ENGL399W Honors Paper

Vincent Valentini

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**The Puppet Valley: Anthropomorphism as Critique**

**Introduction.**

Pierre Burge, a French Industrialist interested in the power of anthropomorphism once said, *“Loving dogs is a question of anthropomorphism. We become attached to dogs because of the feelings we present on them”*. The life that puppets and non-human animals are given by humans may be a way for humans to expose their own flaws and social issues. As we know, inanimate objects and nonhuman animals in literature sometimes are given a life that humans are usually only capable of. Meaning talking puppets, living toys, and trees with arms that reach out to grab you may be more than a funny and entertaining story. Writers often use anthropomorphism to expose society’s flaws and vices. Specifically, how children can be selfish, society may ignore endangered species, and the human tendency to have a class structure even when they say they want equality.

Throughout literary works and film productions such as *Pinocchio, The Lion King, Lord of the Rings, Animal Farm,* and *Pixar Cars,* we see a great deal of puppets and non-human animals being used to expose social and political issues. The reason why authors use these entities to expose their ideas will be discussed later in the essay. We know that humans are giving these non-human entities a life very similar to our own, but what can that say about how humans perceive themselves? If authors were to write essays and novels talking about how ignorant humans can be, it will not reach a wide audience. But when you substitute humans with cartoon-like animals, singing teacups, and cars with big shiny eyes, the audience pays attention. Anthropomorphism is used for a grand number of reasons, this paper will be covering how it is used for exposing problems with society. Something that is important to note is how authors use an animal’s perspective to target specific audiences and appeal to a large audience. An example of this that will be discussed deeper later is *The White Bone* by Barbara Gowdy. Anthropomorphism is used here to expose human’s ignorance towards an endangered species and taking care of our planet.

**Where do we see Anthropomorphism?**

There are countless examples of Anthropomorphism throughout early and late-century literature, pop culture, magazines, and film and television. Some of them may include, as previously mentioned, *Pinocchio, The Lion King, Lord of the Rings,* and *Pixar Cars.* These examples, and the others introduced later, reach a specific audience and use anthropomorphism to expose the author’s ideas about society. Meaning, the nonhuman animals and inanimate objects are given human traits in different ways and for different reasons, but they all support a similar idea as to why we, as humans, need to expose our faults to inform and bring awareness to audiences.

Quite interestingly, anthropomorphism is often seen in political conversation, particularly with animals. For example, *Animal Farm* by George Orwell heavily anthropomorphizes animals so we learn about the truth of human’s need for class structure, even when society says they strive for equality . Anthropomorphism is a great tool for authors and even film makers, such as Pixar’s *Cars.* Pixar’s *Cars* gives a younger audience the truth of how our emotions give us the energy we show others. The film franchise appeals to children, being a film about talking cars without humans, which subtly gives the audience a perception of what makes a human, a human. Stepping away from novels and films quickly, this use of anthropomorphism is even seen in commercials. The consumer products are often anthropomorphized or have an anthropomorphized character in the advertisement. As we know, Geico has a talking gecko as their spokesperson for the company. This instantly expands the audience as a talking gecko is appealing.

***Pinocchio***

Digging into specific types of characters, puppets are a prime example of how anthropomorphism is used to expose truths about society. *Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi encompasses this type of Anthropomorphism. Pinocchio is a puppet that acts like a little boy who becomes selfish, not keeping in mind the people around him.

*“How the puppets recognize Pinocchio as their brother, and make a great fuss of him; but how the puppeteer, Swallowfire, appears in the middle of it all and Pinnochio is in danger of coming to grief” (Collodi 16).*

This is just one of the chapter titles that illuminate what Pinocchio is going through. It is important that Collodi expresses that Pinocchio is seen as a real boy, even though he is a puppet. Puppets are extremely relevant to this conversation because in the end, humans are controlling the puppet. This gives us great detail into how anthropomorphism is used by humans to bring about and expose a truth about themselves. In Pinocchio, Collodi is exposing how children can be selfish without knowing it. We get a sense of what Collodi believes encompasses a “real boy” and what makes a human a human. The use of morals throughout the story illuminates how Collodi is exposing the truth that children do not have morals at such a young age. Most people in society can pick up *Pinocchio* and understand what Collodi was trying to teach his readers, but the text targets children. We know this because of the sole fact that Pinocchio is a puppet and a child. Given that this puppet child is learning the basic fundamentals of what it means to function in society, children can learn a lot from this story. The text is vital to our understanding of how Collodi’s truths are exposed because Pinocchio represents a vessel for a human and is taught throughout the book how you should act and behave as a boy, as a human. A really important part of the text is when Pinocchio becomes a donkey. In the text, a dialogue between the Purchaser and Pinnochio illuminates the importance of this scene.

