Rethinking the Status of Animals in the French Renaissance Culture: from Pierre Belon to Michel de Montaigne

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Abstract

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This dissertation discusses the status of animals in sixteenth century French texts of various literary and non-literary genres. It aims at demonstrating the significant shift from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance with regards to the literary portrayal of animals, which were no longer regarded in the allegorical tradition but rather as a subject matter. These changes in philosophers’ perceptions of animals were conditioned by the intersection of two major phenomena taking place at the time – geographical explorations exposing new knowledge about unknown animals and species, and a rediscovery of classical texts that challenged the Aristotelian vision of a hierarchy of species. As a result, scholars were urged to break the old tradition of animals’ representation as a vehicle of human flaws and social differences, and created instead a new role for animals for the first time in the history of Western civilization.

The main goal of this dissertation goes beyond simply introducing the animal as subject in French Renaissance texts, but it ambitiously seeks to demonstrate that, despite modern scholars’ belief that the Renaissance was a period of all-embracing anthropocentrism when Aristotelian ideas regarding the hierarchy of species flourished and freed man from all moral obligations towards animals, there was a significant cluster of French texts from various authors, such as Des Périers and Montaigne, that raised the question of animal equality, or even superiority, and called upon man to take responsibility for the treatment of animals. The careful examination of these texts surprisingly reveals that modern ideas regarding animal rights and species equality were already addressed, or at least touched on, in French Renaissance literature.
For my father, who was my biggest encouragement on every step of this dissertation
Introduction

One of the important aspects of studies on animals in the course of Western civilization is the steadfast belief in animals’ deficiency of speech, which comes as result of their lack of reason. Animals are present in all kinds of texts throughout the history of our civilization but are perpetually mute. Until very recently, there was practically no doubt among philosophers and scientists that animals could not talk to humans or that animal signals could not be understood. In last forty years, however, successful research has challenged that belief by proving that some animals (chimpanzees) can learn language and can be understood by men. In the course of that research, started by Roger Fouts and continued by Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, it was discovered that chimpanzees not only can learn some words, but are also able to use full sentences, follow the grammar rules of a language, and even get creative in speaking, by adding some ideas to their responses and not simply imitating human speech.¹ This unique research gives us hope of reducing the gap between humans and animals and acquiring the knowledge about animals’ experience of the world. This is the knowledge we currently have no idea about. It is also one of many examples that demonstrates a certain positive progression in our vision of animals in the last half of the twentieth century, propelled by other scientific discoveries which made such research possible. The raising of doubts in our belief in animals’ inferiority or awareness in animals’ much more complex nature or abilities, than we originally thought, is one such indication of that progress.

Nevertheless, we should not forget that talking animals only became possible very recently and their ability is still unknown to most of us. Many people, unfamiliar and disinterested in animal studies, still believe that speech remains a human privilege and, by consequence, the manifestation of human selectiveness to other species. Moreover, in certain areas, our treatment of animals has become even worse than it ever was. A striking example, illustrating our point, is Joel Novek’s recent article on pigs raised by “industrialized farming methods that confine animals indoors,” which emphasizes how pigs’ living conditions have deteriorated by “intensive farming” compared to the time when they were bred on small farms.² Judging by this isolated example of the pigs’ shocking treatment in new industrialized structures, we can sadly remark that, despite the recent discoveries of the heretofore unknown genetic closeness between humans and animals, our treatment of them not only has not improved but has significantly declined in comparison with previous centuries. Taking into consideration these antagonistic changes in human attitude towards animals in our time, we can conclude that even today we still mark the time and for the most part, accept an Aristotelian vision of a human as only one “rational animal” and stubbornly take “reason” as one deciding criteria in the hierarchy of species, by which humans are superior to all other species.

Even progressive thinking advanced by the advocates for animal rights and scholars who examine animals across disciplines, the newness of which we greatly extol, is often only the echo of odd voices in defense of animals coming from different historical periods. We can sometimes find those uncoordinated fragments of ideas in scientific or literary texts from diverse countries and epochs. In this respect, the texts written in the Renaissance period, a time of the reevaluation and elaboration of many philosophical beliefs, are not just important sources of information regarding animals and their relationship with humans. These texts also reveal a new approach on how to perceive animals in the hierarchy of species that move beyond what was seen in the Middle Ages. They significantly challenge the old vision of the unquestionable superiority of humans over all other species based on their position of logos, which was considered as a single canon for that superiority.

The Renaissance texts depart considerably from the medieval employment of animals as allegorical representations of certain human characteristics and the social classes within medieval society. Access to a new knowledge of the earth’s fauna and flora, due to the geographical exploration of different parts of the world in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the rediscovery of classical texts lost or unknown in the Middle Ages allowed the Renaissance scholars and writers to perceive and describe animals in a new fashion. Animals were no longer examined or described as a vehicle for something else, but the subject matter themselves. The human confidence in its ascendancy from other species and preference by God was called into question by the scholars of this period.

