Ailuria:

A Creative Exploration of Adapting Animals to Fiction

by

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To the animals of the world,

We may never be able to cross the chasm,

but I hope we can always gaze across it

with childlike wonder,

unyielding sympathy,

and an earnest desire to build our bridges

in spite of the distance.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the use of anthropomorphized animal characters in literature through the lens of an author writing an animal story. The academic portion serves as a guide through the often-complex process of creating these stories, and it argues that authors have a responsibility while writing them: We cannot understand animals completely, and if we fill in the blanks without taking proper care, there will often be issues of consistency, improper messaging, or even real-world consequences. It analyzes the specific reasons why an author may choose to write about animals, the challenges of writing about them, and the wide array of considerations an author may need to make to create animal characters. For each point, there is a discussion of the specific choices made for the accompanying creative portion of the paper: *Ailuria*. *Ailuria* is an incomplete animal-fantasy novel that shows the beginnings of implementing the academic portion's ideas.

Preface

The scope for this project was originally much larger. The academic portion would have additionally included more research on the history of animals in literature as well as biological research on specific animal species. The creative portion would have been a full rough draft of the entire novel. As the writing began for this, however, I quickly realized that a project of this scope would be impossible to complete for multiple reasons. The creative writing took up much more time than expected and was turning out much longer in terms of word and page count than I had predicted, especially toward the middle portion of the story. As for the academic portion, I felt far more drawn to the subjects included in this paper—the reasons behind writing animal characters and the choices behind the writing methodology—than I did the other subjects. The topics I ended up focusing on were what I was truly interested in, and they by themselves took a long time to research.

Therefore, at multiple points throughout the process of writing this paper, I made the choice to limit the scope. The creative portion became half of a novel rather than a full novel. Then it became a work-in-progress snapshot rather than a polished rough draft. The academic portion became a more focused, in-depth exploration of writing methodology that broke down as many subjects related to animal literature as possible. Despite the limitations in scope, the paper that resulted is still much longer than I had anticipated.

I will also note that the academic portion was not written at the same time as the draft of *Ailuria* that accompanies it. That draft was written before and during the time I was researching the creative and secondary works talked of in the academic portion. In

some ways, this made sense: I had started the creative work before the idea for this whole project was conceived, and waiting to write the academic portion second made it easier to talk about the choices made for *Ailuria*.

However, this methodology also ended up being backward in some ways, as I learned a lot more about my priorities and what changes I wanted to make to *Ailuria* through actually writing the academic portion than I did just doing the research. This would have fit with my original plan, which had included a set of extensive revisions to *Ailuria* after the completion of the academic portion, but writing the academic portion took much more time than anticipated and did not allow enough time for the revisions. I still plan on writing further drafts of *Ailuria*, so any changes in preference I made will be reflected eventually, but they will not be reflected nearly as much in the work's current state as I would have liked.

That said, my passion for this topic certainly grew throughout this process, and I am excited to continue learning about animal literature and working on *Ailuria*. I hope that others who love animals or animal literature can take something away from this paper, whether that is an enjoyment of the academic or creative work, a usage of the discussion toward writing their own stories, or an inspiration for expanding upon the academic discussion in a new way.

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Academic Portion: Bridges into the Uncrossable Chasm

Introduction

I believe it is fair to say that animals are, and always have been, integral to the story of humanity. We have used them for food, transportation, physical labor, war, and many other purposes. They play roles in many of the largest world religions. Some are our pets, some live in our back yards, and others pose significant dangers to us. Our relationships with various animal species and our understanding of them has evolved throughout our history, but their overarching importance to us has never truly diminished.

It is not surprising, then, that animals have carved out their own space in literature. For a variety of reasons—some of which will be explored here—we have a desire to create and utilize animal characters. The individual stories and the intentions behind them lead to different results: Some authors choose to create animal characters that are human in all but appearance, while others choose to create animal characters that look and act as close to the way the animals are in nature as the author can possibly achieve. However, the wording here gives away the inherent difficulty—no matter how closely we study and interact with animals, we can never fully understand them.

In her seminal work on animals in children's literature, *Animal Land*, Margaret Blount succinctly states:

> The great gulf between human and animal can never, in this world, be crossed. All writers who used animals as dramatic material are attempting to cross it and their methods may vary; they may leap, build bridges, or even pretend the gulf isn't there at all. (17)

Her point resonated with me deeply, for I have been working on an animal fantasy novel of my own, and I have found it to be a unique challenge. There are many conflicts an author of animal fiction runs into that would hardly cross the mind of an author of human fiction—some of which cannot be resolved in their entirety. In an effort to learn different methods of handling these intractable problems, I turned to examples in literature. Some of these examples presented valuable insights into how one may approach these characters. Others showcased the pitfalls of handling these stories without proper care. The aim of this thesis is to unravel the complex constructions of these "bridges into the uncrossable chasm" and to apply the lessons learned to my own bridge: the aforementioned in-progress novel titled *Ailuria*.

One may ask, however, what the value of exploring these issues is besides finding the topic to be generally interesting. First, I believe that by exploring in-depth the issues that arise when writing animal stories, and by delineating the pros and cons of alternative solutions, I can create a foundation for other new writers of animal fiction. For each issue, I will explain the choices I made regarding my story, and someone reading who has the goal of writing an animal story in mind can analyze what choices are right for them and accept or reject any of my own assertions or decisions.

Second, and perhaps the more crucial point, is related to the idea that literature affects human perception. All stories, whether it is the primary intention or not, sway us toward a viewpoint. The author can do this consciously or subconsciously. If animals are depicted sympathetically in a story, the audience might come away thinking of animals more sympathetically. If animals are depicted in a negative light that is not generally reflective of their nature, people may come away with an undeserved bias against those

animals. Knowing the difficulties of adapting animals as characters and the implications of certain decisions can help readers and authors properly temper unintended biases. It is all right to have a viewpoint on animals and choose to express that viewpoint, but one should know what they are doing.

A rather extreme yet illustrative example is the ramifications of the film *Jaws*. Directed by Steven Spielberg and based on the novel written by Peter Benchley, the 1975 film presents the story of a man-eating shark that terrorizes a New England town. The shark in the film is not anthropomorphized in a physical sense, but rather in its motivations—its seemingly apparent desire to target humans and hold a grudge. The film led to real ecological damage: Trophy hunting spiked in popularity, and public perception of sharks swayed toward fear, in turn harming conservation efforts. By 2022, shark populations had declined by about 50% compared to 1975, and while that population decline cannot entirely be attributed to the film, some experts believe it was a contributing factor (Germain). Losing sharks leads to a ripple effect: higher populations of fish, lower populations of sea grasses and coral, higher levels of carbon, harm to the climate ("Why Sharks are Vital"). Peter Benchley himself regretted the effects of his novel and went on to campaign for the protection of sharks. This is not the only way that animal stories can have unintended consequences (further examples will be explored), but the hope is that, through study, analysis, and thoughtful consideration, these kinds of consequences can be avoided.

There are four more important notes before launching into the discussion. The first note is two important definitions, beginning with "animals." While a human is a type of animal biologically speaking, that fact is not useful for the language of this discussion.

For convenience, “animals” will be used to refer to all animals besides humans. The second definition is “literature.” Definitions of literature vary, but the one I use is more inclusive. It includes mediums beyond novels and short stories, such as television and film. It also includes works beyond what some may consider “serious” fiction and ranges into works that have found widespread popular appeal.

The second note is that these explorations of animal literature will not be wholly comprehensive. The vast majority of the works studied for this thesis are Anglo-American, twentieth- and twenty-first-century works. This is a limited cultural perspective, but it is a necessary limitation due to the already broad scope of the project. Future scholarly research would be required—and enthusiastically welcomed—to bring further cultural and historical viewpoints to the discussion.

The third note is the exact list of works I will be pulling examples from and analyzing. I have chosen a wide range of works. Most are children’s literature, as animal fiction has ties to this age range (which will be explored in the first chapter), but a few are not. Some are fantasy, some are political allegory, and some are neither. Some are novels, some are short stories, and others are films or television shows. The idea behind this variety is to examine works that cover diverse intentions for writing animal fiction and a wide range of methodologies to achieve those intentions. The following are the children’s books and short stories I will include: “The Tortoise and the Hare” (Aesop, originally told in Greece around the sixth century BC; I pulled from Barnes and Noble’s *Aesop’s Illustrated Fables*, 2013, no translator or editor listed); “The Tale of Peter Rabbit” (Beatrix Potter, 1902); *The Wind in the Willows* (Kenneth Grahame, 1908); *Winnie-the-Pooh* (A.A. Milne, 1926); *Stuart Little* (E.B. White, 1945); *The Lion, the*

Witch and the Wardrobe (C.S. Lewis, 1950); *Charlotte's Web* (E.B. White, 1952); *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (Robert C. O'Brien, 1971); *Redwall* (Brian Jacques, 1986); *Wildwood* (Colin Meloy, 2011); and *The Wild Robot* (Peter Brown, 2016). The following are the children's films that will be included: *The Lion King* (1994), *Brother Bear* (2003), *Kung Fu Panda* (2008), *Kung Fu Panda 2* (2011), *Zootopia* (2016), *The Lion King* (2019), *The Bad Guys* (2022), *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* (2022), and *The Wild Robot* (2024). The following are the books I will include that are not classified as children's books: *White Fang* (Jack London, 1906), *Animal Farm* (George Orwell, 1945), and *Watership Down* (Richard Adams, 1972). Finally, the following are films and television included that are not children's media: *Jaws* (1975) and *BoJack Horseman* (2014–2020). Plot details will be discussed for many of these works. Additionally, I will be referencing some non-creative, seminal works about animal representation in culture and literature and other various academic sources.

The fourth and final note is that, while I will be pulling from secondary scholarly sources that analyze and comment on one or more of these works, I also believe there is value in my own observations and analysis. As I have mentioned, I am approaching this project from multiple points of view: as an English major writing an animal story, as an honors student doing an academic study on numerous creative and secondary works, and as a lifelong lover of animals and their stories. This gives me a perspective that not many others have, and I will attempt to use this vantage point to provide useful insight.

I - Why Write Anthropomorphized Animals?

Anthropomorphized animals have been a part of storytelling since the genesis of the art (Markowsky 460). This is something that has not changed across thousands of years of human history. Ancient civilizations included anthropomorphized animals in their mythologies. The ancient Egyptians often depicted their gods with animal heads, such as Horus with the head of a falcon or Bastet with the head of a cat. Ancient Greek myths had several human-animal hybrids, such as the centaur, minotaur, satyr, and harpy. Anthropomorphized animals can also be seen in fables, folklore, fairy tales, and all kinds of other literature throughout the centuries. Aesop's fables have persisted for thousands of years, and they are filled with animals who speak and interact to teach various lessons.

The full history of anthropomorphized animals in literature is broad in scope and not the primary interest of this discussion. Instead of attempting to recount it, I will focus generally on why authors choose to utilize animals in literature. It is important to note that while I make an attempt in the following sections to categorize these intentions, they are in no way exclusive to one another. Just because an animal story provides commentary on human history does not mean it cannot also be using animals for entertainment or symbolic purposes. Overlap of the following intentions is common, if not more common than having one singular intention, and I do not wish to give any impression of the contrary.

Animals as Symbols

Specific animals have been used for symbolic purposes in an extensive selection of works. In *Animals with Human Faces*, Beryl Rowland states that early humans saw

animals as “exemplifying human traits which [they] either admired, feared, or disliked. In time [their] ideas about animals were confirmed in religious rituals, literature, and art” (xv). The early associations that were formed between animals and specific traits then evolved throughout history. For example, “if the fox had been a symbol of the Devil in the medieval bestiaries, it was still the symbol of craftiness; if the snake in the grass was not the Old Serpent beguiling Eve in the Garden, it was still the symbol of deceit, speaking, as it does yet, with forked tongue” (xvi–xvii). Ultimately, this reinforcement of associated ideas has become more concrete. A common language has been born across thousands of years, to the point where “most animal symbols are traditional, belonging to the mythology of everyone, eternally present” (xvii).

However, it is important to note that these symbols often tell us little of the animals that are themselves being utilized. As Steve Baker puts it in *Picturing the Beast*, animal symbolism is “in no way hindered by the fact that its meanings need owe *nothing* to the characteristics of the animals it employs” (62). He claims that animal symbols are often arbitrary, which can lead to strange consequences when we utilize them for certain purposes. One such purpose he speaks of in depth is the national symbol, such as the bald eagle being used to represent the United States and the concepts of freedom and bravery. Despite the intended simplicity of national symbols, there is “no consistent and reliable relation between the animal depicted and the meanings conveyed or even intended. The apparent power of these images rests on a most fragile foundation” (34). For an example of this in the case of the bald eagle, one can listen to the sound recordings of their vocalizations. Rather than the long and powerful screech that many may be familiar with from films, bald eagles usually produce high-pitched, whistling notes; the eagles are often

dubbed over with the sounds of red-tailed hawks, since the hawks' screeches are considered stronger (Craft). The powerful national symbol of independence and courage is not to be trifled with, so instead accuracy to nature takes the fall.

