

ZOOLITERATURE: THEORETICAL AND CRITICAL APPROACHES*

ZOOLITERATURA: ACERCAMIENTOS TEÓRICOS Y CRÍTICOS

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Abstract: This article puts forward a reflection delving around animals, literature, and post-humanism with the aim to enrich the theoretical and critical debate on animal representation through an overview of zooliterature in Colombia. Thus, it introduces a conceptual framework based upon three categories, namely: “the allegorical, the fantastic, and being animal” intending to open with this classification new paths to broaden literary studies and adapt them to the shifting perceptions of the literary aesthetic object in contemporary discourses.

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Resumen: Este artículo propone una reflexión entre los animales, la literatura y el poshumanismo, con el objetivo de enriquecer el debate teórico y crítico sobre la representación animal a partir del abordaje de un panorama de la zooliteratura colombiana. De esta manera, se introduce un marco conceptual basado en tres categorías: “lo alegórico, lo fantástico, el ser animal”, con el fin de que esta clasificación abra nuevos caminos para que los estudios literarios se amplíen y se adapten a las cambiantes percepciones del objeto estético literario en los discursos contemporáneos.

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Palabras clave: animalidad, poshumanismo, zooliteratura, crítica.

The frontier between humanity and animality has resulted in a degrading animalization of certain human individuals or groups. (Segarra, 2022, p. 2)

Introduction

New epistemologies are emerging in contemporary development to challenge some dogmas governing our worldview. One of those emerging epistemes has to do with the resignification and revindication of the animal within the anthropocentric status. Although humans are part of the animal kingdom, the features that set us apart from other beings in this kingdom do not justify our pretended supremacy over them. That is why, the animal or the non-human living being appears on scene to –following French philosopher Jaques Rancière’s formulations– occupy a place in the new distribution of the sensible. That is, to open our mind to the idea that there are other bodies now occupying the social sphere.

In this process of re-evaluating the hierarchy between species, posthumanism and zooliterature converge. By decentering the human, posthumanism, and by presenting the animal through a particular aesthetic, zooliterature both contribute to modifying the perception of that “other.” This convergence indicates a change in cultural and philosophical dimensions by positioning the non-human—which traditionally occupied a secondary or perhaps invisible place—in a new position within our social and ethical construction.

In this line of thought, Cragolini’s reflection (2014) provides a valuable vision that makes up a premise when it comes to understanding what happens around new readings of humanism; that is, to propose the creation of new humanities or post humanities, grounded in respect for all forms of life devoted to minimizing suffering in others, whether human or animal.

[...]The animal should be thought of as ‘strange,’ and stranger than any other human stranger, in order to avoid a hasty assimilation of its mood//modo de ser into the realm of what is available for the living human... which is why that allows us to think and bring about new ‘humanities,’ or ‘posthumanities’ based upon respect for all living beings and the need to avoid suffering to the other (Cragolini, 2014, p. 16).

In the face of this new perspective aiming for resignifying what makes us human, the representation of the animal goes beyond mere drive, allegory, or entertainment. Beyond this, the animal is a body uttering signs, many of them expressing our affections, and those signs are decoded by humans to give value to our existence. In this

context, literature, from Aesop to Kafka and beyond, has offered us a zoography often ignored in literary analysis. Therefore, it becomes essential to delve more deeply into the relationship between literature and the animal to better understand the interactions between them. This analysis is crucial because it is not evident whether art has truly vindicated the animal or contributed to perpetuating the hegemony of the human in a world that we share with other forms of life.

Undoubtedly, addressing animality is not new. Throughout history, fields of knowledge such as philosophy, psychology, biology, art, and religion have inquired into the animal issue, each with its own framework of thought; and this interest extends today to ethics and legal sciences, which shows an increased interest in animal issues. However, analyzing animality from an epistemological perspective, particularly in a society centered in human being, is a more recent phenomenon. An example of this is the ongoing debate in the Colombian Congress aiming for a ban on practices such as bullfighting and cockfighting.

These discussions mark a transition in how animals are perceived, where there is a shift from being viewed as passive entities to being recognized as subjects of rights. This is a step forward in how society and culture understand and value animals and redefine their role and status in a world that human beings share with other species. That is why, Giorgi (2014) urges us to re-examine how animal life is integrated and represented in our culture, focusing on the perception, worthiness, and handling of animals in cultural and social practices (p. 17). This proposal calls for re-examining our social and political structure, rather than emphasizing on the importance of interactions, conflicts, and other issues often overlooked (*e. g.*, exclusion and violence against animals).

