

Anthropomorphism and Zoomorphism in Roald Dahl's The Twits

Shanmathi. S¹, Dr. B. Sankar²

¹Ph.D., Research Scholar Department of English Joseph Arts & Science College, Thirunavalur.

²Associate Professor & Research Supervisor Department of English Joseph Arts & Science College, Thirunavalur.

ABSTRACT

Children's Literature is literature that persuades its readers to think, act and speak with morality, discipline and humanity. This research article examines how Roald Dahl's *The Twits* is based on Anthropomorphism and Zoomorphism. This novel deals with the human in non-human and the beast in human. The term anthropomorphism refers to the attribution of human characteristics, emotions and behaviour to animals or objects. Another term is Zoomorphism, which represents the qualities of animals and the merciless mind set in humans. This paper explores the conflicts faced by the birds and animals and their struggle to teach moral values to their captivators. The selected novel completely supports the anthropomorphic perspective. This paper primarily focuses on the struggle of animals under the brutal behaviour of humans. It also clearly exposes the demanding authority of humans over non-humans or other beings.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, Zoomorphism, Humanity, Warnings.

Introduction

Roald Dahl was the most popular British author of children literature. He served as a Royal Air Force pilot, short story writer, novelist and screenwriter. His literary works focused on both adult and young readers. His protagonists were children and animals, the role of villains often played by adult characters. His literary works majorly concentrated on morality, friendship, human-animal relationships, magical realism and humanity etc. *The Twits* was also one of the novel focuses on children mental health and attitude written by Roald Dahl. This book has enough source to teach children as well as adults to respect very species present in this universe. The main aim of this research paper is to prove that even animals have certain good characteristics, on the other hand human sometimes behave like animals.

Anthropomorphism is a literary technique used to portray animals, aliens, ghost and objects possessing humanity. With the use of non-human traits, the writers try to convey moral and social values to the young or adult human. This device is majorly present in the children literature genre. Didactic stories like Aesop's fables, Panchatantra, Arabian Nights, Jataka Tales and fairy tales used animals as an attractive tool to teach. Dahl's *The Twits* is somewhat similar to George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. When human ill-treat animals, the animals take revenge against humans. In *Thinking With Animal*, Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman said, "Anthropomorphizing animals is a term of reproach, both intellectual and moral" (2).

Zoomorphism is a literary device used to represent animal characteristics in people, divine creatures and lifeless objects. Humans act like animals. This device also similarly plays a role in the literature for children. The study is to prove that zoomorphic qualities present in the antagonists of the novel. The animal characteristics exists in the manners of Mr. and Mrs. Twit. Roald Dahl has shown this theme in negative perspective.

Roald Dahl comically began his narration with the hairy faced men and their cleanliness. The author accepts the fact that men who are clean shaved like him will never find difficult to have his food. Mr. Twit a sixty-year-old man, who was really a twit from birth. A man who is physically and psychologically normal, always tries not to look bad in front of others. The antagonist lived his life just like an animal, without bathing, without grooming and even without wiping his mouth. "Mr. Twit was one of these hairy faced men. The whole of his face except for his forehead, his eyes and his nose was covered with thick hair. The stuff even sprouted in revolting tufts of his nostrils and ear-holes"(2). Mr. Twit does not eat like a civilized man, tiny food particulars of old breakfast, lunch and suppers always stuck in the hairs around his face. If he spilled or found something uncomfortable in his moustache bristles or in beard, "he used to wipe those off with the back of his hand or on his sleeve while he was eating" (4). People never noticed any animal washing or wiping its mouth after having its prey. "By sticking out his tongue and curling it sideways to explore the hairy jungle around his mouth, he was always able to find a tasty morsel here and there to nibble on" (5).