Even though animal symbols are often inaccurate, are often manipulated, and have faded some in their pervasiveness, they are still important to animal storytelling. Many nowadays still think of the fox as a clever trickster, the snake as deceptive, and so on, and symbols like these are still used in modern stories. Look no further than the film adaptation of *The Wild Robot*, which released in 2024 and features a fox character who, while being a sympathetic character, is still presented outwardly as a trickster. Another example is in the Disney film *Zootopia*, where the fox stereotype is directly acknowledged and challenged for the character of Nick Wilde. He starts the movie with the mindset that "if the world's only gonna see a fox as shifty and untrustworthy, there's no point in [him] trying to be anything else" (59:53–1:00:02). He then spends the movie breaking away from this stereotype and helping save the city of Zootopia. Lastly, as mentioned before, stories like Aesop's fables, which are still used for their didactic purposes, lean on (and likely introduce to children) animal symbols. These symbols can be effectively used in conjunction with the other purposes listed in this chapter to create wonderful stories, and it is safe to say that even if the validity of animal symbols can be undermined, their importance cannot.

Animal Symbolism in Ailuria

When writing *Ailuria*, I chose not to be bound by animal symbols; therefore, I did not intentionally characterize any of the characters based around traditional ideas of their

traits. For example, the fox character Hyra, while being intelligent, is not portrayed as a deceptive trickster. As will be seen in many of the following sections, one of my goals for writing the animal characters is to be true to the animals as they exist in nature if possible. This comes from a desire to teach about animals (a goal that will be discussed in upcoming sections). Since animal symbolism for character traits is not something that is consistently and accurately derived from nature, I did not feel obligated to utilize it. Instead, I will have the authorial advantage of characterizing as I see fit.

Animals and Children's Literature

Animal literature has a strong and undeniable overlap with children's literature. It seems that children like anthropomorphized animals and adults like telling stories about them. There are a multitude of reasons that inform why someone writing a children's story may want to utilize anthropomorphized animals. With there being many viewpoints, complexities, and overlapping concepts within this subject, I will not attempt to be comprehensive. I will try to present some possible ideas to help illustrate the connection, but more in-depth discussions of animals in children's literature will be left to scholars more focused on the subject.

In her article "Why Anthropomorphism in Children's Literature?" Juliet Kellog Markowsky suggests four reasons why authors utilize these kinds of characters. First, for an author wanting to utilize animals in their story, anthropomorphizing them allows children to identify with the animals. Second, these kinds of characters are fantastical and allow for children to witness fantastical worlds. She relates this to a sense of escapism—not in a negative connotation but more as a kind of exploration. Third, utilizing animals

allows for authors to get character traits across quickly—something done using the animal symbolism of character traits that has already been discussed. Markowsky claims that this creates immediate variety for the characters in an author's story, and any symbolism a child has not seen before will quickly become familiar. (To this, I would add that using different animals also makes the characters visually distinct from one another, further contributing to this variety.) Fourth, animal characters can provide humor through exaggerated imagery and by being caricatures based around their symbolic traits (460–461). All of these reasons sound plausible, but some have suggested even further justification for children's book authors to utilize these characters.

Thomas A. More, in the article "An Analysis of Wildlife in Children's Stories," talks about children's literature as a piece of how children interact with wildlife overall. He proposes three kinds of encounters children have with animals: "direct natural experiences, direct artificial experiences, and vicarious experiences" (19). The first type of encounter, direct natural experiences, are interactions with animals in nature. These are the most accurate yet most limited experiences; most species are not easily observed, and in urban settings the number of animals is further limited. The second kind of encounter, direct artificial experiences, are things like "zoos, museums, circuses, and nature study programs" (19). These experiences are less accurate, as the animals' behavior will be changed in some way, but they are still more accurate than the third kind. The third kind of encounter is the vicarious experience. As More describes, these are filtered through the lens of an author or editor and provide the greatest misinformation. Here is where, as has been pointed out before, children are introduced to symbolic, often arbitrary, meanings of animals, and the animals seen here are also often anthropomorphized. More calls this "the

child's single most important source of contact" with wildlife, since many children do not have as many opportunities for the first two kinds of experiences. Children's literature, on the other hand, presents "unlimited" opportunities for interaction with wildlife (20). So, while animals in children's literature are not always accurately depicted, they are important to teach children about animals that they would not know of otherwise, and they are a crucial piece of a child's experience with the natural world.

Blount, in discussing the various kinds of children's literature, talks about two more links of children to animal stories—animal toys and pets. Both are large contributors to animal fiction. On the subject of toys, Blount comments the following:

> That toys and their human owners should be able to enter adventures together is a dream that most children have. Adults can appear to make it come true by hinting that after dark, or in some other dimension, child and toy can live together on equal terms and have experiences of which the child has only to say 'remind me' and the adult story teller will unfold the adventure before his eyes — as A. A. Milne did, or anyone who has united child and bear. (176–177)

A. A. Milne authored *Winnie-the-Pooh* and its follow-ups, which are very famous examples of stuffed animal stories. These stories not only put children on equal footing with toys, but with the wild animals the toys (sometimes only marginally) represent. In Milne's story, for example, a bear goes through these two levels of interpretation before reaching the character of Pooh—first turning from a massive, dangerous creature to a harmless, cuddly anthropomorphized toy, then turning from that toy into a kind talking creature. And Milne does a great job of incorporating the fact that they are toys into the storytelling. For instance, Eeyore's tail being removed and reattached can be seen

through the lens of a toy wearing down and being repaired, and Kanga and Baby Roo's abrupt appearance that confounds the other characters can be interpreted as a child receiving new toys. Pets fill a similar role in the minds of children and in children's literature. Blount goes on to say that "pets, like toys, are friends, confidants and helpers, the comforting resource for children, between them and the grown-up world of parents or others who arrange their lives, or the reality outside home that may sometimes be too painful to be faced" (191). Blount then remarks that the humanization of pets is often done delicately in literature: These stories are often dreamlike situations, one step away from the real world, where the rules of reality are just a bit less defined and animals can talk. Pets and animal toys, both being important factors of many childhoods, further contribute to the imaginative escapism and fantasy spoken of earlier. They are important links between children and animals, and authors writing anthropomorphized animals can tap into these links to tell stories that allow childhood fantasies to be realized.

Before moving on, I feel it is important to note that animal stories do not have to be directed toward children. There is, however, an unfortunate historic bias that they should. Baker states, "Received wisdom has it that the tendency to like, to care for and to identify with animals is essentially a childhood phenomenon, or, as it might often be more condescendingly expressed, a childish thing" (123). He then goes on to remark on the existence of an adult male bias against anthropomorphized animal stories. Both Markowsky and More, in their respective articles, point out the general—but not universal—inclination of children to tend toward animal stories with more realism as they grow older. For authors of animal stories with more adult themes and complex worlds,

these supposed inclinations can sometimes cause issues, such as for Richard Adams when trying he was attempting to publish his story *Watership Down*:

> I submitted it to one publisher after another, as well as to several literary agents. It was rejected again and again, seven times in all, always on the same grounds: older children wouldn't like it because it is about rabbits, which they considered babyish, and younger children wouldn't like it because it is written in an adult style. (7:03–7:25)

The story, about a group of rabbits who leave their doomed home in search of a new one, turned out to be a great success once it was eventually published, and the book seemed to appeal to a wide range of age groups. An example like this can call into question the perceived biases and inclinations. While anthropomorphized animal stories are important for children and useful for adults trying to write for children, they should not be considered exclusively for that age range.

Target Age Range for Ailuria

While I toyed around with the idea of having an adult-oriented story, it did not take me long to realize that I was more comfortable sitting in the age range of middle grade and young adult fiction. I certainly do not mean to imply that I think the story will not be enjoyed by adults: I more so did not want to exclude younger audiences. I did not feel bound to an age range for reasons relating to the biases surrounding animal fiction—the only real contributing factors were my own writing preferences. The content that I would have been free to write about by not aiming toward a younger audience (excessive violence, swearing, sex, and so on) were not things I wanted to include in the first place;

therefore, there was nothing I truly felt restricted on. I did want to include themes surrounding death, but I felt that this would be all right for the younger age range if I treated death responsibly and with significant impact on the plot and characters. (Death is a theme that can be seen in many animal stories, often stemming from predation and shorter lifespans in nature.)

The reasons I did decide to write a story about anthropomorphized animals will be further explored in the following sections. Briefly, however, I will note that the purposes of fantastical escapism and teaching about animals are both important to *Ailuria*. These overlap with possible reasons for writing children's literature, but they were not included specifically to target that age range.

Animal Commentary

Animal stories are bound to make a commentary on animals. However an author portrays the characters, the audience will see an interpretation. If the animal characters have hopes, dreams, fears, or ideas; if they rely on logic, instinct, or emotion; or if they garner sympathy or disdain, the audience is viewing animals through that lens. This may or may not be a purposeful swaying of opinion on animals, but it is bound to happen. As was explored in the introduction, this can have unintended consequences.

However, commentary on animals *is* often highly purposeful. Many stories specifically seek to make animals seem more sympathetic. Sometimes authors are trying to push people toward a specific view of animal rights. Other times, authors are just trying to express a discomfort that they feel about certain animal practices. E.B. White,

author of *Charlotte's Web*, *Stuart Little*, and other works of animal fiction wrote to his editor about his motivations behind writing *Charlotte's Web*:

> A farm is a peculiar problem for a man who likes animals, because the fate of most livestock is that they are murdered by their benefactors. The creatures may live serenely but they end violently, and the odor of doom hangs about them always. I have kept several pigs, starting them in spring as weanlings and carrying trays to them all through summer and fall. The relationship bothered me. ("A Book Is a Sneeze")

The book's plot revolves around a pig named Wilbur being saved from slaughter with the help of a spider named Charlotte. Many who read the book, especially children, will come away with some of the same discomfort White himself had regarding farm animals.

It may also be the intent of the author to teach about animals as one of their primary purposes. As stated before, this is a goal taken up by some authors of children's literature, but it is a goal not exclusive to children's literature. While teaching about animals is not always quite the same as commenting on them, it is in a similar vein—the author is shaping the reader's view of the animals being included.

Animal Commentary in Ailuria

I do sympathize with animals more than some, and this sentiment may come through in my writing. However, it is not the express intent of my story to comment on animal rights. All of my characters will eventually be developed to be sympathetic in some way (even if some are not meant to be likeable), and it is my hope that the majority will be seen with emotional depth by the time the last draft of the story is complete. This

sympathy and depth, however, will more so be the result of trying to write interesting characters rather than trying to intentionally promote a view on animals. If the story's characters still influence the reader into viewing animals differently in any way, then I will accept that outcome.

What *is* intended, however, is for people reading *Ailuria* to learn more about animals. Part of why I started writing the story was because I had become interested in finding and learning about new animal species that I had never heard of. The idea came to me that it would be fun to write animal stories about these uncommon animals and to incorporate strange quirks of different species into the worldbuilding. By including a wide variety of information about animal species in the story, my hope is that the reader will want to investigate the animals themselves and come away having learned something.

Human Commentary

Animal fiction has also been commonly used to make commentary on humans. There are three ways of doing this that I will discuss: commenting on the way humans treat animals, using animals as a vehicle to comment on specific aspects of humanity and history, and using animals as a vehicle for teaching lessons.

The first approach, in a very similar vein to the animal commentary, takes a stance on humans and their role in the treatment of animals. The novel *White Fang* by Jack London deals with these kinds of issues. The part dog, part wolf White Fang lives his life first in the wild, then under the command of various human owners. They treat him with differing levels of respect and abuse, and the reader sees how it changes his

behavior and how it affects him emotionally, since the story is told largely with his perspective in mind. It is not until his final owner—a man who treats White Fang with genuine kindness—that the animal is able to be happy. The human commentary is clear—the methods of care by the owner that bring happiness to White Fang are the methods the readers will most likely support.

The second approach is to use animals (and common perceptions about animals) as a mirror to reflect upon human nature or historical events. As Blount puts it, "Animals are beautiful, innocent, funny, and strange, and their built-in appeal can be used as a half-way stage toward comment on the human race" (17). Using animals instead of humans allows for a different perspective, and the symbolic meanings of animals can be included to further the commentary.

A famous example of a book that uses this approach is *Animal Farm*—George Orwell's tale of a group of animals overthrowing the oppressive farmer who owns them. They then go on to try running the farm themselves. The book is famously an allegory for the Russian Revolution and the rise of Joseph Stalin. Many of the animal characters directly represent historical figures (such as Snowball the pig aligning well with Leon Trotsky and Napoleon the pig with Joseph Stalin) and other animals represent ideologies or social classes. The animalistic nature of the characters serves an important purpose in the allegory. In the second chapter of the book, the animals devise seven commandments that solidify their distance from humanity: being two-legged and without wings, wearing clothes, sleeping in a bed, and drinking alcohol are all examples of criminal offenses. As the book progresses and the society the animals created falls further and further into authoritarianism, these commandments change, and eventually all the commandments

that qualified the importance of an animalistic nature are done away with. The pigs, who have been the leaders of the farm since the beginning, become indistinguishable from the humans who oppressed them, and the book ends with the following: "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which" (141). By utilizing animals for his allegory, Orwell paints a bleak picture in simplified yet powerful terms—tapping into the old stylings of the animal fable to deliver a modern lesson on the dangers of slipping into totalitarianism. This method is not the only way anthropomorphized animals can be used to comment on human affairs, but it is a strong example, and it leads well into the final approach being discussed.