In this long journey of the animal issue, Suárez (2021) points out that as early as 570 BC, Pythagoras called into question animal-related concepts and reflections to encourage his dietary stance, which would be referred to as vegetarianism later in the 19th century (p. 14). Going even further back in time, we can see a defense of animals in doctrines such as Jainism (6th century BC), pointing out the noteworthy fact that it is not possible to separate the animal from human imagination, all the way up to Mariano García's words (2019) quoted in *Zoografías: literatura animal* (Zoographies: Animal Literature), who reinforced these ideas:

At every era, there have been people sensibilized towards animal issues, even though that sensitivity was rarer before than today. That is why Plutarch's paradox continues to be appealing: the animal helps us leave animality, bestiality behind, by helping us to practice compassion [...] Normally, men are the nightmare of animals, as Schopenhauer noted, or their fatal illness as Kojève put it' (pp. 11-12).

This overview leads us to examine the field of cultural studies, which, as early as the 1990s, has encompassed a wide variety of research works. Despite facing some resistance in the scholarly sphere due to its interdisciplinary approach, these studies have succeeded in analyzing and debating a diversity of discourses in social and cultural phenomena, which in parallel has allowed the animalist discourse to strengthen. In turn, this line of thought had its origins in the 1970s with Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (2018), a work that transcended the academic sphere to influence our current understanding of animal ethics, veganism, and animal rights protection. It is worth noting that, despite current criticisms of Singer, his work encourages a reconsideration of how we view animals and their place in the world. By attacking the superimposition of the human species (2018, p. 45), Singer rebuffs the idea of establishing moral differences between humans and non-human animals, which undermines the foundations of anthropocentrism. Thus, this perspective corresponds to the directions taken by zooliterature and posthumanism that seek to revise and disturb the understanding of the relationship between humans, non-human animals, nature and the extent of that relationship, among other issues.

In this sense, the growing visibility gained by the animal issue reflects the resignification it has undergone in fields such as ethics, promoting a comprehensive defense of its animal nature, which gives rise to trends that have led to a diversity of counter-narratives, such as anthrozoology, post-anthropocentrism, animal studies, and animal ethics, to name a few. Over the past four decades, these approaches have enriched the reflection on the animal issue in cultural systems, adding complexity to the understanding of our relationship with animals.

Art, and particularly literature, join this discussion, where the latter suggests that (and this is one of the aims of this research) to analyze the configuration of the animal beyond the hierarchies imposed by the anthropocentric paradigm. Seen in this light, it is pertinent to note that this article follows a method focused on three conceptual

¹ From the original in Spanish: *Toda época hubo gente sensible a los asuntos animales, un tipo de sensibilidad más rara antes y no tan extravagante hoy. La paradoja de Plutarco por ello sigue resultando atractiva: el animal nos entrena en la desanimalización, en ser menos bestias, al hacernos ejercitar la piedad... En su estado normal, el hombre es la pesadilla del animal, como dijo Schopenhauer, o en su enfermedad mortal, en palabras de Kojève*

categories, which will be listed below, through the presentation of examples where the animal theme is significant, paying special attention to certain works of Colombian literature². This demonstrates that there exists a literary corpus that could map out a zoological literature, or, at the very least, alert us to the fact that in the third decade of the 21st century, there has been a surge of works published by Colombian writers where animals are represented in more direct and profound ways highlighting their traits.

For that mapping to materialize, we need to encourage conceptual debates anchored in the principles of literary criticism and theory. In other words, we need to develop a literary theory based on the challenges posed by animality, in order to achieve a more accurate critique rooted in a conceptual analysis that delivers an unprejudiced approach to the phenomenon, in this case, animal nature. In this context, it is important to acknowledge that literary critical studies focused on the animal and their conceptual structure are just beginning to settle down. Therefore, there is some reluctance from some academics to admit the complexity and multiple dimensions that zooliterature entails.

