

Between Anthropomorphism and Animal Alterity: The Non-Human Subjectivity in the Select Short-Stories of Ruskin Bond

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Abstract

Ruskin Bond holds a special place in Indian English literature with his deep descriptions of landscape, childhood, memory, and the living world. However, some of his most interesting works include the stories of non-human animals, such as monkeys, tigers, snakes, birds, squirrels, and domestic companions. Such stories commonly give human characteristic as love, wit, and feeling to the animals. However, Bond tends not to make them into caricatured humans. This essay explores the conflict between anthropomorphism and true animal existence in some of the stories, including "The Adventures of Toto", "A Tiger in the House", and "All Creatures Great and Small". The question raised in the study is whether the animals of Bond exist in their own right or as a reflection of human emotion. The paper is based on Animal Studies, Posthumanism and Ecocriticism, especially the writings of Jacques Derrida, Donna Haraway, and John Berger. And it argues that Bond uses a moderate form of anthropomorphism that allows empathy and yet maintains the animal unpredictability, instinct, and otherness. In his stories, he brings out the potential and the constraints of literary representation in the illustration of non-human consciousness. Bond does not purport to have complete access to the mind of animals but introduces animals as subjects that disrupt the centrality of humans. Likewise, the fiction of Bond can be seen as a valuable location to reconsider the interspecies ethics and narrative voice in Indian English literature.

Keywords:

Ruskin Bond, Anthropomorphism, Human-Animal Studies, Non-human animals' subjectivity, Indian English Literature, Ecocriticism, Posthumanism, Animal Alterity.

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Introduction

Symbolism and realism in the image of animals in literature have always been in alternation. They have been animals to give allegories, or moralists, or comic characters, or fears and desires of mankind. In the *Fables* by Aesop, *Panchatantra*, and *Jataka Tales*, and in *Animal Farm* by Orwell, the animal often speaks with a human voice. But recent Animal Studies in literary criticism question this convention by inquiring whether literature is able to envision animals as not symbols but as agents, perceivers, and worldly beings of their own.

Ruskin Bond's animal stories are especially significant in this context. Set in the Himalayan foothills, small-town India, and domestic locales, the narratives of Bond portray close interventions between humans and non-human beings. Such as, Monkeys steal food, pythons live in drawing rooms, tigers act with decency, and squirrels are made pets. But Bond does not sentimentalize non-human animals completely, as many children's writers do. They are untamed, threatening, obstinate, instinctive, beyond human control. His fictions represent non-human animals as reflections of human feeling as well as the way they are. But to what extent can non-human consciousness be described in his stories? Through a close examination of his narratives, it can be established that he asserts that anthropomorphism is a form of storytelling that helps bond humans and animals. Crucially, this isn't meant to make animals just like humans, but rather to highlight the unique and distinct nature of non-human existence that remains fundamentally different from humans.

Anthropomorphism and Animal Alterity

The projection of human feelings, motives or character on non-humans is called anthropomorphism. "Imbuing the imagined or real behavior of nonhuman agents with humanlike characteristics, motivations, intentions, and emotions is the essence of anthropomorphism. These nonhuman agents may include anything that acts with apparent independence, including nonhuman animals, natural forces, religious deities, and mechanical or electronic devices" (Epley 864-865).

Conventionally, the idea has been derided as naive projection. Lately, however, there has been a reevaluation of anthropomorphism as a form of imaginative relation that is ethical. For instance, in Jacques Derrida, in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, "the animal gazes at us and we are naked before the animal looks at us" (Derrida 11). This is a reversal of the exceptionalism whereby human beings view animals as silent objects. There has been a shift toward acknowledging the subjectivity of non-human animals, viewing them as entities with their own internal lives. Further, in his work, "Why Look at Animals?", John Berger reminds that the animal used to exist "at the centre of the man's world" but it became a spectacle

in modernity (Berger 3). This relationality that is lost can be recovered in literature. Also, Donna Haraway promotes the notion of “companion species”, in which humans and animals co-construct one another in the daily tangles (Haraway 16).