The last approach is the use of animals as a vehicle for teaching human lessons. Teaching some kind of moral or lesson is another thing that is bound to happen in most stories; however, there are some works that see this as their more direct intent. Animals, in this case, are often used in the ways discussed in the section on children's literature—to draw the interest of children and utilize well-known animal symbols to make the lessons easier to understand. Aesop's fables, which have been mentioned multiple times already, are perhaps the most famous example. For example, "The Tortoise and the Hare" (one of the most famous of Aesop's stories) utilizes the natural relative speeds of its two titular animals to get its generalized message across: slow and steady wins the race.

Human Commentary in Ailuria

Ailuria contains the human commentary that comes with having lessons in a story in general. It also contains the overlapping human message about the treatment of

animals that comes with having sympathetic animal characters. Beyond this, there are no direct allegories attempted, and humans are not even present in the story.

That said, I feel that this is a good point in time to address my reasons for not including humans in the story. My very earliest ideas for the story did include humans, but I quickly changed my mind on this point. This was around the time my fascination with strange animals and intriguing facts about them was resurging. I felt that by having humans be a part of the story, I would be pulling attention away from the animal characters. I wanted my time (and the pages of the book) to be solely devoted to the animals and their world, even if the animals were anthropomorphized. By doing so, I believe I can focus more easily on the educational purposes of the story and the fantastical, escapist nature of the world that I will discuss in the following section.

Entertainment and Fantasy

There is something to be said about the use of animals from quite a different perspective: Instead of using animals as a vehicle for commentary, an author might simply want to use them because they find them fun or interesting. Talking animals have a strong association with fairy tales, fables, and childhood whimsy (a link previously discussed), and they are inherently fantastical in concept. There is also the simple fact that animals are everywhere, and there are many who find enjoyment in observing and studying them. Blount claims that "the longing to cross the gulf between the human and animal worlds is present in everyone who writes animal fantasy, and is the prime motive for so doing" (227). While I will not claim such a wide generalization, I think there is merit to the idea that one who has a deep curiosity about animals would be driven by

some desire to bridge the chasm between humans and animals. Regardless of whether it is the case or not, an interest in animals or a desire to create a fantasy world are certainly worthy reasons for an author to write an animal story.

Redwall, by Brian Jacques, is a great example of a story written for these purposes. It is a fantasy story that utilizes woodland animals as characters, but there is little to no commentary on humanity or animal rights. Instead, animals are used in place of humans because Jacques finds them interesting and they make the world feel unique. When Brain Jacques wrote a letter to a fan in 1996, he emphasized as much, writing, "Often I am asked why I write about animals; my answer is that I like to watch and listen to small creatures" (Bishop).

Watership Down, mentioned earlier, would also fall under this general category of purpose. In the introduction to the book, Richard Adams speaks to why he came up with the story—a desire to entertain his daughters on a long car trip. In the final sentence of this introduction, he claims that "*Watership Down* was never intended to be some sort of allegory or parable. It is simply the story about rabbits, made up and told in the car" (9:06–9:20).

These are far from the only examples of such utilizations of animals in fiction, and for understandable reasons. As Blount puts it, "an animal fantasy is a kind of imaginative launching ground" (15). Writers can start with something already fantastical—talking animals—and go whatever direction they would like from there, and while stories using them for entertainment and fantasy often include other purposes, they do not have to.

Ailuria is being written mostly for this final reason. I love all kinds of fantasy; it is my favorite genre because I am drawn to the authorial ability to explore imaginative concepts and creations that do not have to be tethered to any sense of reality. The limitless creativity that these kinds of stories allow for is truly wondrous to me, and this promotion of imagination is something that can foster empathy and eventually lead to social change. Additionally, as I have said before, I find animals fascinating, and there are plenty of strange animals that I am fascinated with that I rarely see adapted into fictional characters. A large part of the drive to write *Ailuria* is to create an imaginative fantasy world, and populating it with a wide selection of animals was an enjoyable way to do so while simultaneously incorporating that other interest. Using the genre of fantasy and the concept of magic also allows for solutions to some of the challenges of animal fiction presented in the following sections.

II - What Kind of Story are You Telling?

When writing a story about animals, there are many things that need to be taken into consideration. The issues presented in this section are mostly, if not entirely, unavoidable. They are some of the earliest questions that need answering, as they inform much of what the story will be like.

Worlds

The world animal characters inhabit will inform a lot of an author's decisions. There is a wide spectrum of how authors can set up the world of the story. The choices the author makes in regards to the world will lead to different subsets of questions about interpreting animals as characters. Categorizing these worlds is a challenging task and can only be done by casting wide nets. It seems that in attempting to cross the chasm between humans and animals, it is uncommon for multiple authors to do so in the exact same way—there are always small intricacies that are worth distinguishing one from another. Here, however, I do not have the time to do so, and instead I will attempt to separate them into three broad categories.

Our World

There are some cases where an author will want to set a story in our world—almost exactly as it comes, sticking as close to realism as possible. Animals cannot talk and they do not generally have human levels of intelligence. The anthropomorphic elements are the liberties taken regarding the things we can never know—the elements of writing animals that make the chasm uncrossable—which are unavoidable when a human

tries to write from an animal's perspective. A great example of one of these stories is *White Fang*, which is a story that will be discussed at later points as one that leans far toward animal realism. The character of White Fang could, for all intents and purposes, be a real animal to an outside observer. London does certainly take liberties regarding the way White Fang makes decisions, interprets the world, and forms motivations, but he never directly voices White Fang's thoughts or has him communicate verbally with other animals. Doing so has the advantage of giving his commentary a certain kind of weight—the horrible treatment White Fang receives and the way he responds to his environments feel like they could have happened in exactly this way. Even *White Fang* cannot bridge the chasm in its entirety, but these kinds of stories certainly make earnest attempts.

Fantasy Worlds

Potentially moving far from these concepts, some animal stories are set in fantasy worlds. These worlds, while likely borrowing elements of how our world operates, are clearly are not our world. Many fantasy stories have talking animals, although not all are entirely about those talking animals. One that is entirely about them is *Redwall*. There are no humans present; instead, the story revolves entirely around animals living in a medieval-style world. Many talking animal stories set in fantasy worlds also include magic, mythical creatures, and other elements common within the fantasy genre. An example of this would be a film like *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish*, which takes inspiration from various fairy tales to get many of its fantastical elements. The advantages of using a fantasy world are plentiful if it is the kind of story the author wants to tell. In terms of anthropomorphism, authors have a lot of leeway. An author can

include animals that act much like those from our world, they can include animals that talk, or they can be even more heavily anthropomorphized.

The Many Worlds In Between

Many animal stories take place within the wide spectrum between realism and fantasy. Some stories have worlds quite similar to our world with the major exception of including anthropomorphized animals. An example of this is *Watership Down*, which includes a lot of realistic animal behaviors, the use of animal senses, and lots of realistic descriptive language pertaining to the animal characters, but it also has the animals speak to one another, has the animals form distinct societies, and includes unique animal mythology.

Some of these stories are far more bizarre, such as the adult television show *BoJack Horseman*, which is set in an alternate version of our world that in many ways operates in the same way, but must accommodate for the fact that humans and "animals" live on an even playing field. The word "animals" appears in quotes because the animals in the show, while they have certain animal quirks (such as animals with wings being able to fly, fish living underwater, and so on) and have animal heads, they are otherwise just like humans. They walk on two legs, are generally the same size as one another, and can do anything the humans of the world can do.

Other stories, like *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* or *Wildwood* take place in our world at first; however, after some inciting incident, the main human characters are taken to a fantasy world where talking animals exist. These portal fantasies can take many liberties with their world building and anthropomorphism while still including

characters that have the same general knowledge as the audience, which can be an advantage for the author.

There are many more examples of the different ways worlds in animal fiction can be handled. Rather than try to make any sort of exhaustive list, I will instead speak generally to the importance of a story's world to its anthropomorphic elements. The world of an animal story can give the audience an impression of what the rules are, and it will lead the audience to the questions they will ask. If the world is shown to be our world initially, and then animals begin to talk, the viewer may have questions: Can the animals understand the humans? Can the humans understand the animals? What would the reaction to a talking animal be? The author must consider how to handle these questions and present answers to the audience if they wish. However, if the story is obviously set in a fantasy world, they may not immediately jump to those questions. They may instead have more questions about how the world operates, and could accept animals talking as a "normal" situation. Obviously, what will more greatly drive the decision for the world chosen will be the idea behind the story, the message and intent, and the personal preferences of the author, but the impacts on how the reader interprets the animal anthropomorphism should still be on the author's mind once they begin writing.

The World of Ailuria

The world created for *Ailuria* is a fantasy world. There are parallels and connections to our world, but ultimately, it is separate. There are no mentions of humans, and animals live in a full-fledged society. I spoke to my reasons for this briefly in the previous chapter, but I ultimately wanted to create a whimsical animal world that could

include magic (as magic is both a major factor in the idea I had for the plot and will help smooth over some of the other animal anthropomorphism issues that will be discussed in the coming sections). I also already discussed my reasons for not including humans, and this purposeful exclusion further disconnects the world from our world in the reader's mind. Additionally, the main character of *Ailuria* begins the story with magic-induced amnesia, which allows the world to be seen and explored through fresh eyes. Ultimately, utilizing a fantasy world fits my personal interests, my desire to use magic, my goal of exploring imaginative ideas, and my desire to focus entirely on animals as discussed previously.

Thoughts, Speech, and Intelligence

Thoughts, speech, and intelligence are some of the most fundamental aspects of animal anthropomorphism, as they are the first anthropomorphic elements required for an author to utilize some of their most powerful tools for exploring characters—dialogue and inner monologue. It is extremely likely that an author will want to incorporate one of these two tools in some way, so considerations must be made on how to handle them with animal characters and portray them with regards to intelligence. Many issues appear already, for animals generally do not have the ability to talk, and we cannot know exactly how animals think.

Animal Thoughts

There is a lot of interesting debate about how the minds of animals work. Do they experience the same range of emotions that we do (and how does it vary by species)?

What do animals have the capacity to understand? Can we attribute human ways of thinking to animal actions? To this last point, nineteenth-century psychologist Conwy Lloyd Morgan claimed that we should not do so if possible. Morgan's canon claims that anthropomorphizing animal behavior is a mistake in any case where it is possible to attribute the behavior to lower psychological processes. His beliefs are still fundamental to some modern scientists and their studies, but others like Tobias Starzak have criticized his ideas, claiming a lack of clarity in what constitutes lower versus higher psychological processes (2016). Others, such as Domenica Bruni, Pietro Perconti, and Alessio Plebe, also argue that there is some value in anthropomorphic interpretations (2018).

This field of research is constantly evolving, but we will likely never know all of the answers. Therefore, an author writing an animal's thoughts must choose some method of bridging the chasm. It is common for animals in literature to have a generally human way of thinking with occasional quirks—like instincts—thrown in. This practice feels natural in many stories, especially in ones where the animals speak; therefore, most animal stories take this route. However, stories that try to lean more toward realism may feel the need to approach animal thoughts with more care.

In *White Fang*, for instance, London approaches the issue of thought quite particularly. When describing the titular wolf-dog as a cub, it is said:

> The gray cub was not given to thinking—at least, to the kind of thinking customary of men. His brain worked in dim ways. Yet his conclusions were as sharp and distinct as those achieved by men. He had a method of accepting things, without questioning the why and wherefore. He was never disturbed over *why* a

> thing happened. *How* it happened was sufficient for him. … Logic and physics were no part of his mental make-up. (61)

Whether or not this is how wolf-dog cubs thinks about the world, London goes to great lengths to keep in line with this proposed animalistic way of thinking. There are many blurbs where White Fang or another animal's interpretations of human concepts are explored. White Fang's instincts drive a lot of his behavior—a fact which will be elaborated on in a later chapter. Overall, there is a form of realism presented to the reader, and it is a realism that is kept as internally consistent as one could expect.

Animal Speech

Dialogue is an important aspect of many stories. It allows insight into characters, it allows for information to be passed between characters and to the reader, it allows for many forms of humor, and much more. To be limited in utilizing such an important aspect of writing is a challenge that many authors do not wish to handle. So, if animals cannot usually speak, what is it to be done?

One option is to accept the challenge and proceed without dialogue for the animal characters. *White Fang* goes about this well, with the human characters speaking to each other while White Fang himself and the other wolf characters communicate only through body language, animal noises, and actions.

An alternative to this level of realism is to have animals speak to each other, but to have it be a translated animal speech. If a human character in the story were to hear the animals talking, they would not hear it as English or any other human language, but the reader or viewer would. In *The Wild Robot* (both the book and the film), for instance, the

main character, a robot named Roz, must spend time translating animal speech before she can communicate with the animal inhabitants of the island she lands on:

> After weeks of robotically studying the birds, Roz knew what each bird would sing, and when they would sing, and eventually, why they would sing. … She discovered that all the different animals shared one common language; they just spoke the language in different ways. You might say each species spoke with its own unique accent. (P. Brown 46–47)

This explanation paints a clear, concise, and creative picture of the animal language, and it gives the audience a justification for this specific anthropomorphic element of the story.