Another helpful approach to understanding the context of this discussion is provided by philosophy, which has not only influenced our development as human beings but has also enriched our understanding of our relationship with animals. This analytical angle is clearly seen in the treatment of animals as subjects of rights, an approach that goes beyond mere legal considerations and delves into the sphere of animal sentience. In this regard, Jacques Derrida's work, particularly evidenced in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, is a clear example of this approach. This is because Derrida is addressing the ontological, epistemological, and ethical status of animals, and at the same time, he shows how interconnected humans and animals are. His famous encounter with a cat reveals the complexity of this relationship by challenging hierarchies and human dominance

² In the rich Colombian narrative tradition, the animal has always been present, as the "living other" whether as a secondary or a main character. Thus, the animal imprint can be observed, among other works, in Rafael Pombo's Fables, José Manuel Marroquín's *El moro* (The Moor, 1897), Celso Román's *Los amigos del hombre* (Man's Friends, 1979), Gabriel García Márquez's *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (No one writes to the Colonel, 1961), Rafael Chaparro Madiedo's *Opio en las nubes* (Opium in the clouds, 1992), Jaime Manrique's *Luna latina en Manhattan* (Latin Moon y Manhattan), Pilar Quintana's *La perra* (The Bitch, 2017) or more recently, Jaime Manrique with *Si me ves por el camino* (If they see me on the road, 2021), Alonso Sánchez Baute's *La mirada de Humilda* (Humilda's gaze, 2022), David Guzmán's *Animales de familia* (Family Animals, 2023), and María Ospina Pizano's *Solo un poco aquí* (Just a bit here, 2023). In this panorama, we cannot overlook animality in Indigenous oral literature, in Afro-Colombian narrative, in the rich children's literature, and, of course, we cannot forget Mario Escobar Velásquez's legacy, who was dealing with the animal phenomenon as early as three decades ago in three of his novels compiled in *Historia de animales* (Animal history, 1994), which gives him a place as a pioneer of zooliterature in Colombia, even before *Los amigos del hombre*, as while the latter contributes to this discussion, we cannot forget that it targets a specific audience and is framed in the sphere of the fantastic.

(Derrida, 2006, p. 21). Here, the philosopher demonstrates that the bond between humans and animals goes beyond evolutionary or linguistic differences, suggesting a primordial and shared bond. This philosophical perspective, which highlights the inherent equality among all forms of life, is key to critical analysis based on zoological literature and posthumanism.

The presence of otherness in the debate about the animal issue allows for creating categories of analysis that challenge traditional conceptions of animality and the skepticism that this entails. Thinkers such as Felice Cimatti, Mónica Cragolini, Giorgio Agamben, Anne Sauvagnargues, and, of course, Jacques Derrida, have developed a philosophical conceptual framework that brings the animal closer to human reflection. These authors propose to go beyond binary categories such as reason, language, and soul, which historically have created divisions, and instead consider the animal on an equal footing, recognizing it as a significant other. Thus, from these abstractions, frameworks of analysis and interpretation are generated that include non-human animals and other living beings, such as plants, in the spectrum of human consideration.

Indeed, animal critical studies set up a field of action that, while having clear research objectives, must be addressed from an interdisciplinary approach. In this field, literature occupies an important place, as its narratives have traced paths that have encouraged readers to view the animal differently. Therefore, such a resignification calls for the emergence of other methods to inquire into animal representations in literature, promoting the creation of theoretical concepts that allow literary criticism to address these emerging debates.

Seen in this way, literature does not escape the dominant idea of anthropocentrism, insofar it is situated in a paradox: on the one hand, it is indisputable that literary production has created zoographies or zoopoetics where animal representation (aesthetic utilitarianism) is key to account for a creative process or to give transcendence to ideas proposed by authors in relation to strength, freedom, instinct, among others. On the other hand, it is also true that literature has helped to question the human-animal binary logic that goes beyond the ontological to situate itself in the political and ethical spheres, and is part of the what is now known as the animal turn or animal critical studies.

In light of the above discussion, we propose an approach based on three categories that have been enacted in literature, both in short stories and novels, throughout history.

This proposal addresses some of Julieta Yelin's postulates³ (2011), particularly her views about the "end of the animal metaphor," as well as the addition of new concepts to enrich the study of zooliterature. This has a twofold aim: to understand how art conceives and represents the animal through literature, and to add to a critical apparatus that drives other hermeneutics focused on the human-animal drive addressed by literature.

Category 1: The Allegorical

There are numerous literary testimonies in which the animal drive works as an allegory of human's instinctual drive. An example is found in several stories by author Clarice Lispector (2021), including *The Buffalo*. It tells the story of a woman who goes to the zoo looking for an animal that will allow her to externalize her emotions. She looks at the lion but does not feel connected to its instinctive strength, then she contemplates the monkey and also finds no correspondence with its animal nature, until she finally reaches the buffalo, with which, through their gaze, she achieves a connection to release her emotions (p. 185). This makes it possible to understand that the natural strength of the buffalo and its fierce gaze are the closest expression to the feeling of that woman moved by hatred, and therefore speculate that this animal is an allegory of the woman's feelings of anger and frustration; in other words, the innate strength of the buffalo amplifies the emotions she is experiencing.

