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## **Pernicious Portrayals: The Impact of Children's Attachment to Animals of Fiction on Animals of Fact**

### ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the lack of distinction between human and nonhuman animals in the fantastic world of children's literature and film results in distorted representations of intelligence, capabilities, and morality of nonhuman animals. From the perspective of attachment theory, the paper shows how humans internalize and sustain misrepresentations throughout adulthood and how these misrepresentations influence relationships with real animals. An ongoing search for the ideal "Walt Disney dog" of childhood jeopardizes relationships to companion animals. Trying to recreate the fantasy dog by genetic manipulation of a real animal's characteristics results in needless distress for companion animals. Because the companion does not meet expectations engendered by childhood stories, normal dog behaviour—chewing, digging, and barking—may result in relinquishing the dog for adoption and subsequent euthanasia. Shifting to the scientific realm, the paper discusses the on-going debate on the study of animals' human-like abilities, most salient in ape language programs. In closing, the paper discusses the disservice done to real animals as illusions of childhood and subsequent misunderstandings leave them judged by impossible, anthropocentric standards—which they rarely can fulfill.

Two interrelated issues—nonhuman animals' similarity to humans and their moral status—often form the basis of a debate on controversial social practices involving animals. This paper argues that expectations engendered by childhood stories are one reason these issues play a key role in determining what social practices are acceptable. Within the magic of children's stories, a peculiar transformation emerges: The human-animal distinction dissolves, and resulting distorted representations are not benign. These internal representations shape the human role, responsibility, and culpability in the human-animal dynamic. Childhood attachment to animal characters and stories unconsciously may influence adult behavior toward animals. Children love stories and their characters. Through narrative, children begin to understand the world and give meaning to otherwise frightening or challenging events. When the animal characters to whom children become attached are highly romanticized, internal representations form, engendering impossible expectations for actual animals. This discussion illustrates how children internalize these pervasive misrepresentations. The paper looks at consequences—the impact for companion animals, the effect on the scientific questions posed, and the subsequent formulation of the science used to answer them.

As our primary information source, the media plays a major role in shaping the way we think about nonhuman animals (Liska, 1999), our attitudes, and even our public policies (Jones, 1997). A 1994 graphic campaign outlining images of rodeo cruelty led to a California legislature bill banning horse tripping. Kidd and Kidd (1990) found that children's experiences with companion animals, movies, television, books, and school affected children's attitudes toward pets. Below, we highlight just a few examples, among thousands, of cherished and misrepresented animal characters.

Children's stories misrepresent animals predominantly through fantastic anthropomorphism, evidenced in how animals communicate, think, and act as moral agents. The contemporary, scientific view supports a tentative consensus that although animals do not have reflective consciousness—they are not aware that they are aware—they do have phenomenal consciousness—they are aware of their environment—(Dawkins, 2001; O'Connell, 2000; Pepperberg & Lynn, 2000). This is very different from the animals of children

stories who often are more aware, and definitely more astute, than their human counterparts.

In the 1995 Disney film by the same name, Balto is the ideal hero. A wolf-dog cross, he is a prime example of a Disney character who does not lack any moral virtues. Balto is more interested in saving the life of a little girl than running with the gorgeous husky who “owns” her. *Balto*, evidently based very loosely on a true story, is a sentimental account of how a dog not only risks the perils of a winter blizzard to bring back life-saving medicine but also comes to terms with the fact that he is a “mixed breed.”

Another distorted canine, Buck, plays the lead character in the classic *Call of the Wild* (London, 1903). Buck is ultra-strong, independent, loyal, courageous, and intelligent. He is an inspiring role model, often persevering through sheer strength of will. Super Buck with his super strength manages to pull 1000 lbs to win much needed money for the destitute John Thornton. Yet, he is sensitive. Buck, as the ultimate idealized animal character, is capable of falling in love. Notably, it is the human, John, with whom Buck falls in love.

A poignant example of another distorted canine comes from Twain (1904). In this tragic story, the dog’s reward for saving a human infant is to be beaten mercilessly when the heroic deed is mistaken for canine aggression. When human ignorance then brings about the death of one of the dog’s puppies, the mother lies down by the grave, thinking “I saw he was going to plant the puppy, and I was glad, because it would grow and come up a fine handsome dog” (p. 31). As the weeks pass and no puppy springs from the earth, we learn that “a fright has been stealing upon” the canine mother, and that she will soon die of starvation and heartbreak (p. 31).

