prey in the story might also tie back in with how he is portrayed as cultivating his image as a cold, vicious predator; Tawny Owl only catches a second rat for them after Adder shares his own meal. The necessity for predators to feed is admittedly alluded to in the very beginning of the story, when Fox and Badger assure the mice, rabbits and hedgehogs by the stream that they mean no harm. However, aside from Adder and Tawny Owl's meal mentioned above, this need has been met by other food sources or glossed over throughout the journey. Story-wise this has the function of avoiding the risk of portraying the ever-thoughtful Fox as in some manner cruel by describing him as eating one of his companions' conspecifics.

Man's Influence on the Beast

The novel, with wild animals as its focal characters, will naturally portray man through their eyes. As nature and man's notion of civilization often stand at odds, it makes sense to also explore two other aspects of the human-animal relationship: how do the wild animals see domestic animals, and how do the domestic animals see their masters? The domestic animal is, in a way, a missing link between the worlds of man and beast, bridging the two by being similar to the animals in body but having, perhaps, more insight into the mind of man than the woodland animals would. The Farthing Wood animals certainly have difficulty comprehending the human mind in regards to its attitudes towards animals; Vixen declares with some certainty that there must be humans other than the Naturalists who appreciate animals and hold hunting in no higher regard than the wild animals do, as "[o]therwise, why

do they keep what they call pets?" only to be reminded by Fox that humans do not seem to see all animals in the same way (205).

The Farthing Wood animals' first encounter with a domestic beast is when they are escaping from being trapped in a shed by a farmer's wife who, like her husband, believes Fox is the same fox that has been killing the farm chickens. The farmer's dog is set to guard the shed, and then, after Mole digs a way out of the trap for them and the farmer kicks the dog after discovering his quarry has gotten away, on its own accord starts tracking them, hoping to win its owner's favor by killing Fox. It is, in fact, so focused on this self-imposed task as to entirely dismiss Fox's protests when he says he is not the chicken thief, and will not give up until Fox manages to convince it that the farmer will just be even angrier with it if it robs him of the chance to kill his poultry-stealing nemesis. This suggests that the dog is compulsively attached to its owner, and the owner's favor means more to it than anything else; the only appeal that can discourage it is that which concerns its master's satisfaction. The dogs of Aesop who have a stated owner are also quite often portrayed as loyal and humble to varying degrees, such as the dog in "The Traveler and His Dog" which wags its tail and speaks to its master with respect even after being falsely accused of holding up his master (31). Thus, the farm dog seems to have been characterized within the scope of tradition, as well as serving the role of a temporary adversary for the self-sacrificing Fox to challenge in a battle of wits.

The next encounter is the one Fox has with the retired hunter's horse in the field after he is separated from his friend. This horse expresses much sympathy with both the hunted foxes in general and Fox in specific, claiming to be unfond of the practice of chasing a poor animal to its death even as it speaks of the trappings of the hunt with fond reminiscence. It is also proud of its noble heritage, which led it to experience the hunt in the first place; when speaking of the draft horse that used to share his pasture until recently, he dismisses the other horse with the words "of course, he was only working class" (162). This attitude seems to mirror the status of the fox hunt as an upper-class entertainment; the reminiscing about the parts of the hunt unrelated to actually killing the quarry can be read as honoring the tradition of fox-hunting if not some of the specifics, and the horse obviously sees itself as part of the upper class of its own species. Whether it is the way humans have always treated the horse "like a life-long friend" (163), a pride in its heritage, or a function of having a human on its back, however, the horse gives no indication that it has ever tried to deliberately let the fox get away on a hunt, thereby being just as obedient as the farm dog in its own way.

The final close encounter between the Farthing Wood animals and domesticated beasts is when a hunting party pursues Fox and Vixen just before they rejoin the rest of the

animals after Fox's absence. The dogs in this context show no particular signs of intelligence, neither shouting intelligibly at their prey nor seeing through Vixen's cunning as she weaves between the trees in the forest and crawls into the underbrush to shake them, while the humans easily see through her. The horses do not show any signs of intelligence, either, willingly pursuing the foxes on open ground and essentially acting as an extension of their riders, lending them the speed to keep up with the foxes. Rather than sympathy from the animals in pursuit, Fox and Vixen instead find themselves saved by Adder's intervention as he bites one of the horses, resulting in one of the hunters being thrown and injured. As even the hunting horse Fox meets does not provide an explanation for why the horses obey their riders when they are asked to perform such gruesome tasks, this could suggest that while under the direct influence of humans, domestic animals more or less give up their free will.

Man Turned Beast

Of all the creatures in the book, the humans seem to be those showing the least concern for their fellows, both animal and human. Farthing Wood, home to many animals, is torn down for human development, a thoughtlessly thrown cigarette butt causes a grass fire which endangers both humans and animals, and pesticide sprayed on the crops has turned fields of plants into death traps. Especially from the point of view of the animals, who share their natural habitat and as such are unlikely to have a strong concept of ownership regarding anything but their personal dens, sets, hollows, nests or tunnels, this must seem like selfish greed, bordering on genocidal intent. As the animals are the protagonists of the novel, their perception of man is very likely to color the portrayal of humans in the narrative. The lack of any sort of kindness being shown to the animals on the part of the humans until they have very nearly finished their journey thus paints the human race as being cold and unconcerned with the suffering of its fellow creatures. A notable exception to this trend is the firemen in general, watching the animals taking shelter from the grassfire on the small island without hostility, and the fireman who picks up Mole in particular. It is possible that this exception could be accounted for by the role firemen play in society; their job is to help, and Toad does note that the large number of men fighting the fire is there to correct for the foolishness of a single human (82).