Still with Lispector (2001), *La pasión según GH* (The passion according to GH) reinforces reflection upon this category, since its main character, named GH and a cockroach engage in a duel of gazes (p. 76), in an episode that reminiscent of the famed encounter between philosopher Derrida and his cat. GH then decides to eat the insect, an act that symbolizes the assimilation and understanding of life in all its forms, even those that might be considered repulsive. On the other hand, even though the cockroach joins the human world, it keeps its animal status, that is, Lispector does not grant it phantastic characteristics such as language or some bodily feature beyond its oval and flat shape.

On another level, it can be said that GH shows a natural aversion to cockroaches, which is understandable given the general revulsion towards the amorphous or different. This attitude, however, is curious when we know that, of the more than 4500 species

³ Drawing from Kafka's short story "Investigations of a Dog", Yelin (2011) suggests that Kafka uses a narrative voice that breaks the traditional animal metaphor, which is key to reevaluate the animal beyond a mere symbol or as an extension of the human.

of cockroaches in the world, some, like the Ladybug, are admired for their beauty. That leads us to reflect on whether aversion to some cockroaches could be more linked to specific aesthetic aspects, such as their dark colors or asymmetrical shapes, rather than their species itself. This evident form of speciesism finds echoes in what Gisella Heffes (2013) defines as “an involuntary socioecological Darwinism” because a hierarchy of “superior” species is established that are protected and maintained not for their ecological or intrinsic biological merits, but for their aesthetic value on the eyes of human beings (p. 283). Those prejudices driven by aesthetic view dictated by human criteria are also observed in *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* (No one writes to the Colonel): “I don’t know what they see in that ugly rooster. To me, it seems like a phenomenon: its head is too small for its legs” (García Márquez, 1995, p. 24). These words from the Colonel’s wife reveal that some traits can be seen negatively when they do not fit into a set of aesthetic criteria. Additionally, this work introduces us to a symbolic and allegorical dimension: the rooster is not merely an animal, but also a symbol of emotional connection with the Colonel’s late son. On that being, the Colonel concentrates all his expectations, thus investing it with full significance that transcends its physical existence.

It is worth noting that this allegorical sense can be combined with the category of the fantastic, which will be discussed in the next section. Regarding this, in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, some elements allow to understand that mix as this novel is clearly a political allegory; but at the same time, it is grounded in the fantastic as the animals that inhabit the farm speak and discuss how they feel about their bodies being exploited by man. Beyond this and strictly characterizing this category⁴, non-human animals retain their nature, since they do not narrate or perform extraordinary acts. Writers are not interested in bestowing human features on animals, because they opt to directing their instinct to highlight human passions, emotions, or feelings. For example, in Jack London’s *White Fang*, the life of the wolf-dog is narrated from the perspective of humans without anthropomorphizing it, which symbolically illustrates the tension between civilization and barbarism through the domestication of the animal.

These considerations about metaphor and the animal were presented by John Berger (2001) in his work *Ways of Seeing*, where he argues that the first metaphor in literature can be found in the *Iliad* and speaks to the symbolic capacity of humans, to the point

⁴ A tiger continues to be a tiger; which draws the attention of the writer is the use of the tiger’s hunter essence to depict a starving human character.

of suggesting that animals were our first symbols (pp. 14-15). That argument brings into conflict the well-documented predatory outlook of humans toward animals, so that by considering the practices and cultural beliefs that integrate animal elements to interpret our experience of the world, a more intimate and less dichotomous relationship with animality is revealed. Therefore, in revisiting the *Iliad*, Berger discovers metaphors enriched by the presence of animals, including that of chant XVII: “as over a calf standeth lowing plaintively its mother, that hath brought forth her first-born, ere then knowing naught of motherhood; even so over Patroclus strode fair-haired Menelaus” (Homero, 2014, p. 347).

Seen in this light, it is undeniable that literature has favored an allegorical interpretation of the animal. This trend is fueled by various factors, such as the projection of the human “self,” the constant presence of the animal in religious mythologies, and the understanding that, as animals ourselves, we perhaps represent an expanded version of that allegory.

Category 2: The Fantastic

We know that the fantastic genre shakes the foundations of reality for the reader and leads them to accept the status of fictionality, so if a beast speaks, it is completely accepted. In this category, we could place Aesop and his famous fables, which, like in the previous point, aim to symbolize and transcend traits specific to the human animal. Hence, much of children’s literature, fantasy literature, myths, among others, are part of “the fantastic.”