These serious changes in the perception of animals were very far from being embraced by the greater number of Renaissance philosophers and writers. Most of them still reproduced the familiar argument of the human superiority in reason and language and, by consequence, were no different from the foregoing centuries. Having been established by Aristotle, the conventional belief in inferiority of animals due to their lack of reason and inability to express themselves through the means of language, was shared by the majority of Renaissance thinkers and writers. The Renaissance reception of this precept was shaped by the history of Aristotle’s reception.

First, Greek and, later, Roman philosophers attempted to find the ways to distinguish man from all other animals. By pointing out man’s distinctive qualities, classical philosophers hoped to prove man’s superiority over all other species. These philosophical reflections on man and animals can be found in literary texts and philosophical treatises. Among earlier Greek philosophers who offered vision on man’s and animals’ relationship, we can mention Alcmaeon of Croton who supposedly established the theory that animals only have perception but lack understanding which is only characteristic to humans. His argument was further developed in the works of Plato and Aristotle who both “attempted to differentiate functions of the mind from the operation of the senses and who sought to isolate those qualities that in general distinguish humans from other animals.”

Plato argued that animals do not have rational element in their psychology and attributed the baser aspects of human conduct to animal part which exists in man. Plato’s pupil, Aristotle

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3 His work is mostly lost but he is mentioned in the works of the later philosophers.

devoted a few of his works to studies of animals whom he tried to comprehend in terms of their differences from humans. Aristotle wished to examine why human life is radically different from that of other creatures and argued that it is defined by an activity of the soul, which he considered “human good” and which acts in accordance with a rational principle. Aristotle thought that only humans are able to experience happiness and they are the only ones among all species looking for it. By studying and describing different kinds of animals, Aristotle came to the conclusion that while humans live by reason, animals are led by nature. The relations between animals and humans are also broadly discussed in the works of Plutarch who devoted three treatises to this topic in the collection, known at present as Moralia.

The firm belief in irrationality of animals and incapacity for language originated in Aristotelian teachings. It was also accepted by the Christian fathers of the church in the early stages of Christianity. According to Brigitte Resl,

The biblical exegetes and early Church fathers of late antiquity were particularly required to elaborate upon the difference between humans and other animals when commenting on the hierarchy of God’s creation. Their general statements usually derived from the very specific context of the creation narrative set out in the Old Testament book of Genesis. That humans were humans was not debated, but only their privileged status in relation to other beings.

This belief in animals’ irrationality determined the inferior position of animals in regard to humans, and justified the absence of any moral obligations from the latter towards them. While many of Aristotle’s works on numerous subjects were studied and interpreted in the Middle Ages, his treatises on animals received very little or no attention from medieval scholars. During the Renaissance, together with many other ancient texts on animals and plants, Aristotle’s three major treatises on animals (De animalibus, Parts of Animals, and Historia Animalium) were “rediscovered” and received a great deal of commentary. These commentaries, written mostly at the end of the fifteenth and the first part of the sixteenth century, are interesting because they reassemble the previous tradition of commenting on Aristotelian works about animals that had been interrupted during the previous two centuries. These commentaries also take into consideration new knowledge about animals that had been collected during geographical explorations. However, beginning in the middle of the sixteenth century, the interest in commenting on Aristotle’s works was all but lost. Commentaries were replaced with “systematic works where Aristotle’s position was reorganized and amended, sometimes in the light of the most recent discoveries.”

In his zoological treatises Aristotle demonstrated the importance of knowledge about animals, classified all animals into different groups, and provided detailed information about each group. Although the three zoological treatises offered valuable information about classes

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6 A Cultural History of Animals in Antiquity, p. 160
8 A Cultural History of Animals, p. 148.
and groups of animals, Aristotle was not interested in discussing animals from a philosophical point of view. His view of the relationship between animals and humans can be found in his other works. Aristotle’s position on language as the sole property of man is evident from the first pages of his *Politics*, where he says:

> Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal who has the gift of speech. And whereas mere voice is but an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the perception of pleasure and pain the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just the unjust. And it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state.\(^\text{10}\)

The author of *Poetics* believes that many animals produce auditory signals proclaiming physical pain and pleasure, while only human speech has the ability to expound a moral choice. This signifying difference puts humans in a superior position with regard to animals, allowing humans to form a private community, expressed in a family, and a public one, represented in a formation of a state. The unique ability of humankind to recognize the necessity of forming a state, based on the presence of reason, is what makes men different from all other species that live either in complete isolation or in groups, and who have nothing in common with the human political state. For Aristotle, the political state as a representation of law and justice, is more important than family and is opposed to the condition of isolation, which, if not an accidental occurrence but by his own choice, makes a man a self-sufficient or a evil man. Aristotle, at the same time, admits that a man who does need a state because he is self-sufficient “must be either a beast or a god.” He does not explain this idea further but elaborates later that a man who is not part of a state represents injustice, and is more dangerous than any animals because he possesses intelligence. Aristotle explains that when a man is part of a state, he is the best of all animals; if he is not, he is “the most unholy and the most savage of animals.”\(^\text{11}\) However, this logic reveals a certain contradiction in the Aristotelian vision on the value of reason. Reason by itself cannot be a determination of men’s goodness and closeness to god. Reason is only capable of granting a choice to men of being a part of a state and, by consequence, choosing justice, or choosing to be alone and preferring injustice. Based on this theory, while following the wrong path, man can become worse than any animal. How then are men considered to be superior to other species if the outcome of possession of reason cannot be predicted, and Aristotle himself believed that some men can be worse than animals?