*“...he stammered out tearfully, ‘And where is the donkey that I threw into the sea?*

*“I am that donkey! Said Pinocchio, laughing.”*

*“You?”*

*“Yes, me”* (Collodi 145-146)

This line is vital to Collodi exposing an important truth about children by personifying Pinocchio as a donkey. At this point in the text, Pinocchio has not been doing what a good and successful boy should be doing. Which would be doing their chores, obeying elders, and telling the truth when asked a question. The symbolism comes into play when Pinocchio becomes a donkey because of the notion, even today, that is instilled behind the donkey. We know that a donkey symbolizes a foolish person or a mockery of some sort. So it is important to note why Pinocchio turned into a donkey and what was happening beforehand. Pinocchio tells us why he turned into a donkey and it illuminates. Pinocchio says..

*“Then it was touch and go whether I would become a boy like all the others in this world, except that, because of my unwillingness to study and because of listening to the advice of bad company, I ran away from home…and one fine day when I woke up, I found that I had turned into an ass with great long ears….and a long tail!...” (Collodi 146).*

This line is a prime example of how the things that Pinocchio has done to disobey his master resulted in him being punished, which exposes a great truth that Collodi is illuminating in this story. One of the lessons of this story that Collodi is educating his audience on is when you disobey, you get punished for it. Now, the punishment in this scenario is a tad satirical because to kids, a donkey is comical. But the reason why this line is so important to this entire argument is because Collodi is consciously highlighting some of the things that good boys should be doing. Boys should study, be motivated, and listen to their parents and Collodi exposes that truth to readers. One of the problems with society that is being conveyed is how some children do not know how to properly behave, and some actions receive consequences.

Further, this example highlights the great truths of this story, to pinpoint child behavior with the use of a puppet to draw children’s attention. Was one of Collodi’s reasoning behind *Pinocchio* to educate children on how good children should behave? Perhaps, but the story evolves beyond that and explores ideas that are timeless. Society structured how children should and should not behave, as Pinocchio is not behaving, we see him receiving consequences for his actions. Lastly, knowing how Collodi uses puppets to expose truths about children’s behavior, it is important to keep in mind how puppets in general are important in children’s literature.

**Puppets are Simple**

Many scholars and critics dig into Collodi’s *Pinocchio* as exposing truths about how children often misbehave and get away with it With an intended audience of children as we now know. Irma Dovey, a journalist who studied the role of puppets in children’s literature, wrote “Puppets are simple” and elaborates on Collodi’s writing choices. In the article, Dovey discusses what puppets mean to children and why we use puppets today to highlight truths about society to children. The article highlights how children are very interested when puppets are involved because it excites them. Further, we can use that in literature to draw children’s attention to a more serious conversation. In this case, the conversation about behavior and how wrong behavior should not be tolerated because it can teach children that boundaries do not exist. Dovey states that..

*Violence on television may be ruining our kids, but oh, what it does to keep the interest up so that Sammy Slow Reader will repeat the story one more time! But, oh what it does to keep the young audience interested…Puppets are simple? Huh! Not on your life. But fun (Dovey 54).*

I found this article to be intriguing because Dovey talks about how puppets seem so simple to the audience as a show that teaches children the basic morals of the human condition, but it goes way beyond that as Dovey mentions. As a society, we view puppet shows as a means to teach children a lesson while putting on a show to keep them interested. *Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi plays a major role in exposing truths about children's behavior by using anthropomorphism. Lastly, I want to quickly add that this story still resonates today, which highlights how the use of anthropomorphism may be timeless. To continue this conversation, companies have also taken objects that we all know and give them life. They are given human-like eyes, a mouth, eyebrows, and other human characteristics. This allows the audience, children especially, to relate to that character. An example that illuminates this is Pixar *Cars.*

**Pixar *Cars***

In Pixar *Cars,* humans are replaced by cars and live in a community very similar to our contemporary world. The cars talk and have facial expressions like humans do. In the film franchise, every car exhibits a different type of person in society. Some cars symbolize cows, some symbolize the average middle-class citizen, and others represent citizens on the poverty line. The way that Pixar uses cars to visualize this not only targets an audience, but shows the truths of societal structure in a children’s movie. In *Pinocchio*, we saw that the life that the wooden puppet has sheds light on the truth of behavior and how children (and adults) should act. But in Pixar *Cars,* it is a little different in the way it is presented. In Pixar *Cars,* the life given to the cars are almost human, but the absence of humans all together is important to note.