In this line of thought, once again, it is understood that the non-human animal is at the service of humans and that the nature of these living beings is not taken into account. In the fantastic world, the animal ceases to “be”^{5, 6} to become a “non-being” because it is endowed with reasoning, with speech. This perspective is supported by a long tradition in the fantastic genre that places the animal in a role alien to its nature. In this regard, Lozada (2017) points out regarding animals that:

⁵ Among the numerous cases in this category, we should remember Latin American modernist writers, who took the swan as a symbol, evoking its elegance and plasticity, to reflect their poetics.

⁶ It is worth mentioning also that animality represented with a fantastic accent helps to understand certain cultural phenomena, such as the mythical phoenix, a bird reborn from its ashes, as a way to explain the inscrutable death. This applies to Ganesha, half elephant half man god, worshipped by Hindus.

In part of the literary production, they were nothing more than an anthropomorphic figuration that encompassed a moral lesson within the narrative discourse, even if it attenuated its moralizing forms by adding descriptive and narrative elements and incorporating the sense of humor (p. 19).

Therefore, for Yelin (2015), it is clear that there must be a break with this predominance. For this, she proposes the end of the animal metaphor supported by “The Metamorphosis.” She observes that in this novel, there is a crisis in the fields of representation traditionally dominated by the anthropocentric paradigm, as with Kafka, the boundaries separating man from the insect-animal blur, that is, they both are a unity and together they both overthrow the rule of time that previously governed them separately: “It is the end of the empire of the animal metaphor: there is no longer a dog or a man [in “Investigations of a Dog”], but a voice that, trapped in the process of transformation, accounts for that loss” (p. 71).

However, contrary to these Yelin’s ideas, it is evident that literature continues to configure the animal from a metaphorical angle, which entails a paradox: while attributing human traits to animals within the field of the fantastic separates them from their nature, in children’s literature, the fusion of the fantastic with the animal often seeks, through anthropomorphism, to promote their recognition and protection.

Drawing from these reflections, it is evident that in the sphere of fantasy, the animal plays a key role in the structure of the narrative. By analyzing characters like the White Rabbit and the Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland*, we may see that, in the magical universe conceived by Carroll, they are not mere elements reflecting his artistic vision because beyond that, through their anthropomorphism, cat and rabbit explore metaphysical dilemmas, such as the White Rabbit’s obsession with time, which reinforces the idea that, in narrative terms, an animal can embody the existential burden of the human and be placed on the same plane.

In this line too, upon reviewing the fables of La Fontaine and Aesop, we can infer that the personification of animals serves as a form of euphemism when addressing certain topics. Thus, the natural sluggishness of the tortoise is transformed into a subtle metaphor when referring to someone with a slow pace. Beings such as the wolf, the fox, and the snakes, who inhabit fables, embody negative aspects of human behavior, which constructs a euphemistic vision as they are culturally associated with evil.

By virtue of these problematic axes, this typification (allegorical, fantastic, and animal being) aims not to draw boundaries between one another, but to trace paths so that the animal is perceived in accordance with the demands of its intricate conception.

Figure 1. Conjunctions Among Categories



We observe in Figure 1 that the allegoric can overlap with the sphere of the fantastic and vice versa. To reinforce this, let's take the example of *El moro* (The Moor) by José Manuel Marroquín, a Colombian novel from late 19th century. We may say it has fantastic elements as it revolves around a horse telling the sad story of her life as an animal, enduring abuse, while it also serves as an allegory of the exploitation of “things”, as a result of the advent of modernity. Another sample is *La mirada de Humilda* (Humilda's Gaze), by Colombian author Alonso Sánchez Baute. Here, there is a narrator who observes a dog named Humilda and recounts what makes her “be,” that is, what makes her an animal. Therefore, it presents an allegorical nuance in which a process of domestication prevails, marked by affection between them. However, Humilda, apart from being a character, is also the narrator of the story, which is clearly a fantastic element.

As will be seen later, the categorization “animal being” can be implicated in the “allegorical.” For now, let's say that there are novels and stories that structure animal characters without compromising on granting them characteristics of *homo sapiens* or beyond the possibilities of non-human animals.

Category 3. The Animal Being

Within the described conceptions, this category could be perceived as purist, as it focuses on the animal simply “being” without resorting to narrative artifices. If an allegory or metaphor arises from the plot, it is not because of any intentional pursuit for the animal to communicate or symbolize something specific, but rather an aspiration to portray its nature.