Although dogs perhaps are one of the most prominent examples of distorted animals, several species have been misrepresented: the lions and the hyenas in the *Lion King*, the bears in *Brother Bear*, and the sea creatures of *The Little Mermaid*. In the more recent film, *Ice Age*, a sneaky saber-tooth lion, a sweet sloth, and their cantankerous leader, a woolly mammoth, teach a lesson in the value of family, loyalty, and forgiveness. They lay shame to the human hunters who are responsible for killing the mammoth’s “wife” and “child” by undertaking an arduous journey to return an infant to the baby’s human family. The characters in *Ice Age* represent a new phase of anthropomorphism. They

are the ultimate portrayal of human character in animal form: They, too, have flaws. The sloth is awkward and slow, the mammoth often apathetic, and the saber-tooth lion plays a key role in the separation of the infant from his family.

Non-animated children's films also highlight the escapades of amazing animals. The *Air Bud* series stars the golden retriever, Bud, a canine version of Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys, who foils criminal plans, understands English, and can tell time. *Andre the Seal* is another example of embellishing a human-animal bond with an emotional, human-centered perspective. The case of Andre's unwavering attachment to his caretakers is made more salient when many of the heart-warming actions of the seal are based in reality. Even when he was old and blind, Andre swam 200 miles each spring to return to his adopted family. Other equally plausible explanations of this behavior (a ready food source, migration, or simply habit) are ignored in favor of a sentimentalized version of Andre's enduring love.

It is easy to see why children love the animals found in children's narratives. These animals represent the archetypal characters—the despicable villains, the great heroines, and heroes. They are the characters that capture hearts. Balto, like countless canine heroes, is a paradigm of admirable qualities. He infuses the phrase, “man's best friend” with new meaning by becoming the very best friend imaginable. In short, these stories create impossible characters—characters with whom children strongly identify, engage in imaginary relationships, and include in their autobiographical narratives. The profound emotional response to these characters may compromise our critical ability to explore our own biases about how they are represented. The massive “Global Disney Project” found that while most participants denied that Disney had exerted a major influence in their lives (Phillips, 2001), their memories of Disney were so positive that investigating the entertainment giant was considered taboo (Wasko & Meehan, 2001). This defensiveness illustrates the extent to which childhood narratives are held sacred. In the following section, we explore how these sacred representations are maintained throughout the lifespan.

## Misrepresentations Internalized: Attachment Relationships with Animal Characters

The emotional response to children's narrative is strikingly enduring. Images of animal characters can stay with individuals for many years, and special books often are revisited throughout their lives (Alexander, Miller, & Hengst, 2001). Bowlby's (1979) attachment theory provides a theoretical basis as to why this may be so. Bowlby introduced the "internal working model" to explain the strong, "affectional" bonds that infants develop with caregivers. Childhood attachment experiences with caregivers result in the development of internal representations or working models that serve to shape, modify, and maintain images of self, others, and self/other dynamics throughout the lifespan. A central tenant of internal working models is that indeed they are working models. That is, they are shaped by experience. As Crowell and colleagues note, attachment representations remain open to revision in light of real experience (Crowell, Treboux & Waters, 2002). However, internal working models, though malleable, do not shift easily, and this relative persistence may affect later relationships and functioning. In Bowlby's own words:

whatever representational models of attachment figures and of self an individual builds during his childhood and adolescence, tend to persist relatively unchanged into and throughout adult life (p. 141) . . . and often continue to do so despite repeated evidence that the model is inappropriate. . . . Such biased perceptions and expectations lead to various misconceived beliefs . . . false expectations . . . [and] inappropriate actions (p. 142).

A large body of research supports the tenacity of internal working models (Burks, Dodge, Price, & Laird, 1999; Carlson, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2004). These enduring models influence belief systems, shape attachment behaviors, and determine future actions. However, because working models operate both consciously and unconsciously, individuals often are unaware that early childhood representations may be replicated in our adult relationships and exert a powerful and ubiquitous influence on our adult behavior.

Bowlby's (1979) work has precipitated an enormous body of research, and attachment theory has been used to explain a host of psychological phenomena. Of particular interest to this discussion is the manner in which children become attached to narratives. Story attachment is defined by Alexander

et al. (2001) as “a strong and sustained emotional involvement with a particular story” (p. 374). Focusing on the emotional aspect of development, Alexander’s team found that fundamental attachment behaviors arise in children’s relationships to stories, often to the point of obsession. Children commonly requested the same stories several times a day, slept with favorite books, and became inconsolable when prohibited from watching a favorite movie. Further, these researchers found that children as young as two developed strong emotional attachments to stories and note that only a minimal level of cognition is needed for story attachment.