A story like *Charlotte's Web*, on the other hand, keeps things more ambiguous. The animals in the story speak to one another, and Fern, a human character who sits with the animals, tells her parents that she can hear the animals speaking. She then goes on to directly quote some of the dialogue of the animals (White 52–53). Despite this, we never see her try to communicate with the animals or act upon what she hears to try and help them. One could interpret the story as being told through her overactive imagination, but only if one is willing to disregard the scenes where Fern is not present or when Charlotte begins writing English words on her web. The only explanation the book gives about Fern understanding the animals is Dr. Dorian's interpretation that perhaps "children pay better attention than grownups" (White 110). The facts as presented and the questions left unanswered can be seen as confounding.

Redwall brings into the discussion a different consideration—the idea of different languages being present among animals. In *Redwall*, most of the characters speak the same language, with two named exceptions: sparrows and bees. Some specific characters,

such as the mice Methuselah and Matthias are born with the "gift of tongues," meaning they can "understand other creatures naturally" (Jacques 26). At other points it is also said that animals can learn the languages of other groups. This concept is an interesting one that can add additional depth to the world.

However, it is also quite possible that the animals in the story are directly stated as speaking English. This is the case in *Wildwood*. When the two main characters stumble upon anthropomorphized coyotes for the first time, they are startled by the fact that the coyotes are both wearing clothes and "definitely talking to one another. In English" (Meloy 53). By calling this out specifically, the reader can identify with the absurdity of such an encounter.

Animal Intelligence

A common factor used to separate humans from animals is human intellect. We have the capacity for complex thought that allows for us to do many things animals are incapable of. However, wanting to write about animals that talk and think forces an issue:

> We think humanity into objects we love because we know no other way of loving them better; but however fond one is of a dog or a cat one knows about the simple brain that makes speech impossible, while not excluding a kind of rough logic. The talking pet can only become delightful in a fantasy; it becomes terrible if you give the animal the speech equipment of a logical brain without the moral equipment, or conscience, that tells him how to use it. (Blount 193)

If an author wants their animal characters to talk and have some kind of human morality (which is not a requirement, but is often something an author will wish to include), that

author is inherently going to need to make the animals think on a more human intelligence level. However, if this separator of intellect is taken away, where does that leave these animal characters? Are they presented as being on the same societal level as humans? Does their intelligence surprise the humans (if there are even humans present)? Do the animals in the story already have a society that is similar to a human society? These are the kinds of questions that surround the question of intelligence and morality in animal fiction.

It is somewhat common in animal fiction for there to be different levels of intelligence presented within the world. The differences can either be between humans and animals or between animals and other animals. In a world like the one presented in the 2022 film *The Bad Guys*, the levels can be challenging. The film is shown to have a society of both humans and highly anthropomorphized animals (although the mammals and aquatic creatures have more human-looking bodies than the snake and tarantula). All of the anthropomorphized animals are shown to be on the same intelligence level as the humans or perhaps even smarter. Strangely, however, there is a cat that is depicted as being non-anthropomorphized. Are cats just an exception in this world? Well, even more strange than that is the fact that there is a major character who is an anthropomorphized guinea pig—who is shown alongside guinea pigs who are not anthropomorphized. What does it imply about this world that animals can be either anthropomorphized or not, even within what is apparently the same species? These non-anthropomorphized guinea pigs are shown being kept in a laboratory for experiments, and they are then freed and subsequently mind controlled by the anthropomorphized guinea pig. It is an overall confounding situation that the movie goes to no lengths to fully address.

In *Charlotte's Web*, the barn animals are shown to reason and talk like humans, and Charlotte is even able to spell words on her web. The human characters are dumbfounded by these occurrences and see it as a miracle. In this case, human perceptions of animal intelligence being challenged directly drives the plot.

Levels of intelligence can also form along the lines of animal types. The bugs in *The Lion King* are not presented as being intelligent on the level of the other animals in the film, nor are the fish in *Brother Bear*. These species groups are treated as merely food sources for the other characters (the issue of food and predation will be covered in a later chapter). While relegating bugs or fish—or generally non-mammals—to the sidelines of anthropomorphism and intelligence is quite common, the focus can easily shift, as seen in *A Bug's Life* or *Finding Nemo*, which are about talking bugs and talking fish, respectively.

As a brief final note on the topic of these levels of intelligence, it is worth pointing out that sometimes anthropomorphized animals will be shown to own other animals as pets. This is done so that there can be a parallel to our world and humans owning pets for storytelling purposes. Perhaps the most famous and baffling occurrence of this is in Mickey Mouse's cartoons, where the audience is shown two highly contrasting characters: Goofy and Pluto. Goofy, a highly anthropomorphized dog-like character, is one of Mickey Mouse's best friends, walks on two legs, and can talk. Pluto, a less anthropomorphized dog-like character, is Mickey Mouse's pet, walks on four legs, and cannot talk. Having these characters in such close proximity may raise concerns. These concerns would be mitigated in other stories if, for example, mammals were

presented as having bugs as pets, and therefore a distinct line was drawn between the intelligence levels.

Beyond the discussion of intelligence levels, there is another consequence of animal intelligence that must be addressed. It stands to reason that if animals are presented with the same intelligence as humans, they may eventually make some of the same discoveries and advancements in technology that we do. This kind of behavior is seen in various animal stories.

A small-scale example of this is in *Watership Down*. The book sticks to animal behaviors in many cases, but it also takes advantage of the intelligence of its rabbit characters for problem-solving. Early in the book, in order to get the injured and exhausted members of their group across a river, one of the rabbits named Blackberry (described as the cleverest rabbit among the group) devises a plan to have them float across on a piece of wood. The other rabbits have trouble comprehending the concept, but the plan works (Adams 51–52). Later on, they use what they learned and incorporate an escape boat in their plan to infiltrate another group of rabbits. These are not the only examples of the rabbits' intelligence, with another notable one being that different groups of rabbits live in organized societies with different government structures.

A more extreme example of technological advancement from heightened intelligence can be seen in *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, where a society of rats creates a full-fledged underground base of operations. This base has interior décor, electricity, and even elevators—all of which the rats themselves put together. These rats gained higher levels of intelligence from experiments done by humans, which allowed

them to escape the labs they were being held in, and a portion of the story involves the rats trying to avoid the notice of humans attempting to find and exterminate them.

These are only a few unique examples of how intelligence is handled in animal literature. Each story is different, but it is important for authors to consider how animal intelligence may have an impact.

Thoughts, Speech, and Intelligence in Ailuria

Almost all animals in *Ailuria* speak English, have human levels of intelligence, and think like humans in most instances. I decided to do this partially because of the world building I devised but more so because of the flexibility it would allow me with portraying the characters, developing the story, and allowing for communication between a wide variety of animal species.

There are, however, two large exceptions to the general rules: bugs and Beasts. Bugs do exist in this world, but they are more like the bugs of our world. Beasts are different. They are a variety of fictional animals that only exist in the world of the book. In a way, Beasts are the "new animals" in this anthropomorphized animal society, as they are not intelligent like the rest of the animals in *Ailuria* are. Bugs and Beasts allow for solutions to the issue of food and predation, which will be covered in a later chapter.

On the topic of animal thoughts, I would also like to note that there are a few moments where animal instincts are taken into account. I plan to add more moments surrounding instincts as I work more on the story. Instincts will also be discussed further in a later chapter.

Leaving Things to Interpretation

Before proceeding to further animalistic considerations, I would like to make an important note. For all the topics that will be discussed from here on (and even for some of what has already been discussed) the author of an animal story has the option of leaving the issue up to reader interpretation rather than making a specific explanation.

For example, in some stories, it can be hard to tell whether an animal is walking on two legs or four simply by the description; however, this detail is made quite clear in *Animal Farm*, where walking on two legs versus four has thematic relevance—one tied to the pigs losing their animal nature in favor of becoming more human. When the pigs in the story begin walking on two legs, it is called out as being an important moment.

Sometimes, a detail is not mentioned in the text, but it is shown explicitly in the illustrations. This is the case in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, where Aslan the lion is never described as walking on two or four legs, but he is shown doing both in different instances in the provided illustrations (see figure 1).

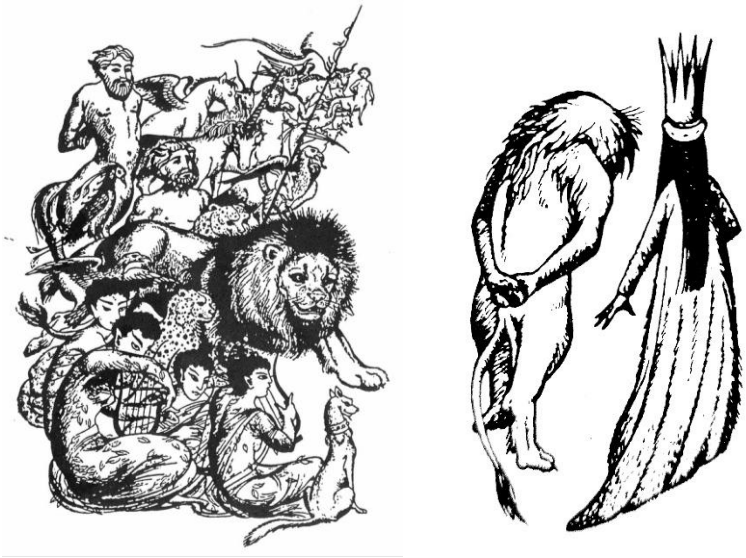

Fig. 1. Illustrations by Pauline Baynes. (Lewis 127, 143)

For the scenes that are not accompanied by illustrations, the reader is then free to imagine either stance based on context and preference.

Sometimes, a detail of the world seems to be left out, but it later comes back to serve a specific purpose. This is what happens in the show *BoJack Horseman*. In a world populated with both only humans and heavily anthropomorphized animals, one may or may not wonder where the inhabitants would get their meat. In the first season of the show, this question is never addressed, but in the second season, the terrifying reality is revealed to create a commentary (this will be discussed more thoroughly as an example in a later chapter).

By choosing to leave out a detail of how the world operates, the author is allowing the audience to fill in the blanks while avoiding the work of explaining things that are unimportant. If instead they are choosing to delve into the details, they are taking the time to more thoroughly build their world and the images in the mind of the reader, but if done improperly, they may create further questions or complications.

Leaving Things to Interpretation in Ailuria

When I was starting *Ailuria*, I wrestled with the question of whether to leave many things to audience interpretation. As I developed this thesis project, however, I decided that it would be in my best interest in most cases to make my choices on animal portrayal explicit in the text and not leave much to be decided by the audience. I did this because I wanted to force myself to think more seriously about how animals actually live, what they are capable of that humans cannot do, what they are not capable of that I wanted them to be able to do, and how the differences between animals and humans

would affect the worldbuilding. Also, for the purposes of this thesis, I felt it would be generally more interesting to have made concrete decisions on most of the issues that will be discussed. There are a small number of instances where I did choose to leave a particular issue to audience interpretation, and I will justify those decisions in their proper sections.

III - How Animal Do You Want Your Animals?

Moving beyond the large-scale considerations of how the world will be constructed and how the animals will be written, there are many more important choices for the author to make. This chapter will include five topics regarding these decisions. The first three will cover some of the more visual considerations to be made when portraying animals, whether it be through description in writing, illustrations, or the on-screen visuals of a film or television show. The second to last section will cover the topic of naming conventions. The last section will broadly cover the qualities of animal species, which will lead into the following chapters.

Legs and the Problems They Present

In the previous section on leaving things to interpretation, two examples were brought up regarding a major issue: whether animals are shown to walk on two legs (bipedal) or on four (quadrupedal). However, the issue is more complex than this. Some animals already walk on two legs but do not otherwise have human anatomy, with birds being the major example. Some animals traverse on more than four legs, such as insects, arachnids, and so on. Some animals have no legs to begin with, such as worms, snakes, many aquatic creatures, and others. Even in the example discussed with *Animal Farm*, where the "essential principle" the animals must remember is "four legs good, two legs bad," it is said that "the birds at first objected, since it seemed to them that they also had two legs," but their concerns are quickly resolved by Snowball the pig, who tells them that their wings will be regarded as legs (Orwell 34). Regardless of the exact number of

legs an animal has, Orwell is right in pointing out that for animals that do not have two legs, walking on their natural number of legs is strong indicator of animality.

Since humans are bipeds, it is natural that anthropomorphizing an animal who is not a biped will sometimes include turning them into one. Writers choosing to do this will therefore create a somewhat common creature in animal fiction: the human with an animal head.