These frameworks are used to study Bond stories. They do not reduce animals to symbols, or even profess to have full access to their minds. Rather, they play the game of coexistence. “The Adventures of Toto” is one of the best-known tales of Bond, with a comic yet animalistic monkey whose actions are depicted. Toto was a pretty monkey. His bright eyes sparkled with mischief beneath deepset eyebrows, and his teeth, which were a pearly white, were very often displayed in a smile that frightened the life out of elderly Anglo-Indian ladies. But his hands looked dried-up as though they had been pickled in the sun for many years. Yet his fingers were quick and wicked; and his tail, while adding to his good looks...also served as a third hand. He could use it to hang from a branch; and it was capable of scooping up any delicacy that might be out of reach of his hands” (Bond 7). The eyes of Toto were gleaming with mischief and his smile bespoke pleasure. Such descriptions seem to be anthropomorphic at a first glance. Human terms are mischief, delight or humour. But the behaviour of Toto is even more surpassing than human categories. He is disobedient to domestic discipline, codes of conduct, and household order. It is not villainy but the vigorous simian curiosity of his destructiveness. Moreover, when Toto enters the bath and tries the temperature of the water step by step, Bond attributes practical intelligence as opposed to abstract reason. Toto is not a little boy in fur, but he is a monkey who negotiates the environment by instinct and experiment. In this way, the story humanizes sufficiently to allow readers to sympathize, yet at the same time maintains species-specific behaviour. Toto is not fit to be absorbed into domestic life.

Then, in “A Tiger in the House”, the cub tiger is first cute and friendly, which makes it possible to interact with a tiger of the opposite sex with love. The author says, “One of Timothy’s favourite amusements was to stalk anyone who would play with him, and so, when I came to live with Grandfather, I became one of the tiger’s favourites. With a crafty look in his glittering eyes, and his body crouching, he would creep closer and closer to me, suddenly making a dash for my feet, rolling over on his back and kicking with delight, and pretending to bite my ankles” (Bond 144). Timothy appears not as a threatening predator but as a playful companion. He goes on to say that he preferred the drawing room, which was his favourite room in the house, “His favourite place in the house was the drawing room, and he would make himself comfortable on the long sofa, reclining there with great dignity...” (Bond 144). This indicates that the tiger cub is acting like a spoiled pet. The sofa scene suggests ease, trust, and playful crossing of species boundaries.

But Bond is keen to highlight the fleeting nature of such intervention. As the tiger matures, he becomes too strong to stay a domestic cat, "...when Timothy was about six months old a change came over him; he grew steadily less friendly. When out for a walk with me, he would try to steal away to stalk a cat or someone's pet dog. Sometimes at night we would hear frenzied cackling from the poultry house, and in the morning there would be feathers lying all over the verandah. Timothy had to be chained up more often" (Bond 144). Later, the grandfather had to take him to a zoo in Lucknow. Timothy is likeable, sentimental, yet can never be transformed into a fully human caricature. His gestures are still very catlike and predatory. Bond generates empathy while preserving his animal alterity. The narrative resists sentimental domestication. The tiger may share affection with Grandfather, but it never ceases to be a tiger. According to the narration, love cannot destroy species differences. It ultimately gives a subtle critique of human possessiveness. Exotic animals cannot be made into decorative or pet companions. The ultimate displacement of the tiger recognizes the wilderness as a worthwhile way of existence. In this case, Bond is contrasted with children's literature, which transforms predators into cute mascots. Instead, his tiger has inherent sovereignty, which reminds readers that animal life cannot be completely usurped.

In addition, Bond takes the domestic menagerie further in "All Creatures Great and Small". He also recollects that he grew up in a house full of pets in Dehradun, he writes, "I had as my companions an odd collection of pets, which included a monkey, a tortoise, a python and a Great Indian Hornbill" (Bond 147). The family is once again in a communal environment rather than a human one, with the love of the grandfather for animals. Bond explicitly notes, "We saw eye to eye on the subject of pets" (Bond 147), which echoes the child-grandfather alliance that subverts normal domestic rules. This expression ironically opposes the child and the grandfather with the unwilling grandmother. But its deeper significance is spatial. In this dwelling, human beings have to surrender some sections of the house to their inhuman friends. The furniture, gardens, and rooms become joint territory where human authority is negotiated.