Research shows that children’s ability to differentiate between fantasy and reality develops slowly. Children as young as three can distinguish a verbal truth from a verbal lie, and six-year-olds consistently are able to recognize verbal deception (Lee, Cameron, Doucette, & Talwar, 2002). However, it takes up to nine years for children reliably to understand non-verbal deception. In addition, Harris (1991, cited in Lee et al., 2002) argues. “Despite their ability to distinguish sharply between fantasy and reality, young children might still remain unsure of the rules that govern transformation between those two realms” (p. 122). Moreover, children’s ability to differentiate the real from the fantastic may be compromised unintentionally because—even as adults—we tend to normalize the humanness of animal characters.

In a 2003 study of Disney’s depiction of familial relationships, Tanner, Haddock, Zimmerman, & Lund (2003) argued that Disney’s prevailing message was the inevitability of romance whenever a man and woman met. They illustrated this with the Disney characters Vixey and Todd from *The Fox and the Hound*. However, Vixey and Todd are not a man and a woman at all, but two foxes (Tanner et al.). Creators of children’s narrative also may use special effects that blur the fantasy/reality distinction even further. The animated film *Balto* begins and ends with a non-animated visit of a little girl and her grandmother to Balto’s statue in New York’s Central Park, serving at once to highlight the heroism of Balto’s deeds and to reinforce the reality of the tale.

Alexander et al.’s (2001) work suggests that the line between fantasy and reality further erodes as children weave new stories about their own experiences and include story characters to whom they have become attached. Ultimately, however, what is important is not whether children perceive animal characters as real but rather their attachment response to these characters.

As Davies (1997) puts it, “Knowing that something is imaginary thus does not seem to lessen its perceived power” (p. 13). Alexander’s team reported that two of the children cried urgently each time they watched Bambi’s mother die. Put another way, although children may recognize that cartoons, especially, are not real, they still may be reluctant to let go of fantasy. Harris (1991, cited in Davies, 1997) found,

Children up to the age of 7 or 8 were quite capable of understanding the concept of a fantasy, or imaginary animal, and they were able to test for themselves that imaginary creatures were not inside a box. However, they still showed reluctance to put their fingers into the box, in case their fingers were bitten by the animal. (p. 13)

Perhaps it is this reluctance that explains why attachment to distorted animal representations is able to gain such an enduring hold.

### **Consequences for the Human-Nonhuman Animal Relationship**

Misrepresented animal characters have the capacity to inspire social practices that serve the best interests of their actual counterparts. Blount (1974, p. 251), reports that Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* had “enormous influence for good in the treatment of horses and helped to abolish the bearing rein”—a leather strap on the carriage horse’s harness designed to hold the horse’s head in an unnaturally and uncomfortably high position. The elevated carriage, fashionable at the time, was thought to enhance a look of equine regality and stature. *Black Beauty*, elevated to a human psyche, “bore a troubled life with great courage and patience” (p. 250). As a result, Blount argues, “it is impossible to read about the horse’s sufferings without being affected—no less so because a human voice is talking” (p. 251). Similarly, the Disney film *Free Willy*, the tale of a boy and an orca, inspired a public call for the killer whale, Keiko, to be returned to the wild.

Simons (2002) argues that instances of “strong” anthropomorphism have the ability to challenge the way that we think about the human-animal dynamic (p. 120). He argues that the film *Babe* (1995), the story of a piglet who believes he is a sheep dog, is an instance of strong anthropomorphism in that several of the strategies used in the film serve either to highlight the sufferings of

the animals living in a human world or to question the differences between animal and human. Simons considers much of the anthropomorphism found in children's literature "trivial" (p. 119). However, because these tales do not teach morals regarding the animal experience or the actual relationship between human and animal, he suggests that these anthropomorphic representations may serve a positive function by inspiring people to treat animals with greater decency. It is possible, and even likely, that these misrepresentations can transform attitudes and behaviors toward animals globally in a positive fashion. However, if we consider that groups characterized by their positive attitudes and behaviors toward animal—such as moral vegetarians and animal rights activists—presently exist on the fringe of mainstream society, it seems that the lessons learned in the name of entertainment more often are corrupt than compassionate.