Contrasted with the callousness of humans-at-large are the Naturalists, referred to by Toad as "a certain breed of human" (22), who set up nature preserves such as White Deer Park, and thanks to whom the animals of Farthing Wood can finally be safe. The Naturalists are portrayed as the exception to the rule to an even greater extent than the

firemen, barely even considered human, but something separate, by the animals; on seeing the Warden making rounds of the park, Vixen exclaims that “[i]t’s our Naturalist!” (291), marking the “breed” of human the man belongs to as more important than his species. By differentiating between this man, as well as the Naturalists in general, and humans at large, the animals show that they take into consideration not only the species of the individual, but the individual himself, unlike the farmer who at a glance assumed Fox was the same fox that had been stealing his chickens. This is, once again, showing man as far more ruthless than the animals. As ruthlessness and cruelty cannot be said to be desirable traits, man is thus, in general if not specific, rendered as lesser than beast; a turn-around of what would be most people’s definition of the word “animal”.

That man is generally portrayed as bestial does not mean that the humans of Dann’s novel are incapable of living side-by-side with animals. The case of domestic animals, and their relationship with humans, was discussed in the previous section, but there are also mentions early in the book of animals which Tawny Owl judges would not benefit from undertaking a long journey to a nature preserve, as they are comfortable enough living side-by-side with humans. Therefore some of the birds, such as the pigeons, are not even invited to the Assembly; they would have no interest in discussing the threat of humans destroying the wood if the wood’s destruction does not pose a threat to them in the first place. Once again, this serves to highlight the thoughtless cruelty of humans; while no mention is made of the pigeons’ fate, and it is indeed quite possible no harm befell them, humans do not restrict their killing solely to animals which may harm their interests. The farmers keeping the fields the animals pass through on their journey have indiscriminately poisoned not only vermin, but also harmless animals like songbirds and even beneficial animals such as the worms found dead in the earth by Mole, in their attempts to keep their crops for themselves. It is unlikely that anyone would argue that it speaks well of a person to harm or kill someone or something which has previously done you good, making this maybe an especially cruel example of how inhumane the humans of Dann’s novel really are.

Conclusion

All wild animals in *The Animals of Farthing Wood* – possibly with the exception of worms, insects and possibly fish, though the last depends on how the incident with the carp in the quarry is interpreted – are portrayed as capable of higher thought and to varying degrees the masters of their instincts. This ability for advanced reasoning has no support in ethological

research and, following this paper's assumption that the general public gives animals no more credit than science has, thus have been anthropomorphized by Dann.

It is, however, interesting to note that this anthropomorphization only seems to have any relevance, story-wise, for the animals that the Farthing Wood creatures have positive encounters with. For example, the shrike lacks empathy with its natural prey animals, while among others the hunter's horse listens to Fox's story with interest and sympathy. The need for the predatory animals to feed is as previously mentioned largely glossed over as well, possibly in an attempt to minimize the problematic juxtaposition between predators protecting some members of their natural prey species and eating others; note that the party from Farthing Wood contains no rats and rats are the only prey mammals named in the book. This mastery of instincts as part of a capability of higher thought is, as discussed, not naturally within reach for animals, making the animals, in that light at least, rather human.

The deviance of the animals, and particularly those with the largest parts in the plot, from their traditional roles may make their exact species unimportant; little in his personality or actions indicate that Badger, for instance, is a badger and not some other beast native to the English fauna. There are key elements in the plot that require that two of the animals are large enough to carry the smallest, that one of the animals in the party is an excellent digger, and that at least one of them has the potential of attracting a hunting party, but other combinations of species could have been just as plausible. Fox, especially, fits badly into the traditional role of self-serving trickster that his species would otherwise suggest, though it is possible the character has simply been given a generous helping of the traditional slyness without the customary selfishness to go with it. Even then, in general, it is far from a given that the story could not be essentially the same, losing little or no symbolic value, by recasting large parts of the cast into other species equally suitable to the plot, for instance as a hypothetical localization measure.

As shown in the discussion above, the animals of the main party have clearly been quite extensively anthropomorphized, but what of man and his animal servants? The domestic animals are essentially rendered without a will of their own when under their masters' eyes, while humans are judged separately depending on what group they belong to. The Naturalists and firemen, fighting against other humans' destruction of animal habitats, are safe from criticism, while the portion of humanity that through ignorance or malice kills wild animals for its own gain is rendered by Dann as less human than the animals it attacks. Through this portrayal of farmers and land developers as cruel, greedy monsters, contrasted with the moral animals who will only take what they need and move on, it can be argued that

Dann celebrates the romanticized notion of the English countryside like his Golden Age predecessors.

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