Despite these contradictions, the Aristotelian principle of singling out man and making him supreme to all other species became a very important concept in the history of Western civilization, but only because it was linked with Christian metaphysics.\(^\text{12}\) Consequently, one

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could argue that if the Aristotelian principle was not supported by Christian teachings, then the perception of animals regarding their relationship to humans would be different in Western ethical thought. If we look at other civilizations from the sixteenth century, unaffected by Aristotelian or Christian teachings, we notice that their vision of men and animals is quite different. For example, the acceptance of cannibalism in sixteenth century China serves as a convincing illustration to this thesis. Many examples from Chinese texts of this period indicate that there was nothing taboo about a body part just because it came from a human. The problem with eating human flesh can in part be understood as a problem of an act of consumption that analogized men to animals and thereby destabilized that which ostensibly made humans unique.\textsuperscript{13} According to these texts, man still belongs to nature; the boundaries separating him from other animals, most significantly apes, are not clearly defined.

Even more than in antiquity, interest during the Middle Ages in examining animals was driven by the desire to comprehend man and his nature rather than by a need to collect knowledge about animals themselves. The source that contributes most to an understanding of early medieval natural knowledge is a Christian text from Alexandria, written initially in Greek, by an unknown author, entitled \textit{Physiologus}. Originating in late antiquity, this text describes different animals, plants, and minerals, which are accompanied by a moral context. Not only does each chapter provide information about characteristics of an animal, but it is also accompanied by passages from the Bible, moralizing animals.

Later, \textit{Physiologus} was modified and extended by the addition of many new animal descriptions, taken not only from the Bible, but also from nature. These new, secondary bestiaries also incorporated passages from another important medieval text entitled \textit{Etymologies}, written by Isidore of Seville in the seventh century. \textit{Etymologies} is a collection of different classical texts on various subjects, one of which is zoology. In these newly modified bestiaries, there are all kinds of wild and domestic animals, including fantastical ones, which often represented immoral behavior. The choice of animals and the actual information about them were not important for medieval readers. What was important instead was the significance of each animal beyond itself, specifically its didactic value, which could be applied to a human life. In other words, animals were nothing more than vehicles for the moral instruction of men. In later bestiaries, such as \textit{Aberdeen Bestiary}, authors were becoming more interested in zoological knowledge and relying less on scripture.\textsuperscript{14}

In the twelfth century, due to military crusades and the growth of several different trades, both interest in animals and knowledge about them grew significantly. For instance, animals became frequent and meaningful characters in the increasingly popular genre of courtly romances. The best example of this phenomenon is Chretien de Troyes’ romance \textit{Le Roman au lion}. This romance tells a story of a knight, Yvain, who loses the love of his lady and goes on a journey to perform many heroic deeds in order to win her back. A lion, whom Yvain rescues from a dragon, becomes Yvain’s loyal companion and personifies exemplary virtue in the story. The lion helps Yvain to defeat a giant and three knights.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Animals and Human Imagination, A Companion to Animal Studies}, Carla Nappi, the article \textit{On Yeti and Being Just, Carving the Borders of Humanity in Early Modern China} (Columbia University Press, New York, 2012), p. 55.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{A Cultural History of Animals in the Medieval Age}, p. 14.
The twelfth century was also the time when animal characters that would come to have very long tradition were created, such as Ysengrims, Reynart or Tibert the Cat. The most extensive treatment of the character of Reynart is the Old French text *Le Roman de Renart*, written by Pierre de Saint-Cloud. This is the story of how the clever fox Reynart triumphed over the butcherly wolf Ysengrimus and the stupid bear Brun. Reynart also succeeds in wrapping around his little finger a lion Noble and mocking donkey Boduen. In the last versions of Reynart, the comical element is replaced by a satire on royal power, feudalists, and the clergy. The allegorical use of animals, which has been known since the Greek fabulist Esope, allowed writers to illustrate human qualities, and by consequence, to visually convey a moral message to readers.

A significant work on animals from the thirteenth century is the twenty-six volume “*De animalibus*” (On Animals) by the Dominican scholar Albertus Magnus. For the most part, this grandiose project is a sophisticated reinterpretation of Aristotelian zoological knowledge. This work, adapted to medieval theology, stands out due to the author’s depth of knowledge, his devotion to the subject, and his attention to details. Albertus Magnus also supplements his text with his own natural observations and experiments, many of which would seem extremely cruel to a modern reader. As Brigitte Resl notices, Albertus Magnus’ work is an important source for understanding the relationship between medieval people and animals.¹⁵ According to her, medieval people definitely believed that animals had feelings, which is demonstrated by many examples in bestiaries from this time.