Thus, this categorization neither allegorizes nor exceeds the natural condition of the animal by granting it human qualities. Here, we speak of the “being” of the animal; we reflect on its own status, and there are no limitations after comparing it to the human animal. *Si me ven por el camino* (If They See Me on the Road, 2021) by Colombian author Jaime Manrique illustrates this concept well because it portrays a rooster that is simply a rooster without resorting to narrative gambits or intending to imbue it with symbolic significance to enhance the novel’s hermeneutics. The only human aspect is its name, which is directly related to the legendary African-American boxer Jack Johnson, yet the rooster is still the main character of the novel.

Now, how does the “being” of this animal, and by being we refer to singing, eating, pecking, and defecating, become the core of the work? In this regard, it can be said that the novel is consciously crafted by Jaime Manrique in the sense of recognizing animality, which implies narrating it without intrusions and literary devices, to the point where the rooster, devoid of logos and speech, occupies a space in the lives of the other characters: ““The rooster gave Gaspar a hostile gaze [...] and lunged at the boy. The feathers on its neck bristled like needles, as if the rooster had seen a lethal viper” (Manrique, 2021, p. 27).

“Like” which acts as a simile in the description, serving to establish a comparison, is part of the author’s intended message and it is, thereby, a projection of the rooster’s nature. Nonetheless, recognizing its comb, beak, feathers marks a boundary, and in no case does it confer the rooster peculiarities typical of the fantastic realm. In other words, the narrator does not interfere with the inherent being of the bird, which is why the way he tells the story is about placing what the rooster is at the forefront, to then generate an interpretation of what it does.

In *The Old Man and the Sea*, such a stance is reinforced, since in the merciless struggle between the huge marlin fish and Santiago the fisher, the resistance of the first one to avoid falling into the hands of the human predator is revealed. However, that

situation does not lead the author, American Ernest Hemingway, to hyperbolize any survival action by the marlin. In fact, the fact that the fish is ultimately devoured by sharks (Hemingway, 1995, p. 134) and not by *homo sapiens* reinforces an affiliation of this story to the category of “animal being.” However, it should also be noted that during the epic battle between man and fish, the dominant interpretation of that novel reads it as an allegory of the struggle against adversity, the refusal to give up, among others.

As expressed earlier, for the “animal being” to be revealed in literature, it is sufficient to let it exist. To understand this, perhaps it is enough to read the memorable passage from Dostoevsky’s novel *The House of the Dead*, where an eagle with a broken wing reaches a prison and its instinct leads it to hide in a corner. There, it is attacked by a dog, while the inmates show scarce compassion towards the wounded eagle. But one day, the inmates decided to take it out of that place because it was going to die of starvation, and that was the moment when the animal gained strength and flew away. Upon seeing this, one of the prisoners said: “She doesn’t look back! Not even once! Then another prisoner replied: Did you think she would do it to thank us? She’s free, she lives her freedom” (Dostoevsky, 2016, p. 138).

This excerpt highlights that the eagle can evoke compassion in human beings, but it cannot in any way respond to the feelings of *homo sapiens*. It is evident that in the case of domesticated animals (such as dogs, cats, and even cows), different dynamics emerge that can only be explained by examining other complex processes, such as speciesism that arises when domesticating certain animals based on the projection of stereotypes of beauty, consumption, among other aspects. However, it is important to note that this controversy is not addressed here, as it is not the focus of the proposed analysis.

From another perspective, *Moby Dick* can be considered a novel that belongs to the categories of “animal being” and the “allegorical,” as the protagonist, the enormous sperm whale, does not display fantastic characteristics. However, despite the detailed description of whale hunting aiming to raise awareness of their recognition, it is important to say that the epic battle between the white whale and Captain Ahab suggests an allegory of revenge and perseverance. Additionally, the author’s intervention can be identified to give importance to the story, as the vast ocean does not prevent the crew of the Pequod from encountering Moby Dick.

In other words, the narrative time and space are arranged to present a nemesis that lends credibility to the story.

It should be clarified that what happens in this type of literature is not an apology for animals. By analyzing what Colombian zooliterature pioneer Mario Escobar (1994)⁷ does in *Historia de animales* (An animal history), we may interpret that the author's intention is to challenge the idea of man as the king of creation in order to reflect on premises such as the right to life, freedom, and bodily integrity. Therefore, a literature-related critical analysis of the animal issue should advocate for revising the way art has viewed these living beings and contributed to maintaining hierarchies.