The realization that animals are not like the characters from the stories to which we are attached bears consequences. Many of our current animal husbandry practices are justified by evaluating the extent to which a given species is similar to humans. When expectations engendered by misguided representations are not met, the way we relate to real animals—in all contexts—is affected. Either we attempt to shape the object to meet our expectations or we abrogate the source of disappointment.

### *Recreating the Disney Dog: The Impact for Companion Animals*

In contemporary Western culture, the bond between companion animal and caretaker all too often is tenuous at best. Kogan and Viney (1998) employed an attachment perspective to examine the bonds that develop between humans and their pets. Their study revealed that when a dog matched the caretaker's internal representation of what a dog should be, the bonds were relatively stable. In contrast, unrealistic expectations and behavior problems were the two main reasons bonds fail. Donaldson (1996) argues that unrealistic expectations of animal behavior result in the erroneous conclusion that otherwise normal or appropriate behavior is bad. Practically, this means that although a canine companion may not be deserving of moral admiration for saving the life of a drowning child, neither would the canine companion deserve moral condemnation for chewing up a pair of shoes. As Donaldson puts it:

As soon as you bestow intelligence and morality, you bestow the responsibility that goes along with them. In other words, if the dog knows it's wrong to destroy furniture yet deliberately and maliciously does it, remembers the wrong he did and feels guilt, it feels like he merits a punishment, doesn't it? Well, that's just what dogs have been getting—a lot of punishment. (p. 13)

That many of us seem firmly attached to the Walt Disney dog and, therefore, attribute human intentions to canine actions often leads to drastic consequences (Donaldson). Researchers estimate that animals who have been dropped at a shelter and subsequently euthanized account for as many as 1/3 of canine deaths in the United States (Marston and Bennet, 2003).

That human-animal bonds do fail—at least on the human side of the relationship—is made more poignant because some animals also become attached to their caretakers (Topal, Miklosi, Csanyi, & Doka, 1998). Dogs are unique in that—as a result of domestication—they are capable of developing closer attachments to human companions than to members of their own species (Topal et al.). Research has found that dogs, given the opportunity, would prefer to associate with humans than to associate with other canines (Marston & Bennett, 2003, citing Tuber et al., 1996). Therefore, when caretakers neglect, abandon, or relinquish their pets to a shelter, the animal must bear the brunt of the broken bond.

The desire for our canine companions to meet our expectations also has led to breeding practices that favor anthropomorphic selection (Serpell, 2003). Practices designed to produce characteristics more desirable to humans are widely accepted in Western culture: (a) animals dressed in designer clothes; (b) physical mutilation such as tail docking and ear cropping; and (c) complete modification of genetic make up. These modifications often result in adult dogs who have the proportions and the appeal of human infants, creating animals who may serve as surrogate children (Lawrence, 1986). They also create varying degrees of suffering. English Bulldogs have been modified genetically into a creature who endures numerous physical deformities. These dogs suffer from sleep apnea, excessively labored breathing, and premature death as a result of chronic oxygen deprivation. In addition, because of the fashion of bulldogs with abnormally large heads and proportionately small

hips, most must be born by Cesarean section. Serpell has described the Bulldog as “the canine equivalent of a train wreck” (p. 93).

Our genetic manipulation does not rest with physical characteristics alone. Serpell (2003) argues that characteristics such as “loyalty” and “fidelity” also are the result of carefully planned breeding. Ironically, these breeding practices have led to many behavioral problems: (a) separation-related problems in dogs bred to be devoted exclusively to one person; (b) aggression problems in dogs bred to protect us; and (c) obsessive compulsive disorders in dogs bred for high energy and activity—an activity level seldom compatible with the modern caretaker’s life style (Mugford, 1995).

Therefore, in trying to create the ideal dog—our very own Buck or Balto—it seems, we have failed and failed at the expense of our canine companions. Moreover, companion animals are not alone in facing the bleak consequences of our expectations. The shift from the domestic to the scientific realm reveals that our paradoxical relationship with animals again has done them an egregious disservice.