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**No humans in *Cars***

On the track of Pixar *Cars,* Jon Negroni provides a great critique on *Cars* and how the talking cars demonstrate different roles in society. Negroni says in his article “Why there are no humans in Pixars’ Cars”...

*“…to human emotion being a source of actual, real-life energy. It’s the energy that makes toys come to life, powers an entire civilization of blue-collar monsters, gives some people superpowers, and residually breathes life and personality into machines. In other words, humans are batteries, and a lot of the phenomena in the Pixar universe can be explained by this very idea”* (Negroni 7).

This example deeply demonstrates the truths about class structure in our society. Pixar is known for exposing problems that society has, such as morals in *W all-E*. But before we move to another Pixar example, *Cars* provides us with a great exposure of our hierarchical and class structure, and Negroni demonstrates how Pixar does this. I do not want to focus on the fact that there are no humans because as important as it is, the main focus is how humanistic these cars are. The cars in the movie represent the different roles in society and hyperbolizes some of them to highlight problems in humans. For example, some of the cars are blue to represent police officers and their snobby attitude because they have power. Further, some cars look very clean and new, who are unironically the best racers in town. Leaving other cars to look beaten up and not taken care of, representing the people in society in poverty. The entire movie franchise covers different parts of society and this is one of the key aspects of how Pixar is exposing the human condition.

Further, I want to quickly add one more Pixar example that Negroni talks about in the line..

*…Cars occurs during the offscreen events of WALL-E, or 2110 to be exact. Mankind has abandoned Earth because all of the garbage they incinerated starting in 2105 polluted the atmosphere to dangerous levels of toxicity before they finished cleaning up the last of it, which is comprised of what we see in the opening city crawl of WALL-E. With humans gone and most of the world cleaned up, 700 years pass before humans return thanks to WALL-E’s intervention” (Negroni 9).*

This example is a prime example of how Pixars’ *WALL-E* movie exposes social and political issues in our society. In *WALL-E*, all humans have been moved to a technology infested world because of a pollution issue (that we have today in our world) that went out of hand and became unfixable. *WALL-E* is a perfect example for how anthropomorphism exposes our obsession with technology and ignorance of climate change and issues with pollution. The robot named Wall-E is programmed to clean up the humans’ mess. This is exposing our ignorance because in our world today, we have a pollution and climate change issue that is not being taken care of and this movie is exposing that. But, relating back to *Pinocchio*, Pixar appeals more to children because they are our future so exposing these problems to them will persuade them to make changes when they get older.

**Anthropomorphism, Again**

Now that we discussed how anthropomorphism sheds light on our social issues in society and examined a few examples that are still relevant today, it is important to dissect anthropomorphism in other perspectives. In the article “Anthropomorphism, Again” by Vicki Kirby, we get a clear sense of how an author anthropomorphizes nonhuman animals and objects to touch upon the societal issues mentioned. Vicki Kirby is an anthropologist that examines how anthropomorphism is used to touch on problems in society. For example, Kirby says in her article that…

*“Although I might concede that my identity is in many ways reliant upon the surrounding socius and that I can make sense of myself only by negotiating specifically cultural and historical values, I can nevertheless retain the belief that within these webs of influence my individuality remains reasonably intact” (Kirby 252).*

This article holds a prime example for how an author uses anthropomorphism to bring a deeper conversation about major political issues. I want to include this because examining why objects are alive tell us what the author is trying to illuminate in their writing. According to Kirby, authors most of the time subconsciously use their own identity and individuality to anthropomorphize characters in their writing. Meaning if an author wants to expose how ignorant we (as humans) are about climate change, they might anthropomorphize an elephant or our planet since they are victims of the issue. Further, authors may be directly impacted by an issue, which may be why they write about it. This is what Vicki Kirby highlights in her article. She does this tremendously by providing many examples of classic and contemporary writers who used their own identity to write their stories. Kirby continues her essay by discussing how anthropomorphism handles the human condition with the author’s identity embedded in the anthropomorphized character(s).