New information about animals started reaching Europe from the very first journeys made to remote countries and cities. Before this time, the only source of knowledge about exotic animals were their descriptions in religious texts. The explosive growth in exploration, however, provided Europeans with an opportunity to see these animals in real life and describe them for their contemporaries. One of these first travelers was Marco Polo, who visited Central Asia and China, where he came upon many unusual animals. He was the first traveler to leave a detailed account of his travels to Asia in his book *Livres des merveilles du monde*. Jean-Claude Faucon notes Marco Polo’s novel approach in representing everything he encountered in distant lands and says: “La grande originalité de Marco Polo, dans sa perception d’un monde reçu comme fabuleux par la plupart des Européens, est de ne pas chercher à le lire à travers les grilles de l’éthique chrétienne, comme le firent entre autres, Rubrouk ou Pian Carpino.”¹⁶

One of the more mysterious phenomena concerning the relationship between animals and man in the Middle Ages is animals’ prosecution. There are many documents that summarize in details animals’ legal hearings, imprisonment, and execution. There is no agreement between scholars regarding the meaning and utility of these trials, although they do believe that these hearings unquestionably illustrated the power of authority and served as a spectacle for medieval people. Resl says: “As far as contemporary concepts of animal are concerned, the remarkable feature of such cases is not the attribution of reason to the unfortunate beasts, because there is no proof that this ever happened. But what they do show is that animals were regarded as full members of the community.”¹⁷

¹⁷  *A Cultural History of Animals in the Medieval Age*, p. 21.
However, these single instances of treating animals in a manner similar to man did not translate into any perceptible change in attitude towards animals in the Middle Ages. On the contrary, as a continuation of Aristotelian philosophy, the inferior position of animals to men further deepens the difference between animals and man. This vision has shaped man’s treatment of animals over the entire course of Western civilization. The question here is when exactly this vision of man’s pervasive supremacy was completely formed. According to Resl:

Human claims to superiority over the rest of creation are often seen as taking decisive shape during the central Middle Ages, but scholars have disagreed as to whether the attitudes to animals established during the early centuries of Christianity began gradually to disappear in this period, or whether the intellectuals of the time were in fact reinforcing an existing human-animal divid.18

Two clusters of medieval texts were briefly discussed above: one was zoological texts, which contain information taken from Aristotelian zoology that has been reworked and supplemented with observations and additional knowledge about animals, all obtained by medieval scholars; another cluster was literary texts, in which animals are main characters, but represent humans’ virtues and vices, think and act as humans, and are employed as moral exempla. The authors of these texts and their readers did not have any interest in learning about the animal kingdom or engaging in any discussions about the relationship between animals and man. This medieval attitude towards animals is based on particular medieval philosophy, which we will briefly discuss here.

In medieval philosophy, man is created in God’s image and only one possessing reason. Man occupies the unique position of being the only one species able to fight its natural passions by will, governed by reason, yet still belong to the animal world with all its uncontrollable essence. Depending on the inclination to one side or the other of this belief, medieval philosophers were divided into two groups: those in one group thought that humans share many characteristics with animals and that his behavior should be understood along with all animals, whereas those in the other group suggested that human rationality comes from God and makes man very distinct from all other animals. Understandably, the second group of philosophers saw very little value in studying animals themselves.19

The illustration of the belief in human superiority and man’s specific purpose on earth can be found in the writings of St. Augustine, who offered the extensive discussion of human nature and the relation of the human soul to divine nature. St. Augustine suggested that the human condition is created after God’s image and can reach “the supreme pleasure of the contemplation of divine truth.”20 However, he also created a powerful description of man’s misery wallowed in sin. St. Augustine’s idea of human corruption found recognition in works of other medieval figures.

18 A Cultural History of Animals in the Medieval Age, p. 9.
The prevailing majority of Renaissance scholars continued medieval tradition of regarding animals and did not allow the possibility that animals had the capacity for reasoning or possessing anything besides a voice as “an indication of pleasure and pain.” 21 But in my dissertation, I concentrate on small group of the Renaissance writers who regarded animals from different perspectives. (The ideas of this minority writers, even today, seem revolutionary to most of us.) Instead of Aristotle, these progressive scholars studied other classical thinkers such as, for example, Plutarch, who assigned animals reason and the ability to talk and anticipated doubting the Stoic belief in reason as a sign of man’s connection to divinity.

It is quite puzzling why, despite the fact that animals are present in all genres of Renaissance texts, there are few attempts to trace their status in these texts among critics. There are some relatively recent critical works that explore animals’ position in Italian and English early modern texts, including several books by Erica Fudge, who examines animals’ presence in English early modern texts, or Juliana Schiesari, who offers an analysis of animals in Italian Renaissance texts.

In Perceiving Animals, Fudge admits that her book “is a book not so much about animals as about the ways in which humans define themselves as human in the face of the animal.” 22 Fudge seeks to examine animals in early modern England to crystalize a definition of a human as an antithesis of animals – a definition, however, formed by humans themselves. She later says her book is about both animals and humans, and that they are always studied together because “in historical terms the animal can never be studied in isolation; it is always a record by and of the human.” 23 Indeed, animals and humans are not in equal positions in terms of their factual existence. All knowledge about both is recorded by humans, because animals do not speak and cannot write, or else they speak and we do not understand them. They have to use humans as tools to speak on their behalf, but the paradox here is that humans are the ones who prosecute animals out of their beliefs, and they are from whom animals have to be defended the most.