But these are animals, all the same. Bond's descriptions leave them idiosyncratic without domesticating their wildness. The story talks about two docile Great Danes, a monkey named Toto, a tame hornbill, The Great Danes and even racing snakes "The Great Danes were gentle creatures, and I would sit astride one of them and go for rides round the garden. In spite of their size, they were very sure-footed and never knocked over people or chairs. A little monkey, like Toto, did much more damage. Grandfather bought Toto from a tonga owner..." (Bond 148).

Each has its own habits and disruptions. The presence of a python in the stairway or a naughty Toto in the schoolroom reminds readers that the house is never completely within the control of human beings. Bond patiently tackles this chaos with loving humor. The grandfather allows the snake to slip along the corridors and the Great Danes clatter along the garden path but he never makes them look like regular pets.

In the vision of Bond, coexistence is a muddled reciprocity. It is not emotional concord but a living, breathing negotiation. Animals are part of the house, but on their own terms and conditions. This echoes the notion by Haraway of becoming with, whereby our lives are intertwined with those of other species. In "All Creatures Great and Small", identities are lost. The boy is turned into a protector of homeless squirrels (hiding them when Granny dislikes), and the grandfather is instantly a caretaker and playmate. The house is a companion-species ecosystem in which there is no sharp division between human and animal residents. The memoir of Bond ultimately reveals domestic life turned upside down by its four-legged, winged, and scaled inhabitants, where a place exists where all creatures indeed matter.

Bond approaches them and frequently characterizes animals externally, like their gestures, habits, eyes, movement, and reactions, and does not insist on having access to abstract thought. However, in contrast to fables where animals talk human language, Bond's creatures communicate through embodied signs. The smile of a monkey, the quiet of a tiger, the running about of a squirrel, or the call of a bird is intelligence not spoken. The restraint shown in these narratives is of philosophical significance. Thomas Nagel used to pose this question: What is it like to be a bat? which seemed to imply that the subjective experience of a different species might be unreachable. Such limits appear to be tolerated by Bond. He does not even pretend to know what animals think. Instead, he brings their presence, rhythm, and responsiveness. Thus, the realism of Bond is not in the objectivity of science, but in the humility of epistemology.

In addition to that, non-human animals in Bond occasionally indicate the human longing, the feeling of childhood wonder, loneliness, or affection. His narrators tend to attribute friendship to animals. In the case of children, especially, animals become friends and sources of emotion. But Bond does not degrade them to reflections alone. Human expectations are often disrupted by non-human animals. E.g., Toto destroys and creates chaos instead of cuddling, Timothy transcends the limits of interspecies affection and friendship, Danes abandon him, etc. Wild animals do not care about human feelings. Such instances break the predetermined projection and perception. Human feelings are not props of non-human animals. They are self-reliant and have a distinct mode of being in the world. Bond's short fiction, therefore,

dramatizes a conflict where human beings want to have emotional attachment, and animals are more or less opaque. The very fact of that opacity becomes ethically significant.

Conclusion

The animal stories of Ruskin Bond occupy a fruitful ground between anthropomorphism and realism. He provides animals with a personality, emotional texture, and narrative importance but does not turn them into simply human caricatures. Rather, monkeys will be trouble makers, tigers will be wild, python will be disturbing, and birds will be free. Non-human animal as itself and animal as a reflection of human emotion are never entirely resolved, and that is the strength of Bond. His fiction provides emphasis on how literature may engage with non-human subjectivity by observing, empathizing, and imagining, without violating alterity. Bond finally implies that non- human animals are not signs awaiting human interpretation. They are co-inhabitants of the world, and their lives surpass what humans have conventionally perceived. In this respect, the selected stories subtly decentralize the human and anticipate contemporary Posthumanist ideology.

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