Mrs. Twit is the wife of Mr. Twit. Dahl satirized her ill-tempered nature with her ugly appearance. By presenting the character of Mrs. Twit, the author advises his readers that, a person with bad thoughts and action can never be beautiful. One who follows good thoughts and deeds, it will get reflected in their beauty. Mrs. Twit always carried a walking stick, "so that she could hit things with it, things like dogs and cats and small children" (8). A woman is specially praised for her patience and soft natured towards children and creatures around her. This

act of Mrs. Twit shows the readers that, she is unfit to be a woman. In *War as a Post Human Force: Anthropomorphic and Zoomorphic Representations in Nathan Hale's Treaties, Trenches, Mud and blood*, Krista M. Turner said "If a human is becoming animal-like, it should follow that they are no longer rational or acting on knowledge" (55).

A good husband and wife should make each other happy. Sometimes they need to share or sacrifice their happiness for others sake. In the case of Mr. and Mrs. Twit, they kept plotting against each other like predators. One fine day, Mrs. Twit brought some worms from the garden and mixed it in her husband's Spaghetti plate and covered it up with tomato sauce and sprinkled with cheese "she was watching him from the other end of the table. It gave her great pleasure to watch him eating worms" (17). After seeing her husband finished the food, she revealed, the truth about sauce and cheese topped worms mixed inside the spaghetti.

They never had a window. The couple believed that if there is a window at home, everyone will peep inside to see the happenings. Mr. and Mrs. Twit had a fallacy that she is good at gardening and grew thorny tress. People have pet dogs to guard their house from thieves, the dog's job is to keep strangers away from the house. Here, Mrs. Twit behave like a dog, which attacks the children when they trespassed. Her selfish and animalistic attitude is exposed when she revealed "I always grow plenty of spiky thistles and plenty of stinging nettles. They keep out nasty nosey little children" (38). A woman turns soft natured and nourishing whenever she finds a child, the motherhood in her makes her one among the children. Mrs. Twit does not come under this feminine category. Her sadistic nature made her to plant sharp trees to hurt the children who entered.

The Twits had Bird Pie once in a week. Every Tuesday he painted the Big Dead Tree's branches with glue, whichever bird landed to rest, their feet got stuck and unable to escape from Mr. Twit. One Tuesday four young boys crept inside the Twits garden to watch the monkeys. The boys' adventurous nature kindled them to climb over the Big Dead tree. The next day Mr. Twit was furious to see the four boys got stuck by their pants in the tree. He could not resist the loss of birds, because of these boys' presence. His cannibalistic thoughts came to daylight when he climbed the trees to catch the boys saying, "As there are no birds for my pie tonight, then it'll have to be boys instead! Boy Pie might be better than Bird Pie. More meat and not so many tiny little bones!" (41). It shows that Mr. Twit did not regret to eat children. Like an animal he is ready to replace the boys instead of birds.

Even after Mr. and Mrs. Twit's retirement as circus monkey trainers, their dream to own the first upside down monkey circus, never faded. They terribly trained four monkeys to stand upside down, one on top of the other. They tortured them to play, dance, eat and drink upside down. Sometimes the two young monkeys fainted because of the blood pressuring towards the brain. Mr. Twit trained these monkeys six hours daily, if their practice did not go well, Mrs. Twit will punish the monkeys with her "beastly stick" (45). Being a human, they did not understand the meaning for humanity or liberty. Roald Dahl has realistically brought out the animal inside human with reference to these two characters.

At the same time, Dahl was successful in bringing out the humanity in non-human creatures. The author used monkeys and birds to teach the values to human. These animal characters are completely opposite to Mr. and Mrs. Twits. These monkeys were called Muggle-Wump. They wanted to return to the African forests where they belong. Every Tuesday evening these Muggle-Wump tried to warn the birds about the sticky glue in the tree. "Fly away, birds! they used to shout, jumping about in the cage and waving their arms" (46). Since those birds are England natives, they know only English, so they failed to understand the warnings of these African monkeys. The Anthropomorphic element is clearly visible when the monkeys faced language barriers to help the other birds. Dahl has practically portrayed that just like human, majority of the creature finds hard to speak and understand foreign languages. Daston & Mitman stated that, "humans assume a community of thought and feeling between themselves and a surprisingly wide array of animals; they also recruit animals to symbolize, dramatize and illuminate aspects of their own experience and fantasies" (13).