The works gathered in *Historia de animales* (1994), namely, *Marimonda*, *Historias del bosque hondo* (Tales from the deep forest) and *En las lindes del monte* (In the jungle's edge), are characterized by some respect for the essence of these beings. This is evident in "Historias del bosque hondo," where the narration is always external, because giving animals voice or logos would lead to anthropomorphization. In this sense, the author is careful to establish that distance, since, as explained before, when a story gives voice to the non-human animal, it leans towards the fantastic. This detail is essential because the true symbolic animal is man, and it is language that sets him apart from the rest of the species. Cimatti (2021) puts it like this: "It is language that produces the 'subject,' and, on the other hand, animality is animal precisely because it is not traversed by language" (p. 19).

In this respect, in *En las lindes del monte*, Escobar (1994) problematizes what is created through language, which is evident in his way of narrating when the protagonist forms a special bond with a dog, whom he calls Rufa. Later, a cat and a male cat appear, whom he also names Rufa: "How will you call her? / –Rufa. / –Rufa? That's the dog's name. / –Yes. I'm not going to complicate my life with names I often forget" (p. 17). In this passage, the author's intention is to reveal that an animal's name does not constitute a differentiating element of its identity; it is suggested that a name is just a sound to which the animal responds as a result of domestication.

Finally, let's talk about another novel that is part of the corpus of Colombian zooliterature: *La perra* (The bitch), by Pilar Quintana. Here, the category of "being"

⁷ At least three arguments support this premise. Firstly, the timeframe of publication, with all works being published during the 1990s, a period when animal critical studies were just emerging in the epistemological horizon driven by cultural studies. Secondly, this is the only author who wrote three novels apart from anthropocentrism at that time, rather focusing on "the living other", represented in animals, without the need to resort to the fantastic genre, typical of children's literature. Thirdly, these novels reveal a form of animality coming not from exoticism or hierarchy often seen in literature. Instead, they display a narrative vision more interested in approaching the animal nature without altering or intervening it.

animal is also addressed through the main character, Chirli, a female dog who acts in perfect harmony with her nature. Chirli simply “is,” and her construction as a character does not exceed the limits of what an animal can do. By analyzing the environment of the animal, characterized by abandonment, mistreatment, uncontrolled reproduction, and rejection, we can see that these are circumstances that many stray animals face. Thus, Chirli integrates into the narrative directly and without appealing to excessive sentimentality.

On the other hand, through the connection between Damaris and Chirli, this novel can evidence the concept of “becoming animal” proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (2010, p. 239) in the sense that new forms of subjectivity are explored that are not limited by *human-centric* standards.

Damaris’s corporeality and consciousness correspond to those of Chirli, allowing her to connect with the animal world and configure a denied motherhood. Remember that the protagonist becomes obsessed with having a child and sees the dog as an object of desire to fulfill her wishes. Chirli’s act of giving birth to her puppies instills in Damaris the idea of procreation and overcoming her infertility. Damaris becomes Chirli.



All the considerations presented so far determine that the approach to zooliterature implies establishing theoretical-critical-based analyses that explore the dynamics of animal representation and foster new readings of this phenomenon. Yelin (2017) has already provided an enlightening definition that serves as a starting point when describing zoo literature as: “a series of works in which recognizable images of animals or—since at least a century ago and mainly due to the influence of the Kafkaesque tradition—of the becoming-animal of human characters are offered” (p. 15). From this perspective, it is clear that Colombian literature reveals its marked participation in the treatment of the animal issue. Then it is essential to stop and look around and develop a hermeneutic focused on what “the living other” can reveal in the realm of literary aesthetics.


Consequently, examining the representation of the animal must transcend its mere identification to approach what its nature demands. For example, when exploring animality aspects in José Eustasio Rivera’s *La Vorágine* (1924), in any of the myriad species found in it, we move beyond the description of a jungle scenario to delve into the study of a zoography that reveals unknown aspects of a country and that promotes awareness to recognize and accept the “living other.” In turn, this will allow for a broader view of the aesthetic dimensions of this novel.

Category Conjunction

After presenting the conceptualizations of each category, in Table 1, we aim to illustrate how these categories interrelate or converge and also to show in a concise manner how, given their initial conception, some of these categories could be incompatible with each other.