Humans with Animal Heads

There are a few approaches to the creation of humans with animal heads. Oftentimes, these creatures retain some of their other animalistic physical traits, such as wings, tails, skin, hair, or even size. A great example of this is in *Zootopia*, where animals retain their general size and some other animal qualities, but the animals presented, all of which are mammals, walk on two legs (yet *are* capable of walking on four legs, as seen when the animals are drugged into "going savage"). The favoritism toward specifically making quadrupedal mammals into bipeds is common, and it often forms a dividing line within the rules of a story's anthropomorphism. This can be clearly seen in the DreamWorks film *Kung Fu Panda*, which has many mammal characters walking on two legs in a humanlike way while the praying mantis, heron, and viper characters retain their animal forms. It seems like a reasonable dividing line in a certain visual sense—mammalian quadrupeds can be simply made to stand on their hind legs, begin using their forelegs as human arms, and begin using their paws as hands. In nature this is obviously made impossible by animal anatomy, but it feels more reasonable than

the more extreme visual differences required for bugs, birds, and snakes to do something similar.

However, the distinction is not necessary. The show *BoJack Horseman* includes all kinds of humans with animal heads, including aquatic animals, bugs, and so on. They are all proportioned to be human-sized, and they are all essentially considered to be equal with humans societally.

While humans with animal heads are common in animation, they are also found in literature. A famous example is *The Wind in the Willows*. The animals are clearly presented (in both the illustrations and the writing) as walking on two legs and going about their lives in a similar way that humans do. They use human tools and weapons, and Toad driving cars even becomes an important plot point. Humans do exist in this world, but the relationship between humans and animals is somewhat strangely presented (and will be discussed further in a later chapter).

This example alludes to perhaps the largest advantage of this approach to animal anthropomorphism. Why make animals stand on their hind legs? Because humans do so many things with their hands. These heavily humanized animals can move about the world in the same way humans do, and they require a lot less overhead work in terms of writing scenes and creating a world. The author of a story with these kinds of animals does not need to worry about actions we find trivial, whether it is showing affection with a hug, opening a door, writing, putting on clothes, or even just picking up an object. However, by using these kinds of characters, an author sacrifices much of their animal characters' animality.

Maintaining a Realistic Stance—The Constraints of Animal Actions

If a writer wants to maintain the animality of their animal characters, then the animals will have a much harder time performing human actions. For those leaning more toward animal realism, this is not an issue. Their animal characters would likely not even have the inclination to perform most human actions that would be rendered impossible by bodily constraints, and they will only need to make considerations for how to describe the animal's movements and animalistic actions. However, if the author intends for the animals to have higher levels of intelligence and perform human actions, they will need to make additional considerations about how their world operates.

In *Animal Farm*, when the pigs are still walking on four legs, it is said that they were only able to inscribe their commandments on the wall with some difficulty, because "it is not easy for a pig to balance himself on a ladder" (Orwell 24). Just after this, the animals take over the operations of the farm in earnest, and they run into issues:

> The implements had been designed for human beings and not for animals, and it was a great drawback that no animal was able to use any tool that involved standing on his hind legs. But the pigs were so clever that they could think of a way round every difficulty. (Orwell 27)

The specifics beyond this are not described, and understandably so—these details are not important to the story or world, and so they are left up to interpretation.

Further considerations regarding the use of tools, weapons, and other devices common to humans will be discussed again when discussing animal societies. I will make one final note that, while it might seem unlikely, the issue of legs is one that *can* be left up to interpretation. It was seen with the illustrations for *The Lion, the Witch and the*

Wardrobe that it is not impossible to interpret the same characters as both using an animal stance and a human one. By not calling attention to either choice specifically, an author can allow readers to fill in the blanks themselves, and their interpretation may even change scene by scene depending on what the character is required to do. It is all up to the story the author is trying to tell and whether the issue is important to them.

Legs in Ailuria

In *Ailuria*, animals walk on the number of legs they walk on in nature. However, if there is a certain action that they would be capable of performing more easily by balancing on hind legs (and if the animal is capable of the action), they will do so. My goal is to limit this, as I want the animals in this world to really feel like they are animals in as many ways as possible. This fits with my ideas for the world building and my desire to challenge myself. The homes, tools, and weapons of this world will be developed with this in mind. By having this aspect of realism, I am relating my character more closely to the animals of our world, thereby strengthening the educational value of the story and providing further justification for including a larger number of animal-accurate details.

Animals Wearing Clothes

Obviously, animals in nature do not wear clothes. The closest examples could be hermit crabs and decorator crabs, who wear other objects as shells for protection. However, since humans wearing clothes is normalized socially, and because clothing can immediately provide information about a character, it is natural that many anthropomorphized animals wear clothes. This presents problems. Would animals with

thick fur or feathers all over their bodies find clothes restrictive and uncomfortable? How would many animals, especially those who rely on four legs to balance, manage to put clothes on in the first place? Some authors, especially those sticking closer to realism, avoid these issues by simply not having their animals wear clothes. Others avoid it in the opposite way: They are writing about humans with animal heads, and therefore do not have to explain the use of clothes quite as thoroughly. The animals are already almost human, and it is easier for the audience to suspend their disbelief.

However, for authors who want their animals to wear clothes while maintaining an otherwise high level of animality, these problems of practicality are interesting challenges. The combination of having animals that wear clothes while not walking on two legs is rare. Some authors may still choose, in this instance, to simply let the audience suspend their disbelief. For those choosing to delve into the details, however, animals that wear clothes may need some kind of solution—whether that be another animal's help, a technological solution, or a magical solution. Putting in the effort to do this does have its advantages. As mentioned before, information can be conveyed quickly through clothing, including a character's status or rank, profession, culture, personality, or the level of formality. They can also be used for temperature-related reasons when an animal is in an inhospitable environment.

Clothing in Ailuria

Clothing was an issue I grappled with when I began writing *Ailuria*. I wanted to tend toward animality in many ways, but I knew clothing had its storytelling uses, and the overall style I had originally envisioned for the world included some clothing usage. I

eventually decided on a system where animals would wear clothes largely for the reasons listed just before this—weather, environments, rank, formality, species-to-species tradition, and so on. In cases where none of these things are a factor, however, animals do not wear clothes. Animals that do wear them will put on their clothes with the help of other animals or with the use of magic if they cannot otherwise do it themselves. I wanted the option of clothing in certain situations to create a more fantastical feeling in the visuals of the story. From a worldbuilding perspective, I also felt that as the animals developed cultures and social norms throughout their history, it would be reasonable for them to invent the use of clothing for those specific scenarios.

I will add, however, that as I continued into the later parts of the story, I found I did not mention clothing at all when I was naturally describing scenes, so these ideas are not explored as much as I would like. In future drafts, I will be adding more details and explanations to the story regarding these clothing practices.

Expressing Emotion

Animals do not express emotions in the way humans do. Some animals have vocalizations, such as hisses, growls, chirps, and purrs, that convey some kind of emotion, while others exhibit specific body language. Including these kinds of behaviors can add to the verisimilitude of an animal character, but what is more difficult is avoiding the kinds of expressions that are not common for animals to make. For example, many animals do not have the capacity to smile in the way humans do; their facial constructions simply do not allow it. This creates issues for an author who wants to quickly get a character's emotion across to the reader. Does the author stretch reality and simply claim

that their animal character can and will express emotions through human facial expressions, or do they avoid these humanized amotions and try use animalistic expressions more exclusively?

This kind of dilemma can be seen clearly when comparing the two film versions of Disney's *The Lion King*. The 2019 remake of the film opted for a photorealistic depiction of the animal characters, whereas the original 1994 film chooses to take a more cartoonish approach. The photorealistic 2019 film has been criticized for its lack of personality and expressiveness, and when looking at side-by-side comparisons, the reason is clear. The stills in figure 2 are taken from the exact same moment in the story—when Simba the lion cub witnesses a fast-approaching stampede of wildebeests.

Fig. 2. Frames from *The Lion King* (1994) at 32:51 and *The Lion King* (2019) at 39:24

The 2019 Simba shows none of the wide-eyed, mouth agape, ears turned back, face elongated expressiveness of the 1994 Simba. They do not portray the same feeling in the character, nor do they give the same feeling to the viewer. That is not to say that going down the realistic route is wrong or that an animated film's shortcomings in this regard will be the same ones a novel will have, but it illustrates the overall problem.

White Fang provides an example of the effective use of animal expressions. The reader gets an early example when the dog One Eye encounters a she-wolf. As he approaches her, she "[seems] to smile at him, showing her teeth in an ingratiating rather than a menacing way" (London 23). This explanation keeps it more animalistic than human, and reading further reveals far more examples of animalistic behavior to express emotions: shrinking in fear, snarling threats, flashing teeth, whimpering, growling, slinking away, and so on.

Animal Expressions in Ailuria

For as much as I wanted to stick to animal realism in as many places as I could, this was a consideration where I went the way of letting the audience suspend their disbelief. While I did want to mix in more animalistic ways of expressing emotions (and want to do so even more in future drafts), I also wanted my characters to be able to simply smile and portray other emotions in ways that are implied to be slightly more human. When visualizing scenes, I often picture *Ailuria* in a stop-motion animated style. It is a style that has the texture of reality while ultimately being artistically controlled, and I felt that its handmade visual charm fit the feeling I wanted my story to give off as well. I strove to achieve this animated quality through the mixture of both human and animal expressions. Using this mixture also makes my job as a writer a lot simpler and helps me get across subtleties of emotion I might not be able to otherwise achieve. I will use this mixture so long as I am not too far breaking the realism of the animals in the story (such as how I will need to account for bird beaks, the lack of eyelids on snakes, and so on). This can be an admittedly hard line to draw, but my restrictions will often be

more related to whether animals *have* anatomical features rather than what they do with those features.

Naming Conventions

A very different question regarding the creation of animal characters involves naming them. Some authors put a lot of thought and depth into the names of their characters. For this discussion, however, I will only be briefly covering special considerations that are common for animal characters and not human ones.

Some animal stories do not give names to the animal characters. This can be seen in Aesop's fables, which use simply "the Tortoise" or "the Hare," for example. Choosing to do this prevents these characters from escaping their own symbolism or stereotypes: They are not individuals; they are simply one of their species. This can be helpful for children, as they will associate the character and the animal directly.

In a similar vein, some stories have animal characters that are named after the type of animal they are. This can be seen in *The Wind in the Willows*, which has the characters Rat, Mole, Toad, and Badger. Other authors incorporate the species name into just a part of the character name, such as with the fox character Diane Foxington in *The Bad Guys*. Related to this is the inclusion of notable attributes of a character's species into their name, such as Judy Hopps (a rabbit) in *Zootopia*. These types of character names act similarly to the previous examples: They tie the character to the animal species and its qualities, and they make the character-animal associations stronger. However, these names add some degree of individuality that is not present when they are given no names whatsoever.

Some stories utilize names related to nature for their animal characters. This is done for some of the characters in *Watership Down*, such as Blackberry, Clover, and Bluebell. These kinds of names make sense from the perspective of animals naming their children or themselves, as the animals would be familiar with these natural things.

However, other authors may simply want their animal characters to be named just like any other character in fiction. Doing this gives an author complete control over the meanings of the name chosen and can give their characters full individuality.

Naming Conventions in Ailuria

I chose to give characters more personalized names in *Ailuria* rather than using their general species names. I wanted my characters to have more individuality, and naming them directly after their species did not make much sense for a world meant to be inhabited by billions of animals. Additionally, many character names were ones I came up with before even thinking about a project of this scale. In fact, some of the earlier names like Thellon and Hyra were devised completely arbitrarily other than that I thought the sounds of the names fit the personalities I had in mind. They were only meant to be placeholders, but the names stuck around through every iteration of the story, and the association solidified over time. However, many characters in *Ailuria* have names that are related to their species' scientific names. For example, the squirrels Caroline and Linus were derived from the scientific name for the eastern gray squirrel: *Sciurus carolinensis*. I did this as a fun connection to the animals and for my own convenience in being able to come up with names quickly rather than for a specific storytelling reason.

Qualities of a Species

Most animal species are extremely different from one another. The unique features of animal species included in a story can inform the choices available to the characters, the way the world operates, and the way the plot unfolds. It also determines how the characters are described with their varying physical appearances (using animal species that look distinct from one another can be helpful for keeping characters distinct in the minds of the readers, especially with illustrations). It is important to know what species will be included in the story and whether any specific facts about those species will be relevant.

An author of animal fiction must consider things like size; hooves and paws; feathers, fur, scales, and skin; senses; cold-bloodedness and warm-bloodedness, the ability of some animals to climb or fly while others cannot, and a gargantuan number of other details. Many of these attributes can be ignored, implied, or left to interpretation based on the story being told, but some stories require a lot more research and attention to detail.

Other subjects that fall under this admittedly broad topic will be discussed in the following sections, such as instincts, senses, lifespans, and habitats. However, I include this section here as a general note that deciding on species types and deciding whether to include details that are unique to those species should be of a high priority to an author of animal fiction.

Sometimes these unique details about a species inform why an author includes that species in their story. Other reasons an author might choose to include an animal species in a story include symbolic meanings behind the animal; personal familiarity,

experiences, or interest; the level of widespread familiarity amongst the target audience; and setting.