In many ways, Juliana Schiesari’s book Beasts and Beauties: Animals, Gender and Domestication in the Italian Renaissance, 24 is similar to Fudge’s Perceiving Animals. Schiesari’s book is not a historical study of Italian humanist ideas about animals but rather an examination of a domestic space as a place where all family members – including men, women, children, servants, and animals – overlap and interact. More than anything, this gender study, in which animals just happen to play a secondary role, is a quest for the definition of humanity in the Italian Renaissance, from a psychoanalytical and animal studies perspective. Schiesari attempts to show how restricted the definition of who is considered to be a human was in Italian Renaissance texts and art. At the same time, animals played a new role as domesticated creatures, or “pets,” who became an important part of a private space ruled by the pater familias of the

23 Fudge, p. 35
24 Schiesari, Juliana, Beast and Beauties, Animals, Gender, and Domestication in the Italian Renaissance (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2010).
period. Despite the gender focus of this study, the book provides a general picture of animals’ representation during the Italian Renaissance.

While these valuable works by Fudge and Schiesari give us a general vision on the status of animals in English and Italian Renaissance culture, there is no work that offers a comprehensive analysis of the status of animals and the man-animal relationship in literary or philosophical French texts of the period. With a complete lack of critical works available on this subject, any analysis, even if it is merely descriptive in nature, would be valuable. The main goal of my work goes beyond simply introducing the animal subject in French Renaissance times, but ambitiously seeks to demonstrate that despite modern scholars’ belief that the Renaissance was a period of all-embracing anthropocentrism, when Aristotelian ideas of hierarchy of species flourished and freed man from all moral obligations towards animals, there was a significant cluster of French texts of various genres that raised the question of animal equality, or even superiority, and called for man to take responsibility for the treatment of animals. These writers examined animals as a subject matter and disagreed with the Aristotelian vision of hierarchy of species and examined animals as a subject matter and not a taciturn vehicle to compare and praise animals, as often happens in pro-Aristotelian texts. The careful examination of these texts surprisingly reveals that modern ideas on animal rights and equality of species were already addressed, or at least touched on, in French Renaissance literature.

The French Renaissance texts are of particular interest in a study of the history of animals because of the sequence of fundamental historical events that occurred in the sixteenth century in Europe, specifically in France. Firstly, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, major geographical explorations were undertaken by Europeans. Although such explorations were certainly embarked upon by Europeans before this time, they were concerned with much smaller territories and covered shorter distances. There were many reasons for the new voyages: religious—spreading Christianity to other parts of the world; intellectual—discovering new knowledge and exploring the unknown; and finally, economic—European nations were looking for goods such as gold and silver, and for new routes for the spice and silk trades. Some examples of these geographical explorations include Christopher Columbus’ voyages, during which he discovered Cuba, Virgin islands, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, Margarita, etc., as well as the journey of Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan, who was in search of the Spice Islands and accomplishing, as a result, the first circumnavigation of Earth.

In addition to this surge in world exploration, the sixteenth century also saw the introduction to France of Renaissance ideas centering on the return and reinterpretation of classical texts. These were brought from Italy, first during the French invasion in the reign of Charles VIII, and later by another French king, Francois I. Consequently, the completely new information about animals brought by European travelers landed in France on a fertile field of growing interest in classical ideas about various subjects and areas of study. Animals were significant in the travelers’ accounts of explorers who visited new lands and encountered creatures that were little known or unknown in Europe, and they were present in many classical texts. This coincidental intersection of two major processes created the special conditions needed for French scholars to address and study animals. Hence, various zoological texts examined animals as subject matter, monster literature puzzled readers regarding the existence and purpose
of monsters, and travel journals described indigenous people in distant lands, as well as their relationship with local animals.

The second part of the sixteenth century, with its protracted and internecine religious wars, was a dark period in French history. This political and religious crisis that tore France apart has raised the issue of what constitutes the rationality of humans and the human identity. In fact, human rationality and reason were questioned by many scholars during this time, above all by writers such as Des Périers and Montaigne, both of whom believed that humans have no basis of believing in their superiority over animals. In Montaigne’s vision, men who engage in killing representatives of their own species by no means could be considered superior to non-human animals that do not kill within their own species. In line with this critique, encounters with men in other parts of the world, whose lifestyles were so radically different from those of Europeans, along with their closeness to nature and equal treatment of animals in the natural environment challenged the definition of man and eventually made it impossible to produce one. The absence of this definition threw the entire argument about hierarchy of species into an abyss of uncertainty.