*Scientific Questions and Anthropomorphic Answers: Still Looking for the Human Element*

In recent decades, animal rights advocates, inspired by Peter Singer, have challenged scientific practices that lead to the suffering and death of some 50 million animals in the laboratory in the United States each year (Shapiro, 1998). Psychological research in particular has been the focus of compelling criticism. Singer (1990) asks if animals are so similar to human beings that research on animals is justified, then how can we justify painful research on animals that ethically is not permitted on human beings? Some medical researchers argue that the use of animal research subjects is justified because animal lives do not have the same value as healthy, adult humans due to their lack of moral status (Fox, 1986). Moral status as an ethical criterion speaks to the claim that, at least in this one important way, animals are not like us. When animals do not meet the expectations engendered from childhood stories, our judgments about real animals, in all contexts, is jeopardized. In the scientific realm, the repercussions are most evident in the on-going debate over the anthropomorphic study of animals’ human-like abilities.

The classic example is evinced with the infamous 1904 equine phenomenon “Clever Hans,” who created a furor of excitement over his apparent mathematical abilities and verbal understanding (Pfungst, 1965). The Clever Hans story epitomizes the scientific goose chase precipitated by the inherent myopia of the scientific method and human bias about animal capabilities. Rather than extolling Hans’ remarkable natural abilities, the researchers, mired in their methodology, sought only to fail to reject the null hypothesis that Hans could not perform typically human actions. Naturally, it was discovered that Hans was not performing the cognitive functions of arithmetic or language. Rather, he was picking up the questioners’ body language—body language that was imperceptible to the questioners and to the entire Berlin team of 14 learned doctors, scientists, and professors sent to investigate this unlikely phenomenon. In the end, the academy gave little credence to the real intelligence Clever Hans demonstrated. Feral horses communicate, not by numbers or language, but almost exclusively by reading the subtlest body cues of their herd mates to establish pecking order, find food and water, and communicate danger (Budiansky, 1997; Houpt, 1998). Indeed, Clever Hans’ communication strategies exceeded those of his human examiners, such that he fooled quite a number of very clever people for an extended period.

The so-called “Clever Hans phenomenon” (when researchers attribute human abilities to animals) is still very much alive in contemporary primate language programs. In recanting his original findings about the language prowess of Nim Chimsky, Herbert Terrace, one of the first persons involved in an ape language program, demonstrates how easy it is to misinterpret animal behavior as human behavior (cited in Budiansky, 1998, p. 152). Budiansky argues that one of the reasons misinterpretations may plague ape language projects is due to the “degree of wishful thinking . . . apparent in some of these projects” (p. 152). Terrace admits, “I really wanted to communicate with a chimpanzee and find out what the world looks like from a chimpanzee’s point of view” (cited in Budiansky, p. 153). Perhaps the greatest challenges facing primate language researchers are their own intense feelings and expectations, potentially leading to false reporting and/or interpretations (Umiker-Sebeok & Sebeok, 1980).

An ironic example of this wishful thinking is found in a popular children’s book written by one of Terrace’s volunteer teachers. In this version, the twist

ending (that Terrace recanted his prior scientific conclusions with regards to Nim Chimsky's speaking ability) is omitted. This story's happy ending is that Nim was indeed taught to communicate (Budiansky, 1998).

Umiker-Sebeok and Sebeok (1980) report a nearly "palpable" emotional commitment from the scientists involved in primate language projects (p. 7), exacerbated by the paralleled enthusiasm from the public at large (Budiansky, 1998). Consider Fouts (2004) and his so-called "magical" relationship with the chimpanzee Washoe:

Washoe has taught me that . . . personhood is something we share, and that personhood goes beyond species classifications. She has taught me that human arrogance is very lethal to our fellow beings on this planet, especially when it is combined with human ignorance . . . She has taught me that compassion is one of our dearest traits, and that we should value it above all others, including intelligence.

Magic, it seems, is not bound by the world of Disney. Miller (1978) claims, "there is a magical or fantasy-like aspect to the idea that one's expectancies . . . can become true . . ." (cited in Umiker-Sebeok & Sebeok, 1980, p. 55). Magic is reported in the relationship between Fouts and Washoe. Further, Savage-Rumbaugh and Lewin (1994), who have been working on primate language projects for the last several decades, report,

The first two years of an ape's life are something of a magical time . . . If they watch television, they come to see the patterns on the screen as representations of other people and other apes in different places, rather than just flickering images. A sense of imagination and narrative begins to emerge, so that they become as interested in TV stories to which they can relate as are human children. (p. xii)

Savage-Rumbaugh and Lewin's claim that Kanzi sees the flickering images on the screen as representations draws our attention to an important point: Animals are not the sole victims when it comes to misrepresentations in children's narratives. Disney films' portrayal of the family often is too simplistically positive, presenting unrealistic "happily ever after" endings (Tanner et al., 2003), while their negative portrayal of mental illness also may result in an "unrealistic and stereotypic view" (Lawson & Fouts, 2004, p. 312).