Qualities of Species in Ailuria

As stated before, the idea of exploring interesting facts about species is one of the most significant reasons why I started writing *Ailuria* in the first place. While it is impossible to consider every detail in building a world, I want to include as many as possible. Many considerations that fall under this topic will be covered in the future sections, but to illustrate the way a species' unique qualities are incorporated into the story, I will discuss a prominent example.

Thellon the binturong is the main character of *Ailuria*. Binturong fur is shaggy and black, they have tufts of black hair behind their usually rounded ears, and they have large, muscular tails (San Diego Zoo). This physical description is unique compared to the other main characters, which, as mentioned, is helpful for writing scenes and keeping the characters distinct. In terms of unique capabilities, binturongs use their long claws and padded feet to climb trees, their rotating ankles to descend trees when facing down, and their prehensile tails to grasp branches for stability (San Diego Zoo). This is seen in the story in multiple scenes—Thellon has no memories of being able to climb since he starts the story with amnesia, but he picks up the skill rather easily due to his instincts and biological advantages. Binturongs also smell like popcorn due to a chemical in their urine, which I plan to incorporate mentions of in future drafts when he meets other animals (San Diego Zoo). This is just one example, but I think it illustrates the kind of things that can make an animal character's utilization unique.

I will also use this section to outline some of the reasons I chose the animal species I did. The binturong is a unique example. When I went to the Nashville Zoo in the spring of 2023, I had never seen a binturong in my life, and I was amazed by Willow the binturong—she was extremely unique and seemed to combine interesting aspects of a variety of other animals (for example, a monkey-like tail, a cat-like face, and a bear-like body—even to the point where the binturong is also known as the bearcat). I then investigated binturongs online, and I loved seeing the Nashville Zoo's social media posts about Willow and her cousin Wilbur. The binturong grew to become my favorite animal, and the idea for *Ailuria* sprouted from this fascination.

Other species were ones I included due to them being personal favorites when I was growing up—namely, the red panda (Aila) and the jerboa (Root). Some species I included because I thought unique facts about them would fit nicely into the worldbuilding. A good example of this is the inclusion of the black-footed cats Lita and Ditha. Black-footed cats have an average hunting success rate of around 60%, meaning they are one of the deadliest, if not *the* deadliest, predators by this metric (Solly). This fact alongside their small stature inspired their inclusion as assassins within *Ailuria*'s fantasy world. Other species were ones I utilized due to how common and familiar they are. The best example of this is the inclusion of the squirrels Caroline, Linus, and their family. Squirrels are one of the most likely animals for me to see on a daily basis, and this is the case for many people in the United States. This familiarity made me want to include them as a starting point for the story, from which I could branch off into talking about less familiar species. These are just a few examples from the large variety of

animal species that are included in the story, and I want to continue to branch out and utilize more non-mammal characters going forward.

IV - Widening the Uncrossable Chasm

No matter how much research an author puts into their animal story, there are certain aspects about animals that they can never understand. One such aspect that is fundamental to writing has been discussed already: animal thoughts. As mentioned in that previous section, an author must make assumptions or guesses when facing an issue like this, even if those guesses are based in observation or scientific study. Filling in the blanks often tends toward a more human perspective, as this is all we can fully experience. The following sections will cover a few other major aspects of animals that make writing them accurately impossible—the details that make the chasm uncrossable.

Instincts

Animal thoughts have already been covered, but I feel that instincts deserve their own special consideration. Instincts are reactions to certain stimuli that are built into animals' biology. Humans have instincts too (innate fears, fight-or-flight responses, and others), but the behavior of animals clearly shows that their instincts are often different from ours. These differences include what the instincts actually are (for example, humans do not have instincts for seasonal migration and hibernation) and how much conscious choice is involved in following the instincts (many believe animals have less autonomy, although opinions on the subject vary). It is impossible for us to know exactly how the instincts of animals affect their thinking or emotions. We can observe how animals respond to certain situations, but to know the whole truth is not something we are capable of. However, that does not stop authors from making attempts.

In E. B. White's *Stuart Little*, Stuart, who is essentially a tiny anthropomorphized mouse, states that there is "something in [him] that doesn't trust a cat" (54). The fear of predators is a common animal instinct, and one that is important for animals in the wild. Later in the story, Margalo the bird leaves abruptly with the justification that "something inside her told her that north was the way for a bird to go when spring comes to the land" (71). Seasonal behaviors like migration, hibernation, and stockpiling food are often included in animal stories that take place over a long span of time, with another example being in *The Wild Robot*, where preparing the gosling Brightbill for migration is one of the major plots. In *Charlotte's Web*, White also explores the passing down of more technical knowledge as instinct. In the story, Dr. Dorian claims spider webs are miraculous since "a young spider knows how to spin a web without any instruction from anybody" (110).

The general concept that instincts are innate feelings that draw animals toward certain actions and the idea that instincts are the passing down of innate knowledge through generations are both explored in detail in *White Fang*. One example takes place early on with the dog One Eye:

> Old One Eye was feeling the urge of an impulse, that was, in turn, an instinct that had come down to him from all the fathers of wolves. He did not question it, nor puzzle over it. It was there in the fibre of his being; and it was the most natural thing in the world that he should obey it. (London 51)

London uses animal instincts multiple times throughout the story. He presents it as how animals like One Eye and White Fang are able to survive and how they know how to act. This is reinforced for the reader when White Fang is still a cub:

> Never, in his brief cave-life, had he encountered anything of which to be afraid. Yet fear was in him. It had come down to him from a remote ancestry through a thousand thousand lives. … Fear!—that legacy of the Wild which no animal may escape. (64)

In *White Fang*, instincts are unavoidable. They dictate animal actions, they are something that animals simply accept and obey, and they are the culmination of the experiences of those who came before.

The film version of *The Wild Robot*, however, makes different claims about instincts. Early on, the film relates two concepts: "Why did you steal my gosling?" Roz asks Fink the fox. Fink replies, "I am a fox. I do foxy things. It's in my nature." Roz internalizes this by relating it to what she can understand, saying, "Your programming" (21:30–21:41). Later in the story, after Roz has taken on the task of being Brightbill's mother, she finds another robot, who questions her about whether she overrode her programming. Roz responds, "I have been overriding my code for months. It was the only way to complete my task" (45:22–45:28). Roz had to improvise and use emotions to becomes a mother. What she learns in doing this is something she then teaches back to the animals later in the film. During a winter storm, Roz brings all of the animals of the island to the shelter she made in order to save their lives. Being wild animals, however, they quickly start trying to kill and eat one another. Roz then makes a speech to get them to stop:

> I know you all have instincts that keep you alive. But sometimes to survive, we must become more than we were programmed to be. Before I shut down, I need you to promise me one thing. A truce. Just while we're in here. (1:11:38–1:11:54)

The animals then successfully resist their urges in order to survive the storm. This theme of overcoming programming stands in direct opposition to the way instincts are handled in *White Fang*, but I believe that both interpretations work well for the specific choices made regarding the anthropomorphism of the animals and the stories being told.

Regardless of how instincts are handled—whether they are treated as some kind of inheritance, something unavoidable, something that can be overcome, or something that the author chooses not to acknowledge at all—they are an important trait within animals, and they are an important topic for authors of animal fiction to make decisions about.

Instincts in Ailuria

In *Ailuria*, animal instincts are not yet thoroughly explored. They are hinted at, such as when Thellon the binturong climbs a tree for the first time, but they are not something I incorporated too much on my first draft. This is an area where I plan to make changes in future drafts. I want part of the uniqueness between my animal characters to come from the attributes of their species, and the instincts of a species are something I want to use to contribute to that. Even though animals in *Ailuria* do not eat one another, it would still be interesting to have certain characters be instinctually apprehensive around those who they see as a threat. Animals may have to work against said instincts in certain situations, or they may instinctually tap into abilities that other species might not have. By doing this, I can further explore the details of certain animal species, bring them closer to their real-life counterparts (albeit with some necessary interpretation on my part), and make them stand out more from one another.

Senses

Animals do not experience the world in the same way we do. Many animals have sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, but they experience these things in different ways. Some animals have far better senses than we do, while others have more limited senses. There are even animals who have senses that humans do not have at all, such as the ability to sense barometric pressure or other wavelengths of light (including night vision). How should these things be accounted for when writing animals?

Plenty of stories make some reference to animals smelling, hearing, or seeing better than humans. In *The Wind in the Willows*, despite the high level of anthropomorphism of the characters, Kenneth Grahame comments on the matter:

> We others, who have long lost the more subtle of the physical senses, have not even proper terms to express an animal's inter-communications with his surroundings, living or otherwise, and have only the word 'smell', for instance, to include the whole range of delicate thrills which murmur in the nose of the animal night and day, summoning, warning, inciting, repelling. (66–67)

The use of the word "we" excludes the narrator from being able to understand these senses as well, therefore absolving Grahame from presenting any sort of knowledge that is unknown to humans.

London utilizes animal senses frequently in writing from the perspective of White Fang, as does Adams when writing the perspectives of his rabbit characters. White references Charlotte the spider as being nearsighted (which is true for some spiders), and

many other stories utilize animal senses in some way—although the difference between these and human senses can be hard to distinguish.

Ultimately, many authors of animal fiction do not attempt to utilize animal senses that we have little understanding of. Sometimes that is because the senses, like animals seeing different wavelengths of light, are quite literally impossible for us to describe or visualize. Sometimes, authors do not include these kinds of details simply because it is not the focus of what they are writing, and the reasons they want to include animals in their story do not require any use of different animal senses. Other times, it is because the use of enhanced animal senses would get in the way of the plot, as heightened hearing, sight, or smell may cause characters learn information they would not otherwise.

Senses in Ailuria

Animal senses are something I am considering in *Ailuria*, but it has been one of the largest challenges. In a similar vein to animal instincts, I believe animal senses not only contribute to the characters being closer to their real counterparts but also to showing the uniqueness of animal species (therefore helping the reader learn even more about animals). Portraying in some way the different perspectives of how animals process the world around them is something I want to explore, and while I have already incorporated some elements of this, I will also need to do further research.

One thing related to animal senses that has already been incorporated in *Ailuria* is dichromatic vision. Most mammals, not including humans, see the world with dichromatic vision, a type of vision that allows only a limited number of colors to be seen—a range of yellows, browns, greens, and blues primarily (Bowmaker). When telling

the story from the perspective of an animal who would have this kind of vision in nature, the world will be described only with those colors.

Other senses, like sensing barometric pressure, having night vision, and having hypersensitivity to sounds and smells, are also things that have been utilized in the story at different points. However, as I have said, doing so has been a challenge. In a story where keeping secrets is vital and animals are everywhere, it is hard to account for these senses in every chapter. My solution has been to incorporate magic as a barrier to these animal senses. By learning magic and using it to manipulate the air around them, animals can muffle their own conversations or mask scents. Even with this, I am certain that senses have not been fully taken into account in every scene where they might make an impact, and adjusting them will be a challenge for future drafts. It is an issue I am aware of and am excited to solve, as doing so will make the world feel more fully realized and the animals more realistic.

Uncomfortable Practices

There are many things that animals do that do not align with common human moral or social standards. This can include mating practices, familial dynamics, gender roles, and more—anything that may seem uncomfortable to readers when animals are anthropomorphized to feel more like humans. A gruesome example that gets the idea of this across is that female praying mantises will sometimes bite off the head of their partner after mating (Division of Fisheries and Wildlife). Absurdly enough, this practice was addressed in the children's film *Kung Fu Panda 2*, when the praying mantis character states, "I don't have any problems with my dad. Maybe it's because Mom ate

his head before I was born," before being quickly dismissed by his friends (26:15–26:21). This somewhat dark throwaway joke is purposefully not dwelt on within the film, as doing so would bring on a line of discussion that may not be suitable for the film's younger target audience.

However, some children's works do cover uncomfortable animal practices in mature ways. When first meeting Charlotte in *Charlotte's Web*, for instance, Wilbur watches "in horror" as Charlotte wraps up a fly, and is "saddened" by the fact that Charlotte drinks the blood of insects. He calls the practice cruel, but Charlotte explains to him why it is necessary for her to do it: both for her own survival and for the survival of the ecosystem (White 38–40). Wilbur then comes around to Charlotte as a friend, and she becomes a likeable character. By having the main characters work through what may be considered an uncomfortable practice by human standards, the younger target audience can understand and get past it.

Another story that handles potentially uncomfortable animal practices in a mature and thorough manner is *Watership Down*, and it does so even more head-on. A large part of the book's plot stems from the need to get more female rabbits (does) for their burrow (warren). Adams, however, directly calls out to the reader that the rabbits in the story do not view mating in the way humans do:

> The kind of ideas that have become natural to many male human beings in thinking of females—ideas of protection, fidelity, romantic love and so on—are, of course, unknown to rabbits, although rabbits certainly do form exclusive attachments much more frequently than most people realize. However, they are

> not romantic and it came naturally to Hazel and Holly to consider the two Nuthanger does simply as breeding stock for the warren. (260)

By clearly and maturely explaining the difference between human and rabbit perceptions of the subject matter, Adams can stick to his sense of animal realism while largely removing the discomfort that may otherwise be felt. Directly acknowledging the chasm between animals and humans has its uses.