The French texts I propose to examine in my dissertation are quite experimental. The genre of dialogue (in the case of Des Périers) and essay (in the case of Montaigne) are particularly interesting in the context of the study of animals. The dialogical form allows Des Périers to draw attention to the animals themselves and break with a long-standing tradition of their use as a vehicle to talk about man. In this way, Des Périers veils his own views and distances himself by allowing animals talk about their own condition in his dialogues, which challenges human belief in the power of language. For his part, Montaigne draws upon the humanist tradition to write in a new way – in the genre of essay – that makes possible for him to question all types of knowledge and present his vision on animals and their relationship with man through the prism of his reflections on knowledge.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters, each of which is either devoted to a cluster of texts of similar genres, or, as in the case of Des Périers and Montaigne, examines a specific text in depth. The first chapter of this project serves as an introduction to the subject of animals during the French Renaissance by examining a variety of zoological and literary texts. These texts are grouped in the chapter according to genre. The chapter begins with an illustrative example of a zoological opus by French zoologist Pierre Belon, titled *Voyage au Levant, Les observations de Pierre Belon du Mans*. The purpose of including a zoological text in this rather philosophic-literary-in-nature work is to show where human knowledge of animals and their peculiarities was at the time, and how scholars seek to enrich their knowledge about them. Additionally, Belon described the customs and approaches to animals in non-Christian places that he visited during his travels, which often appeared to be more humane than in European countries.

Belon’s traveling account is followed by two books on monsters by Boaistuau and Paré. The primary interest in these curious books is the descriptions of actual well-known animals, and imaginative ones in equal terms due to lack of understanding of a difference between real animals and the ones who are nothing more than the figment of the human imagination. In fact, all animals mentioned in both books were believed to exist at the time. This naive approach, even if it partially diminishes the value of revolutionary ideas about animals during the Renaissance,
nevertheless mostly demonstrates that the definition of what should and should not be considered
an animal was not yet formed. This lack of definition – or, more precisely, contradictory
definition of animal – does not change the originality of the approach to the “animal question” in
these books.

The inability to create a logical and coherent definition of an animal echoes in even more
contradictory definitions of a man. This failure becomes especially evident in Thevet’s and
Léry’s travel journals, which represent the last cluster of texts in this chapter. Both travelers
encountered representatives of distant lands and described them living in a very similar way to
animals, on one hand, but understanding themselves as part of the natural order, in which nobody
holds a privileged position, on the other. These contradictory descriptions of the inhabitants who
possess all attributes of humans, but by their manner of life and their beliefs belong to a different
world, are incomprehensible to Renaissance Europeans and provoke a trail of questions such as:
How should these people from other lands be perceived and what does their peculiar status mean
for a notion of a man in general? Are the terms describing who should be considered a man much
broader than Europeans originally thought? Should somebody who does not share any Western
values still be included in the category of man, or are these terms are much more narrow and
demanding, meaning that to be considered a man, someone has to demonstrate and practice other
attributes, besides physical ones, and the ability to use some type of speech? Perhaps, in Western
cultures, you also have to believe in your own superiority and uniqueness in order to be
considered a man, and any deviation from that self-admiration immediately puts you into the
realm of animals. All of these and many other questions are raised by the travel journals and are
important for our examination of the status of animals during the French Renaissance.

In the second chapter of the project, I examine Des Périers’ Cymbalum Mundi, an
interesting text that illustrates the significant shift in human perceptions of animals that took
place during the Renaissance. Scholars have focused on the history and reception of Cymbalum
Mundi and traditionally have debated whether des Périers wrote the work as an attack on
Christianity. They only briefly touched on the theme of the puzzling coexistence of animals,
man, and gods in four dialogues in the work. I aim to demonstrate in this chapter that des Périer’s
work is an inquiry into where man stands in relation to animals. The chapter shows how
Cymbalum Mundi challenges the irrefutable value of the human vehicle of communication, in the
form of speech. I also regard this text as a rare attempt to write a literary text from an animal’s
perspective.

The third chapter, on Montaigne, is a culmination of the discussions on animals of the
period. The chapter’s structure echoes Montaigne’s own structure in his essay Apologie de
Raymond Sebonde, in which he first attempts to explain the animal world by summarizing many
classical and contemporary examples demonstrating animal “cleverness,” and at times even
superiority to humans, then seamlessly transitions to a broader discussion of what knowledge is
and how animals are directly related to the perception of this phenomenon. Earlier in his essay,
De la cruauté, Montaigne gives a great number of examples demonstrating attitudes towards
animals in non-Western societies, which are very different in this regard from Western societies.
Montaigne contends that in many non-Western nations and societies, animals were not only often
considered equal to man, but were sometimes perceived as having a higher rank than them in the
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species hierarchy, or even regarded and worshipped as gods. By distancing himself from the Aristotelian principle, Montaigne concludes:

…but when among the more moderate opinions I meet with arguments that try to show the close resemblance between us and the animals. And how much of a share they have in our greatest privileges, and with how much of a share they have are linked to us, truly I beat down a lot of our presumption and willingly resign that imaginary kingship that people give us over the other creatures.25

The perception and attitudes toward animals that Montaigne offers in Apologie de Raymond Sebonde are deeply intertwined with his concept of knowledge – that knowledge is a constantly changing phenomenon that does not allow for constructing the objective understanding of any object or fact. From this interpretation, mostly based on Montaigne’s reading of Sextus Empericus and Heraclitus, Montaigne concludes that humans are not in a position to comprehend animals or know where animals stand in relation to them. In other words, the knowledge that humans claim to have regarding themselves and their environment is momentary, unable to provide any tools to help them interpret objects and phenomena. Therefore, Montaigne would contend that any human judgement regarding animals, or any other subject is always false.