Table 1. Category Conjunction

| Categories Entering in Conjunction | | | Description | Example |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| F |  | A | The “fantastic” happens when an animal reasons and narrates to—as any other character would do—utter their own experience. If this way of saying is so powerful that it becomes an allegory-related symbolic representation, then we can say there is a conjunction between F and A. | The classical British work <i>Black Beauty</i> told from the perspective of a horse |
| S |  | A | The “being” animal happens when an animal is not granted human attributes or qualities alien to its nature. If this ways of being in the animal is kept and, as a character, it interacts with humans to the extent of generating interpretations and appropriations of meaning, then we can say there is a conjunction between S and A. | The classical Spanish work <i>Platero and Me</i> , where a donkey does not speak or reason, but the narrator interprets the animal’s feelings. |

F: Fantastic A: Allegory S: Animal Being : Conjunction

It should be noted that, as explained above, some categories are incompatible and therefore cannot come together. This is the case with “being animal” and “fantastic,” as if the animal cannot be, it ceases to be one or the other. That is to say, the fox in *The Little Prince* enters the realm of the fantastic by speaking directly to the prince; consequently, it has ceased to “be” an animal.

The turn towards the animal is about making a pause and considering our own animality and that of the other sentient beings to reread and resignify narratives that have excluded the living other. It is important to clarify that this does not intend to challenge the literary canon. For example, hating the hero Odysseus who, after arriving in Ithaca, is indifferent to Argos, his faithful dog who waited for him for 20 years and seemed to be waiting for his arrival to die peacefully. Thus, rather than blaming the

man for what he is and has been, it should be emphasized the need to accept that the discourse of the human-animal must also address the animal or nature, and at the same time, it should be devoid of the belief that it is the supreme being of the kingdom.

Likewise, without the human being, there is no animal turn, since it is the only one who can communicate and raise awareness of what the animal is entitled to as a sentient being through its capacity to create through language.

We conclude this reflection by noting that critical animalist studies focused in literature and their conceptual framework are just beginning to emerge, especially with the reception of philosophical posthumanist thinking in Latin America as a backdrop. This natural conceptual gap entails acceptance issues to the phenomenon and makes it not uncommon for certain academics to put up resistance to accepting that in the animal-literature link some issues may arise that intersect with different intensities and therefore require thorough analysis.

In our country, there is a wide literary production that addresses animality without biases. Therefore, the recognition and consolidation of Colombian zooliterature require literary studies that explore the animal theme, moving away from exoticism and the notion of human superiority. María Ospina's *Solo un poco aquí* (Only a little here, 2023) precisely demands that: knowing that the beauty of animals is revealed in their inherent nature; a premise that is, among other things, magnificently illustrated through the flight of a *tangara* soaring the skies (Ospina, 2023, p. 57).

It is evident then that the unspeakable resides in animals, and it is up to humans to narrate/fictionalize the indeterminate, the inscrutable in the animal world. As such, in the past two years, Colombia has produced literature aimed at expressing the “being” of the animal, indicating a shift in perception where the animal is no longer simply seen as an object, but as a living being with dynamics and characteristics of their own. This approach allows animals to be presented in art as beings deserving aesthetic appreciation, granting them value beyond any connection with humans.

This article presented a conceptual framework composed of three categories: the allegorical, the fantastic, and the being animal; each category offers a different perspective for analyzing how the animal is represented in literature. Therefore, this classification intended to provide analytical tools that facilitate a broader understanding of the ways in which literature addresses and represents these interactions. Applying these categories in our analysis helps to reveal and appreciate the diversity of approaches with which

literature manifests and enriches our perception of the animal world, thus contributing to a broader vision of the human being essence itself.

Consequently, the proposal for the “being animal” does not seek purism, that is, it does not claim a reflection of the pristine nature of that “living other” since we can never know what or how an opossum is looking at. What we pursue is to broaden the horizons of research on a topic that is barely entering into conflict in the panorama of critical animal studies from the perspective of literature. For now, it is necessary to return to certain works, even those inscribed in the literary canon that address the animal theme. It is also necessary to give space to emerging novels and stories to compile them to allow their classification according to these or other categories of analysis since, as it was demonstrated, not every work involving an animal can be conceived in the same way.

On the other hand, it is clear that literature has contributed to the exclusion of animals through their allegorization and the use of their bodies for the construction of characters closer to human beings. At the same time, there are authors who offer careful forms of reflection on the animal being; their narrative style, aware of other forms of life, is an example of literature’s concern for that “other living” manifested in the non-demanding of signs and in the distancing from anthropomorphism.

The animal was here before the human, and what we are seeing in the field of critical animal studies could be considered a return to that origin. It is not about a regression to savagery, but an opportunity to reconsider otherness and recognize that other forms of life are closer to us than we imagine.

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