Uncomfortable Practices in Ailuria

Uncomfortable animal practices related to the species in *Ailuria* will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis as more research is incorporated into the story. There will be times where the practices of animals will not be included because I have no desire or reason to touch on the subject matter (such as certain mating practices), especially in cases where the topic would not be suited for the younger target age range of the book. However, there will be some cases where I will want to include details in these regards—in the spirit of keeping things accurate to real life and educating the reader.

V - The Trouble with Leveling the Playing Field

When making animals more like humans, an author is essentially leveling the playing field intellectually and, in some ways, morally. If one does this with multiple animal species—putting them all on the same "human" level—they are inviting problems, as animal species are far more different from one another than individual humans or groups of humans are from one another. This chapter will cover two major examples of problems that can arise.

Predation and Farming

Many animals kill and eat other animals to survive. It is a simple fact—and requirement—of nature. On top of this, humans for thousands of years have farmed animals for meat. However, the more you change animal qualities to be like human qualities, the more you make predation and farming look like murder. As Blount puts it, "You cannot write about animals without mentioning that nature has arranged that they kill each other. … When animals have completely human status, problems of cannibalism arise" (237). For authors trying to write animal stories, this may be something that needs to be addressed with care.

With Levels of Intelligence

One way to handle predation in animal stories is to have the various levels of intelligence previously discussed. By doing this, an author can recreate a human-animal dynamic within their world. As stated before, these levels can be drawn along species

lines, such as having bugs and fish be less intelligent than the other kinds of animals, or you can create these levels some other way.

The show *BoJack Horsemen*, mentioned a few times already, directly addresses the issue of meat in the fifth episode of the show's second season, and it provides a unique example of this issue being used to make a statement. The episode, titled "Chickens," opens with an advertisement for a company named Gentle Farms that sells chicken. However, since all animals in this world are anthropomorphized to an extremely human level (walking on two legs, all proportioned about the same as humans, treated on the same societal and intellectual level as humans), one may ask questions about how such meat is acquired. In the opening, the owner of Gentle Farms—a chicken himself—goes on to explain, "The chickens here have wonderful lives—before we harvest them, so you can eat them" (0:52–0:58). However, his son interjects, "But wait, Pa, aren't we chickens? I don't wanna get eaten!" (0:58–1:02). To this, his father explains:

> Boy, these animals aren't like us. They're specifically bred to be eaten, and genetically modified for maximum flavor. When our chicks first hatch, we lovingly inject them with natural delicious hormones, which makes them meat, thereby erasing any moral gray area! Now you can feel good about eating our meat. (1:02–1:22)

The underlying idea tone of the message, of course, leads the audience to believe that the moral gray area of this is anything but erased. The hormones make these chickens more animalistic: They cannot speak English, they are constantly pecking at things, and they do not have strongly developed motor functions. They therefore are not treated with the same rights or as being on the same level of intelligence as other animals. Without the

hormones, however, they would otherwise have turned out extremely human. Despite the potentially horrific nature of this, Gentle Farms is presented here as being the friendly, pasture-raised alternative to the factory farm Chicken 4 Dayz. In the episode, a factory farm chicken escapes—an event that is treated as a threat to public safety. On the news, the CEO of Chicken 4 Days is interviewed, and the host asks him about the ethics of factory farming:

> How do you respond to allegations that factory farming is "torture," or "cruel," or "like a terrifying movie about some strange dystopian society, but in this monster story, the horrifying monsters are us?" (11:34–11:46)

The owner responds simply with: "Relax, Tommy, everything we do is completely legal and FDA-approved, so, therefore, it is fine" to which the host replies, "I have no follow up questions" (11:46–11:55). The commentary on factory farms is made explicitly clear to darkly comedic effect: It is easier for most people not to ask questions regarding the morality of the treatment of animals beyond basic legality.

The episode then involves the main characters trying to help the chicken escape her fate, and it ends up serving overall as a brief commentary on the farming industry. Even Gentle Farms is presented as horrific, despite it being the better alternative. By the end of the episode, they do manage to free the chicken, but it ends darkly with the line "I think we really changed things for the better" as the characters drive past a Chicken 4 Dayz sign being changed from "5 billion served" to "6 billion served" (24:40–24:49). Many people are all right with the treatment of animals by factory farms, or they do not know about it in the first place. The show calls attention to that ignorance and to the moral discomfort that can be brought on by taking a closer look. It is not a perfect one-to-

one commentary, as this world's animal anthropomorphism makes the situation look much darker. However, it still makes for an interesting wake-up call, and it is a great example of anthropomorphic animal elements being used for a specific purpose—to make farming feel murderous.

Without Levels of Intelligence

Other stories treat animal predation in a different way. They do not have levels of intelligence as a moral buffer, and they instead include predation closer to how it really operates. This can create for lessons about death and nature, but it can also create for some uncomfortable situations.

The Wind in the Willows is a story that treats animal predation as an awkward, terrifying, and touchy subject. In the first chapter of the story, Rat briefly hints at the danger of the animals in the Wild Wood when he says that "you can't really trust them, and that's the fact" to which Mole drops the subject because he knows "that it is quite against animal-etiquette to dwell on possible trouble ahead, or even allude to it" (Grahame 13). This is only a nebulous reference to animal predation, but it is made a bit more explicit soon after. When they are talking with Otter, he trails off and disappears, and Mole recollects "that animal-etiquette forbade any sort of comment on the sudden disappearance of one's friends at any moment, for any reason or no reason whatever" (Grahame 16). In the context of animals eating one another, this is a terrifying social standard, but it is how the book treats the idea of predators and prey. It is easier for these anthropomorphized, civilized animals not to speak of something so distasteful.

The Wild Robot shows similar signs of awkwardness but acknowledges predation more directly. It presents the idea of animals forming truces, but outside of these truces, killing and eating one another is fair game. There is the Dawn Truce—something the animals in the story do even before the arrival of Roz the robot—that allows them to talk with one another and discuss news with no fear of hunting. Later in the story, we also see the truce made during the winter (something already touched on in the section about instincts). However, outside of Roz's shelters where these truces take place, the animals revert to their regular ways: "When the animals went outside, it was business as usual. Sometimes a lodger wouldn't return. Sometimes a lodger would return in the belly of another lodger. As you can imagine, that made for some awkward moments" (P. Brown 188). Once again, predation amongst these intelligent animals becomes something necessary yet awkward—a fitting reflection of how it can feel for an author to be dealing with such a basic fact of nature alongside sympathetic anthropomorphized animals.

White Fang and *Watership Down* both treat predation as a fact of nature, but they come at it from different angles that show how much perspective can shift the issue. *Watership Down* is told from the perspective of the prey, and therefore any predators are viewed as antagonistic threats. The danger of being preyed upon drives much of the story and serves as a strong yet natural force. *White Fang* is told from the perspective of the predator, and therefore portrayed in a slightly different light. We see White Fang kill his first animal, but because of how realistic it is to nature, we do not see him as any sort of villain. London even provides interesting narration on the subject:

> Life lived on life. There were the eaters and the eaten. The law was: EAT OR BE EATEN. [White Fang] did not formulate the law in clear, set terms and moralize

about it. He did not even think the law; he merely lived the law without thinking about it at all. (82)

We are specifically told that animals eating animals is not something to be moralized on, and it is an explanation that especially works due to the strong attempt at realism within the story.

Predation and Farming in Ailuria

I chose for predation to not be commonplace in *Ailuria*. I felt that the animals' thoughts and societal structures were too humanlike for predation to make sense as a direct inclusion and that it would raise too many ethical questions with the reader. If the story were to take place in a more natural setting, predation might make more sense. I do include it as something that was more common in the distant past, and future references may be made to it being a crime that happens on rare occasions. However, the story will not include many references to predation beyond this. The primary food sources in the story (aside from plants or plant-based foods) are bugs and Beasts. Bugs (while there may not be many references to them in the current text) are shown to be on a different level of intelligence, and it is normal for animals to eat them—the only predation normal in the main city. The reasons for bugs not being intelligent will be discussed later. Beasts are similarly unintelligent, and they are farmed for meat so that the carnivores of the world can eat. These "new animals" also tie heavily into the story's worldbuilding and mysteries.

Life Cycles

Different animal species have different life cycles. Lifespans vary widely from hundreds of years to just one day. Animals with shorter lifespans have compressed life cycles, and they often reach maturity much faster than humans and many other animals do. How should an author account for this when writing animal stories?

Much of the time, authors do not need to address these questions. Their stories do not reach a scope that requires them to deal with the old age and death of their characters. Sometimes, however, lifespans or life cycles become integral to the plot or themes of the story.

The Wild Robot is a story that sticks to animal realism in many ways, and accurate lifespans is one of them. The character of Brightbill is born near the beginning of the story. Throughout the span of less than a year, he matures enough to join the migration from the island—something which is integral to the book's plot structure. Furthermore, a twelve-week-old squirrel named Chitchat can communicate effectively with Brightbill and become his friend (P. Brown 110). These are sure indications of real animal lifespans being utilized.

Charlotte's Web deals with lifespans in a different way. Charlotte's death at the end of the story due to her short lifespan as a spider contributes to the overall theme of death. Wilbur then bears witness to many spider generations in the following years (White 183). Through this ending, the relative lifespans of these two species are put into proper perspective, and the observation of life continuing despite death makes for a bittersweet ending that fits with the themes.

Authors also have the option, however, of completely ignoring the lifespans of real animals and making them age closer to the way humans age. This is more likely in stories where anthropomorphized animals are closer to being humans. In *BoJack Horseman* for instance, all animals appear to age at the same rate. This makes the integrated society of the animals work more smoothly. In a society consisting entirely of animals, how *would* an author account for animals of different species having different lifespans? How would it affect the economics and culture? How would education look if some animals matured much more quickly than others? Would certain species become overpopulated? It is not impossible to address these questions, but it makes for a challenging task.

Lifespans in Ailuria

I struggled with this topic when I was first writing *Ailuria*, but I ultimately decided it would be more interesting to try creating a world where animals did have their real lifespans and life cycles. Alongside the added realism, I felt that doing this could create interesting personal and societal conflicts. The one caveat I will allow is that the few animals of the world who can perform magic get their lifespans extended. Doing this would even the playing field for those with magic (most of the stories' main characters), and it would help solidify the power structure of the world—with those who can perform magic being in charge. This power structure may also lead to societal conflicts.

VI - Animal Societies

Most humans live in communities or, more broadly, in nations. The general term I will use for communities, nations, or other interconnected groups of individuals is "societies." In a looser sense, animals form societies as well. Packs, herds, flocks, colonies, and so on could be considered kinds of societies. Some of these groups have power dynamics, divisions of labor, and even hold to territories. However, human societies are different. They have more complex government structures and economies, often hold larger quantities of individuals, and are constantly evolving culturally and technologically to a degree not seen with animals.

The creation of humanlike societies that include or are entirely composed of animals is not a task that every animal fiction author will choose to undertake. Many stories are not told in that scope or are told in a less fantastical setting, and creating these kinds of worlds requires a huge amount of additional work on the front end. This kind of work is required when creating any sort of fictional world, but anthropomorphized animals being included potentially makes things more complex. Some authors will still wish to take on the challenge because they want their animals to exist in a setting that reflects ours. This can allow for commentary on human society or for a more fantastical feel. Those choosing to do so must take into consideration all the other questions that have been previously discussed about animals and decide how those choices will affect the way the society functions (or vice versa—using an idea for a society to dictate the choices made about the animals). The number of things that can go into the creation of *any* society, much less an anthropomorphized animal society, is massive, and I will be

unable to cover everything. The following sections will simply touch on some important considerations.

Integrating Animals into Societies

There is more than one way to make an animal society, and perhaps the most important decision to make beforehand is what animals will be included in that society. Some authors may attempt to create a society that includes all kinds of animals, such as in *BoJack Horseman*. Others may choose to create a society that is only one or more broad groups of animals, such as birds in *Wildwood* having their own society that is separate from the other animals. Others may even choose to create a society that is one specific species, such as the group of sparrows in *Redwall*, a story which also contains a separate multi-species society consisting of woodland mammals. The larger the scope of the society, the harder it becomes to build the world, as interactions between different kinds of animals introduces complexity.

Accounting for Animal Needs

Different animal species need different things to survive. Sometimes, these things are dependent on habitats or climates (which will be covered in an upcoming section). In a related vein, some animals are warm-blooded and others are cold-blooded. Animal species also have varying dietary needs.

The sizes of different species are an especially important issue to address when a wide variety of species live in close proximity. How should an author account for an elephant and a shrew living in the same city? Should animals be separated based on size,

as they are in *Zootopia*? If animals that are larger need more food and more space, how does that factor into the economy? These are just some of the confounding questions that need to be considered if the world building is going to be thorough.

Interspecies Relationships

There are territorial conflicts; instances of mutualism, commensalism, parasitism, and predation; and many other interspecies relationships between animal species in nature. There are also many complex relationships between groups of people in human societies. It is therefore unsurprising that there would be complex relationships and conflicts between individuals and groups of anthropomorphized animals in an animal society. There may be conflicts that are more unique to animal worlds (such as ones based on the extreme size differences and needs listed in the previous section), and there may be conflicts that are more like human conflicts.