The enforcement of stereotypical gender roles also is a common practice in children's narratives. The portrayal of bereavement in children's literature tends to reinforce gender roles of the stoic male and the crying female (Moore & Mae, 1987). Children also are often misrepresented. In the 2001 film *Spy Kids*, the children can be described aptly as super children, easily able to conquer their adult foes.

We are not calling on the authors of children's narratives to strip their stories of all the super characters—animal or human—and limit their portrayals to realistic representations. Nor do we mean to suggest that all misrepresentations are negative. We do mean to draw attention to how unrealistic portrayals of animals affect us and, perhaps, suggest that a more balanced approach to animals in children's narratives may be appropriate. Much in the same way that awareness regarding the effects of misrepresenting human characters have led to new narratives—such as the recent decision of teen magazines to portray girls of all sizes and colors—celebrating the typical traits of animals in children's stories should not put an end to the magic but serve to enhance it.

Finally, it is debatable whether Savage-Rumbaugh and Lewin's (1994) claim that Kanzi comes to see television images as representations could be substantiated. Although primates do seem to make representations, it is unclear as to what representations they are making (Suddendorf & Whiten, 2001). It may be fair to say, however, that if apes are capable of internalizing the representations of humans portrayed by the media, it is unlikely that their disappointed expectations would affect humans negatively in a similarly far-reaching fashion.

## **Conclusion: Conflating Consequences and Causes**

Clearly, a multitude of factors affect an individual decision to give up a dog for adoption, become an outspoken advocate against animal testing, or devote one's scientific practice to the search for human-like capabilities in animals. That said, internal representations based on beloved characters in children's stories result in severely distorted expectations of what constitutes appropriate animal behavior. Imagine if children's stories were to bridge the gap between the ideal and the actual, where dogs who behaved like dogs were

not deviant and animal amorality was not a license to condone animal suffering.

Unfortunately, focusing on a given animal's natural proficiencies is easier said than done. What will happen to the magic of the story if the animals are not able to talk and sing? This is a fair and troublesome question, which makes ever more salient the problem with anthropomorphizing in science. If we do not understand animals from our own perspective, how can we understand them at all?

In examining cultural images, Baker (1993) argues that animals do not represent themselves to us; rather, we define and represent them. Consequently, animal representations are founded on human interests and cannot, in any sense, claim to be true. Consider Gowdy's (1998) concept of an elephant's perspective, not as we would represent the elephants but as elephants represent themselves—as they see themselves in relation to their world, rather than ours. When readers see that the supreme beings, the "She-Ones" (elephants), have a world that has nothing to do with human reality or values, they are forced to face our typically invisible anthropocentricity. In fact, "hind-leggers" (humans) are significant only because of the threat posed by their brutality. However, despite Gowdy's attempt to show us an animal world through an animal lens it remains the case that none of us, including Gowdy, can ever know what elephants actually are experiencing.

Apart from our inability to represent accurately the animal experience, Baker (1993) also points to the extensive and paradoxical manner in which we use animals as symbols. This allows a more sinister interpretation of children's stories to take shape. Perhaps children's stories are a consequence, not a cause, of our ambivalent and negative social practices involving animals. In our everyday lives, we exploit animals for our own purposes—to work for us, entertain us, and feed us. Using animals to tell human stories similarly serves our own ends as it simplifies, and makes more appealing, complex human issues and emotions—emotions that animals may not even experience.

Common opinion seems to hold that maturity eventually will temper the emotional attachment children feel toward these characters. We would suggest that childhood emotional attachments—more often than not—are impervious to the process of maturity. Research illustrates that attachment representations are remarkably stable across the life span, and there is no

correlation between attachment security and age (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994). Far from being insignificant, these characters have a considerable impact on the way children's internal representations develop. Consequently, misguided representations greatly influence the way adults interact with animals. Adults may hope they will discover the animals of their memories and dreams or they may resent ever having believed those dreams. The fact remains: The animals in children's stories are illusions. These illusions place the worth of animals in human terms that animals can never fulfill. So, in the way we treat our pets, practice our science, and formulate our answers, animals suffer.

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