*“…I want to offer a preliminary dilation on what it might mean to discover ends in beginnings, an originary anthropomorphism, a "diagonal science": what if the most intriguing riddles that attach to the human condition and its special identity are already present in the presumptive simplicity of life's earliest and most primitive expressions?” (Kirby 257).*

Kirby is emphasizing how examples such as *Pinocchio* and Pixars’ *Cars* touch on political and social issues using anthropomorphism. I find it interesting how most of the examples even talked about during the seminar, can appeal to children. Almost all children's literature has some form of anthropomorphism that exposes various problems in society.

**Animal Farm**

One of the most prominent examples of anthropomorphism that expose some of the issues mentioned is *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. In this case, Orwell exposes the corruption and social issues with Communism. The use of anthropomorphism in this example highlights political issues, because of this the novel does not exactly appeal to children like Pixar and Pinnochio do. Animal Farm uses classic farm animals to warn society about the faults of communism. Orwell discusses some of the problems in our society as humans. On page 7, the line…

*And remember also that in fighting against Man, we must not come to resemble him. Even when you have conquered him, do not adopt his vices. No animal must ever live in a house, or sleep in a bed, or wear clothes, or drink alcohol, or smoke tobacco, or touch money, or engage in trade” (Orwell 7)*

This powerful example illuminates how Orwell’s use of anthropomorphism exposes truths about society, particularly vices such as alcohol, money, and smoking. But it goes beyond that to touch upon rebellion. Orwell exemplifies how people must change their ways (in terms of communism) and rebellion is an option. I wanted to touch upon this line briefly because Orwell provides us with another example of how human vices are being exposed. Further, *Animal Farm* has an overall message of the animals being equal and living a happy life. But this is the anthropomorphized context of it because we know that this novel is exposing problems in our world. In society today unfortunately, certain groups in society across the world are not viewed equally. But if Orwell were to write a novel just talking about humans not being equal, that would not appeal to a greater audience. The anthropomorphism of the animals gives a satirical nature to the novel which appeals to a younger audience as well, particularly middle and high school students.

Further, there are a lot of political cartoons that illuminate the themes presented in the novel. One of them is a cartoon of all of the farm animals angry and Napoleon on the other side. We can see Napoleon starting a rebellion in the farm, which illuminates the theme of rebellion in the play. The rebellion against the Soviet Union continues the conversation of a warning against communism.

**The White Bone**

As previously discussed, one major social and political issue that is evident in many examples of anthropomorphism is climate change and endangered species. Authors often write novels in the perspective of animals to give readers an experience similar to that animal. In *The White Bone* by Barbara Gowdy, the entire novel is written from the elephant’s perspective. The social issues in this novel are the effects of poaching and endangered species awareness. The novel seems to be in a separate world from ours, but it is actually quite similar.

*“She and Mud were calves then. They were so devoted to each other that they walked with Date Bed grasping Mud’s tail, and they said ‘we’ instead of ‘I’--’we are tired,’ ‘we want,’ ‘we can’t’--as if they were a single calf. When She-Screams slapped Mud, it was Date Bed who squealed” (Gowdy 67).*

The diction that Gowdy uses emphasizes that the elephants are hurt as a species. The use of Pathos to refer to the calves as a community instead of individuals exemplifies the issue at hand. Gowdy is exposing the truth of how humans are becoming ignorant about this endangered species and our planet in general. In this case, anthropomorphism is paired with pathos to not only engage an audience but also expose an important truth. The elephant’s perspective throughout the novel helps Gowdy touch upon the truth about Elephants and how poaching affects their species.

**After the matter**

Now that we know how anthropomorphism is used to target social and political issues in our society, what does this mean? The use of animals and wooden puppets not only makes for a great story, but also reaches a wider audience as we know. From Gowdy’s usage of elephant’s to expose our climate issues and ignorance of endangered species to Collodi’s *Pinocchio* to highlight issues with child behavior and how we “should be acting” in our contemporary world. Further, the substitution of farm animals in Orwell’s *Animal Farm* to critique Communism and the Soviet Union allows for a greater audience while exposing a serious problem. All of these authors have their own ideas and messages that they want to show their readers. The usage and absence of humans to include animals and objects makes their story much more engaging and even more expository.

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