“…when among the more moderate opinions I meet with arguments that try to show the close resemblance between us and the animals. And how much of a share they have in our greatest privileges, and with how much of a share they have are linked to us, truly I beat down a lot of our presumption and willingly resign that imaginary kingship that people give us over the other creatures.” Michel de Montaigne, The Complete Works, Translation (Everyman’s library, 2003), p. 385.
Chapter 1

Real and Fantastic Animals in French Renaissance Culture

I would like to begin my enquiry of the French Renaissance man-animal relationship by examining the variety of non-literary and literary French texts of the period that responded to the new emerging cultural and zoological knowledge brought to France from geographical explorations during the fifteenth and (especially) sixteenth centuries. In those texts, Renaissance thinkers attempted to reconsider zoological knowledge and offer a new systematization of species after encountering the descriptions and images of enigmatical animals that were unmentioned in Aristotelian or Pliny’s works. The interest in animals was so wide-spread that thinkers from different disciplines were involved in an extensive correspondence that “led to the rise of a sort of international scientific community, which ensured greater circulation, and thus better control of information.”

What becomes clear after reading many literary and non-literary texts on newly discovered animals is that the authors rarely were interested in just zoological information: their texts had many other objectives as well. The authors invited reflections on a series of questions, among which: How should we understand and approach newly discovered species? Should we treat new species differently from well-known animals? How should we reassess the hierarchy of entities in the light of novel discoveries? Finally, what should be the relationship between man and animals in the light of all these discoveries?

In many cases, Renaissance natural philosophers were looking for ways to incorporate the old, dominant-from-antiquity, anthropocentric point of view on the man-animal relationship into the new context. At the same time, despite the majority of writers and philosophers who were still interested in animals as a vehicle to talk about humankind, there were also attempts to challenge the accepted philosophical tradition of human superiority over other species. Those pro-animal philosophers tried to find the basis for their argument in the classical sources, primarily in Plutarch. It is unlikely that pro-animal philosophers had ambitious plans to establish the whole theory of relationship of species on earth to the advantage of animals, but they were genuinely interested in ethical dimension of human/animal relationship. This minority of Renaissance scholars who were the first since the pro-animal writers of antiquity to have the intent to exploring animals as a subject matter are the subject of this dissertation. However, they are not presented in this chapter. Instead, this chapter introduces the subject of animals in the French Renaissance and provides a rich background to the other two chapters in which pro-animal philosophers Des Périers and Montaigne are examined thoroughly. Although the scholars examined in this chapter sometimes make hints or observations that contradict Aristotelian views, they, nevertheless, do not purport to argue for animals’ equality or superiority, and by no means, do they call for establishing the moral obligations of men towards animals. One might

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say that they, on the whole, prepared the way for Des Périers and Montaigne through their contributions to the subject of animals by discovering new animals, providing novel descriptions of known animals, arguing for direct observation of all kinds of life, and questioning the borders separating different species—including man.

Therefore, the main purpose of this chapter is to give a broad excursus into French Renaissance texts from different disciplines and genres which discuss animals. The selection of certain French texts over others is not coincidental. The selected texts are the most influential works of the French Renaissance on the topic of animals and collectively provide a comprehensive picture of who was writing about animals, in what disciplines, and produced what on this subject. In this chapter, I discuss three distinctive categories of texts in which animals are a significant topic among many other subjects of interest: texts on natural history or zoological inquiries, texts on the nature of monsters represented by both real and imaginary animals, and finally, the journals of scholars who visited distant lands and left accounts of their travels.

It is difficult to examine and comprehend philosophical views of animals in any historical period without knowing what the approaches to studying animals were and what was specific to this particular time period. The main feature of several Renaissance texts in this chapter is the peculiar position of scholars who, on one hand, were enamored with classical sources and eagerly and unreservedly accepting of everything from antiquity, but, on another hand, were full of scientific curiosity to explore and discover new species, forms, and ideas which were difficult and sometimes even impossible to reconcile with classical ones. Pierre Belon’s text *Voyage au Levant, Les observations de Pierre Belon du Mans* serves an convincing illustration of this internal conflict between acceptance of classical authority and the making of new, completely original discoveries based on direct observations. Belon’s book also gives an idea of how a zoological text was written in Renaissance and what the task of a zoologist writing such a text was. Other examples of this tension are traveling journals written by two Renaissance explorers: a pastor, Jean de Léry, and a Franciscan priest, André Thevet, who both travelled to Brazil at that time and left a contradictory descriptions of the fauna and flora of those remote lands.

Another category of texts in this chapter different than those mentioned presents another type of internal contradiction. This category consists of texts on teratology, the exploration of monsters of all kinds and effort to explain their origins and purpose on earth popular since antiquity. In this chapter, I examine two Renaissance works of this kind: *Histoires Prodigieuses* by Pierre Boaistuau and *Des Monstres & Prodiges* by Ambroise Paré. Both authors were interested in explaining the existence and purpose of monsters, and less interested in establishing the boundaries between them and other creatures.