Authors must be careful, however, when relating conflicts in an animal world to conflicts in our world. *Zootopia* famously uses the relationship between predators and prey as an allegory for prejudice and discrimination. However, as many have pointed out, including Matt Zoller Seitz writing for Roger Ebert, the message can get muddled by using animal relationships rooted in nature:

> I can imagine an anti-racist and a racist coming out of this film, each thinking it validated their sense of how the world works. 'Zootopia' is constantly asking its characters to look past species stereotypes, and not use species-ist language or repeat hurtful assumptions. … This all seems clever and noble until you realize

that all the stereotypes about various animals are to some extent true, in particular the most basic one: carnivores eat herbivores because it's in their nature.

The danger of using animals for an allegory about a sensitive human social issue is made clear. The dividing lines between groups of animals are often based in biological fact, and by trying to anthropomorphize animal species while maintaining those dividing lines, you are inviting false parallels.

There is also the issue of individual animal relationships. When animals are all made more human and put into a society, it is possible for unique relationships to form between species that may otherwise not be possible. There are several questions that an author may wish to address pertaining to this. For example, can predator and prey species be friends (such as with a fox and a rabbit in both *Wildwood* and in *Zootopia*)? Is it societally acceptable for animals of different species to have romantic relationships? Can aquatic species interact with terrestrial species in any meaningful way? Is a member of a smaller species more likely to fear a member of a larger species? The answers to questions like these can help inform social issues within the world and what character dynamics the author may want to focus on.

Animal Society in Ailuria

The animal society in *Ailuria* will incorporate all species of animals with one exception that has already been outlined: bugs. While I was willing to go as far as to have fish be anthropomorphized to the point of gaining human intelligence, doing so for bugs felt too far because of just how many there are and how that might significantly sway the power structure of the world.

The main city in *Ailuria* is not segmented based on size (since I wanted there to be a high level of interaction between all kinds of animals), but there are several accommodations made for size differences, such as differently sized seating, housing, tools, and so on. Spaces that are meant for multiple species will be sized based on the largest species that will need to use the space, and further interior accommodations will be made from there for smaller animals when necessary.

Other animal needs will be met through special designs of the city, many of which will depend on magic for their existence. Magic provided for a simple way to make the society highly interconnected and therefore showcase all of the character and social dynamics I wanted to be able to include. One large-scale example of an animal need being met through magic is the way the city is magically segmented into different environments (this will be touched on more in the following section).

Interspecies interactions between all kinds of creatures will be common. The details of these will be developed more as I write the story, but an example I have thought on is the idea that romantic relationships between species *can* exist, with these interspecies couples adopting children if they wish to do so. However, the ideas surrounding this have not been fully developed and do not appear commonly within the story as of yet.

I will say overall that the society shown in *Ailuria* needs more developmental work. I am excited to explore this more in the future as I form further drafts of the story and solidify all of the anthropomorphism choices I made during the long course of this project.

Housing and Climates

Animals often construct their own kinds of homes in nature, such as burrows, dens, nests, lodges, and hives. They may also take advantage of natural formations for their homes, such as tree hollows and caves. Humans, on the other hand, usually live in various kinds of constructed houses. There are few ways authors can handle the homes of their anthropomorphized animal characters which will be discussed. Before doing so, I also feel it is important to note that animal housing is a consideration that is *not* exclusive to stories with animal societies. I included this section within this chapter because I felt that where individuals live (and what kind of technology is implemented into their housing) is often important to how a society operates.

One method authors use is to have animals live in a home that is similar the kind they have in nature, even if they utilize it in some unique ways due to their anthropomorphic intelligence. This is the case for the rabbits in *Watership Down* who live in a warren.

A second option is to have animals live in a place reminiscent of their natural home while using extremely human elements of a home mixed in. This can be seen in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, wherein the beavers live in a dam that has bunks, a dining table, an oven, and so on. A less extreme example can be seen in "The Tale of Peter Rabbit," where Peter's family lives "in a sand-bank, underneath the root of a very big fir-tree" (Potter 9). The home, however, is shown to contain a kitchen and beds.

A third option is to simply have animal characters live in completely humanlike homes. This is often seen in cases of more heavily anthropomorphized animals, such as in

Zootopia and *BoJack Horseman*, and this choice more easily allows for humanlike cities to be implemented in the story.

Additionally, since animal species in real life have adapted to specific environments, an author may choose to have different areas of their world be specially tailored toward various climate needs. *Zootopia* also addresses this early on, as the city of Zootopia includes a variety of environments that are artificially maintained—such as with massive heaters for the desert and a sprinkler system for the rainforest.

Housing and Climates in Ailuria

Housing in *Ailuria* will mostly be of the in-between variety. They will usually be styled after the natural homes of animals, but they will be large enough to include human implements. In some cases, housing will also be more tightly packed than in nature. I felt that choosing this mixture would allow for the benefits of both realism and anthropomorphism—animals are still shown with their natural homes, but they are used in unique ways that fit with the fantastical, humanlike society. Many buildings that are not built as housing will be more like human buildings, and in-world they are constructed with the help of magic. Buildings and housing are subjects that will need to be developed a little bit more in future drafts of the story.

Tools and Writing

As was discussed in the earlier section on legs and the limitations of animal actions, it is sometimes the case that an author of animal fiction will want their animal characters to use tools, weapons, or other human creations that require human hands. In

some cases, such as with the example discussed from *Animal Farm*, this issue *is* directly addressed, even if a satisfying answer is not focused on. Other times, the issue is not addressed at all, and the reader is simply meant to suspend their disbelief. Other times, the animals simply walk on two legs and have humanlike hands, which makes the use of human tools possible. Choosing to address the issue while not having the animals walk on two legs can lead to inventive solutions and a unique world. However, it once again requires more work on the part of the author.

Another related issue is whether an author wants their animals to be able to write. Charlotte the spider in *Charlotte's Web* uses her silk to write human words. The rats in *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* learn how to write, which helps them with organizing their new society. The pigs in *Animal Farm* write down their commandments with paint. Writing is extremely important to human society, but animals may find the task more difficult, especially if they are trying to write with human writing tools.

I bring these subjects up in this chapter because our use of tools facilitates the advancement of human civilization and the functioning of our societies. While these issues were ones I initially wanted to explore more thoroughly (as within *Ailuria*, I want animals to walk on their natural number of legs, but I also want them to be able to use some tools), ultimately, none of the stories I read or watched addressed this issue in the way I plan to in mine. The stories either had the animals physically anthropomorphized to the point where using human tools would be simple, did not have their animals using human tools at all, or did not delve into the exact ways the animals went about using the tools.

Tools and Writing in Ailuria

The animals in *Ailuria* will use many human tools; however, they will also use tools that are specifically made to accommodate animals. The reason for this mixture is so that I could work from a place of familiarity (especially because the society overall is reminiscent of ours) while allowing for inventiveness to work with the animal realism. The choice to have animals walk on their natural number of legs has already been discussed, and the way tools are handled in *Ailuria* is primarily consequence of that choice.

Human-Animal Relations

It may be important for a story with an animal society to address how the animals interact with humans, especially in cases where the humans and animals live in the same society. In some instances, like with *BoJack Horseman* or *The Bad Guys*, humans and anthropomorphized animals generally live on equal footing. In many portal fantasies, like *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, humans are outsiders to the fantastical world that has talking animals, and these outsider humans become important to the outcomes of that world's conflicts. *Wildwood* combines the previous two examples, with humans and talking animals already being present (and on relatively equal footing) inside the fantasy world when the outsider humans enter.

In other stories, humans exist as threats or sources of conflict. In *Watership Down*, for example, humans are a general threat that the rabbits usually try to avoid. In *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, on the other hand, humans serve as one of the primary antagonists of the story. In *Animal Farm*, the pigs initially overthrow their human

oppressors and swear off interacting with the humans outside the farm; their eventual reversal on this policy lends itself to the story's allegory.

The Wind in the Willows offers a rather unique example of human-animal relations. The animals at one point are said to generally avoid humans:

> The animals did not hold with villages, and their own highways, thickly frequented as they were, took an independent course, regardless of church, post office, or public-house. (Grahame 64)

If the animal and human societies never interacted, that would be one thing, but we soon learn that this is not the case. The two groups do interact, as seen when Toad is arrested for reckless driving and thrown into a human-run jail. However, humans and animals seem to view each other in strange ways. This can be seen when Toad is having fun talking with the daughter of the human jailer:

> Then she wanted to know about his animal-friends, and was very interested in all he had to tell her about them and how they lived, and what they did to pass their time. Of course, she did not say she was fond of animals as *pets*, because she had the sense to see that Toad would be extremely offended. (Grahame 109)

This paints a rather strange portrait of this world's social climate. Even though most of the animals we see in the story generally act like humans, wear clothes, use weapons, can fully communicate with humans, are subject to human courts of law, and live up to the human societal standards of the time, the humans still apparently look down upon the animals as if they should own them. The dynamic is not explored too much further within the story, but it is one I found fascinating upon first reading.

Human-Animal Relations in Ailuria

Humans are not present within *Ailuria* for reasons that have already been discussed. The interactions between the animals of this world and humans are therefore not explored.

Religion and Mythology

Since human culture has always been heavily intertwined with religion and mythology, and since fictional religions and mythologies are common in the fantasy genre, it is natural that some animal stories will include their own references to these concepts, whether real-world or fictional. In this section, I will discuss a few prominent examples to show how different stories can utilize these concepts.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe features animal characters alongside a story with many Christian elements. Many of the characters in Narnia refer to the human children as "The Sons and Daughters of Adam and Eve," and famously, Aslan the lion's story in the book parallels the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Wind in the Willows references churches and features field-mice singing a Christmas carol that references the animals present during the birth of Jesus (Grahame 76). However, there is also an interesting moment slightly later in the book where Rat and Mole have a strange experience when searching for Otter's lost son. They come to a small lawn and feel an intense presence before them, and Mole feels called to look up:

> He looked in the very eyes of the Friend and Helper; saw the backward sweep of the curved horns, gleaming in the growing daylight; saw the stern, hooked nose between the kindly eyes that were looking down on them humorously, while the

> bearded mouth broke into a half-smile at the corners; saw … the pan-pipes only just fallen away from the parted lips; saw the splendid curves of shaggy lines disposed in majestic ease on the sward. (Grahame 101)

Though he goes unnamed, this being is presumed to be the Greek god of the wild, Pan. Rat and Mole have a religious experience here that they cannot quite remember afterward, but they do find that the lost otter has been returned. This entire chapter of the book is left out of many editions due to how strange and jarring it is within the narrative; however, Grahame found it essential (M. Brown). Pan is even featured on the book's original cover, and his inclusion in the story brings up a lot of fascinating questions about the world.

The last example I will bring up is from *Watership Down*. This book features a fictional mythology that the rabbits tell to one another throughout the book. They mostly involve stories of El-ahrairah, the Prince Rabbit. They also include Frith, who is the creator of the world, and the Black Rabbit of Inlé, who is described rather powerfully:

> The Black Rabbit of Inlé is fear and everlasting darkness. He *is* a rabbit, but he is that cold, bad dream from which we can only entreat Lord Frith to save us today and tomorrow. … You all know how some rabbits seem to just throw their lives away … but the truth is that their foolishness comes from the Black Rabbit, for it is by his will that they do not smell the dog or see the gun (Adams 280).

This continues further, but the idea is made clear that this rabbit is a sort of Grim Reaper within their mythology. These stories are prominent and important within *Watership Down*, and they were one of my personal favorite aspects of the story.

Religion and Mythology in Ailuria

I decided early on in my worldbuilding work for *Ailuria* that the world's mythology and gods would be an important aspect of the plot and world. However, much of the prevalence of these ideas comes into play later in the book (in the half that has not been touched on). In its current state, there are a few references to a goddess named Magi, but religion and mythology are not yet thoroughly explored. My reasons for including this kind of mythology are less connected to the animal anthropomorphism elements and more related to the fantasy world elements, but in-world, the lore behind the mythology does inform why the animals exist in an anthropomorphic form in the first place.

Conclusion

There are many topics related to animals and their adaptation into literature that I did not have the time or space to address, many works I love that I wish I could have included, and many more points to be made about all the topics and works that *were* included. That said, I believe that what has been presented in the previous chapters has shown just how wide the chasm between humans and animals is and just how much work authors can put into crossing it. It is my opinion that the task of writing about anthropomorphized animals can be quite admirable if done properly. Attempting to cross the chasm, when done with care, can build sympathy between the sides, can push us to try and understand our companions on this planet, can help us understand ourselves, can help us teach our children, and can create iconic, amazing stories. Every animal story is approached differently, and every animal story says something about animals, whether it chooses to or not. As our understanding of animals grows from a scientific standpoint and as our discussions around their rights and around their use in our culture develop, I am eager to see what future bridges are made into the uncrossable chasm. That said, I now invite you to read my own bridge that has been referenced throughout this paper: the work-in-progress novel *Ailuria*.

Creative Portion: *Ailuria*

The creative portion of this thesis has been removed from the online copy due to the intent of future publication.

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