The Muggle-Wump were really happy to see the Roly-Poly bird from Africa. It also spoke the same African language. The Roly-Poly bird perfectly represented the human characteristics like self-boasting, vacation, speaking other languages and helping. When the monkey enquired about the reason for bird's visit, it started to boast that, "I've come for holiday... For most people flying away on holiday is very expensive, but I can fly anywhere in the world for nothing" (48). Next, when the Muggle-Wump asked whether he knew to communicate in English, the Roly-Poly bird advised, "It's no good going to a country and not knowing the language" (48). It is evident that a traveler should be aware of the foreign language. One should not travel without knowing the language. The monkeys requested the Roly-Poly bird to warn all the birds not to perch on the Big Dead tree. That evening the Roly-Poly flew around the tree and sang a song about the sticky glue painted on the branches and warned the birds not to perch on the tree. As per the Roly-Poly's warning all the birds sat on the monkey cage.

Next day, Mr. Twit smeared the glue on top of the monkey cage bars. The Muggle-Wump noted everything and shouted “Don’t land on our cage, Roly-Poly Bird! It’s covered in sticky glue! So is the tree!” (52). The Roly-Poly once again warned all the birds in the evening. Since all the birds followed the command of the Roly-Poly, they escaped from the trap. Mr. Twit was outrageous to see birds happily perched on the roof were “hooting with laughter at Mr. Twit” (53).

Muggle-Wump is a brilliant monkey. It always had an eye around Mr. and Mrs. Twits. When the human gone out to purchase guns to shoot the birds, he requested the Roly-Poly to bring the cage key nailed in the shed and release his family. Muggle-Wump went inside the shed and ordered his fellows to fill the buckets with the glue. Like a real painter, “Roly-Poly Bird flying in after them, with a bucket in his beak and a brush in his claw” (60). Muggle-Wump took out the front door key hidden under the mat and unlocked it.

He ordered all the birds and his fellow monkey to paint the ceiling with the sticky glue. “He was like a demon hopping round the room and telling everyone what to do” (68). He instructed to stick the carpet to the ceiling first and then the furniture. When the birds questioned whether it is strong enough to hold the furniture, Muggle-Wump reminded them that, this is the strongest glue to catch birds, to make Bird Pie. The Roly-Poly Bird begged “I have asked you before not to mention that subject. How would you like it if it was Monkey Pie they made every Wednesday and all your friends had been boiled up and I went on talking about it?” (71). In these lines, the readers can understand that, animals too get frightening feeling like human.

When a group of people is under any mischievous activity, a person among the group will be sent out to watch out, until others finish their work successfully. Muggle-Wump planned the same and asked “will one of you birds please fly out on to the road and watch to see when those frumpious freaks are coming back?” (74). Roly-Poly bird accepted and went out to watch. They finished up their trap just before the Roly-Poly warning of Twits arrival. All the birds settled on roof top and the monkeys went inside cage and stood upside down. They acted as if nothing happened. Two black ravens smeared the sticky glue paint brush on the Twits head. The Twits thought it was birds’ droppings and didn’t wiped their heads. The common sense of a man never worked for these Twits. When they entered their house they falsely believed that they are standing upside down. Without analyzing what would have happened around them, Mr. Twit and Mrs. Twit stood upside down. The raven smeared glue stuck on the floor. The birds and animals watched everything and dispersed happily. Without help the Twits shrank and became invisible. Muggle-Wump planned to move towards Africa with his family. Roly-Poly Bird promised to help them while travelling to Africa.

The exploration of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism helps the readers to understand that both human and non-human creature are part of nature which belongs to this universe. This aspect proves that sometimes, in some cases human is the reason for the extinction of animals. In the story, The Twits, Roald Dahl projected adult human are the only rival to nature. Both the terms have been beautifully weaved together to expose that these creatures also possess the freedom of life and their own perspectives of nature more than human. It also brings out the exploitation of innocent animals and birds by the selfish human like Twits. According to Roald Dahl, if one messes with nature’s piece, his peace will be disturbed. Therefore, this research article wanted to educate the readers to protect and not to disturb the non-human species around them.

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