**Pierre Belon**

The first discipline that comes to mind when one mentions animals is zoology. This discipline deals with the animal kingdom, and its history goes back to antiquity. Zoology like many other disciplines, flourished during the Renaissance and became very important due to discovery of previously unknown species. Therefore, it seems logical to start this project with an example of a zoological text: Pierre Belon’s *Voyage au Levant, Les observations de Pierre Belon*
Belon, along with scholar Guillaume Rondelet, was a major French zoologist who collected specialized knowledge about animals and made a considerable impact on this discipline. Belon wrote separate books on fish and birds, while Rondelet wrote a book on fish and other aquatic creatures. The nature of this project is not zoological, so I chose to include only one zoological text. The analysis of Belon’s work in this project serves as an introduction to the topic of animals in the French Renaissance and the so-called, technical, background for reflexions on animals in philosophical texts.

Belon’s work and intention are far from pondering the relationship between man and animals or discussing the hierarchy of species. However, this book is important for my project for several reasons. First, it provides reader with a necessary knowledge of the discipline in the period, and secondly and perhaps, more importantly, it demonstrates the increasing tension of Renaissance scholars’s admiration for classical sources and their direct observations which were only made possible by the exploration of other geographical locations and study new plants and animals. Like many other scholars of the period, Belon faced the challenges of describing new species for the first time without relying on descriptions from antiquity when these species were unknown and of correcting classical descriptions based on new possibilities and knowledge.

Pierre Belon manifested his interest and diligence for science early in life by persistently studying medicine, zoology, and botany. He later described his observations and reflections on plants and animals in several books. *Voyage au Levant, Les observations de Pierre Belon du Mans* describes his expedition with a French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. From the first pages, it becomes clear, Belon was more interested in the singularities of the local fauna, flora, and customs than the political events he witnessed during this expedition. During his long stay in the East, he was able to visit almost all the territory that belonged to Turks at the time and, by his own declaration, wrote down everything interesting and curious he saw. No detail of the local life with all its whimsical features, often incomprehensible to Belon’s contemporaries, escaped Belon’s eye. As the result of his extensive traveling, he produced a uniquely detailed description of the land.

In the preface to *Voyage au Levant*, Belon gives the response to the eternal question of why we need knowledge about distant lands, their flora and fauna, and their inhabitants. He says:

> Grand nombre d’autres s’efforçant de vaincre toutes les difficultés ont pas semblable désir suivi lointaines péregrinations. Ni les frayeurs des naufrages en la périlleuse mer, ni la tourmente des vents impétueux battant les navires et les brisant entre les ondes agitées par les orages, ni la crainte de perdre leur liberté es mains des pirates inhumains, ni les dangereux passages par les âpres rochers, ni l’intemperature du chaud excessif ou de l’extrême froidure, ni les nuits obscurcies des nuées pluvieuses foudroyantes de l’horrible tonnerre, ni le danger de passer les déserts inhabités pour la crainte des bêtes sauvages, n’ont eu

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Guillaume Rondelet, *Libri de piscibus marinis* (Lyons, 1554) and *Universa aquatilium historia* (Lyons, 1555), *L’histoire entiere des poissons* (Lyons, 1558).

Both titles are taken from *A Cultural History of Animals, edited by Bruce Boehrer*
These burning and demanding multiple sacrifices implied by the word “desir” are among the feelings that Belon shared with those who, in spite of all dangers and difficulties, overcame all obstacles in the quest for knowledge, and whose curiosity led them to visit new countries and cities. One example of the manifestation of this thirst for discovery and knowledge is described by Belon in one of the first chapters of the book, when he describes his long stay on the island of Crete. Having already spent a considerable amount of time on this island, Belon knew that a fish called Scarus was found in the area. One day, while on a ship going to the town of Candy, he shared the fate of other seamen who had to flee to the mountains after corsairs captured the vessel. Belon and others had to seek refuge in the mountains. His refuge was a monastery. Despite having just escaped from a mortal danger, Belon was curious to find out why this fish is so common in the water around the island and so rare in other areas. The answer is the fish likes a certain plant, which grows only among the rocks in this area. Belon notices several interesting features about this fish. First of all, the locals cook it a certain way by sticking a skewer through its mouth, which causes this fish to look like a laughing person. Secondly, it is notable that this fish eats a number of plants mentioned earlier, and finally, it has a very big liver, which locals use in a sauce. This innocent example shows Belon’s priorities in traveling to other lands.

Belon commences his *Voyage au Levant* by establishing the authority of the ancients, who, as we saw in the citation earlier, devoted their lives to collecting information about animals and plants and without whom it would have been impossible for Belon’s contemporaries to have any knowledge about the fauna and flora of foreign lands. Therefore, Belon’s task is, first, to learn about animals and plants in the books of his ancestors and afterward to make his own journeys to distant lands to confirm or refute the classical knowledge about them. From the very beginning of *Voyage au Levant*, Belon struggles to combine two kinds of knowledge: antiquarian knowledge of flora and fauna from classical sources and his own knowledge obtained from the direct examination of the plants and animals he encountered in his travels. In other words, he faces the difficult task of attempting to reconcile the well-established authority of ancients with firsthand experience. This struggle arises because tradition tells to Belon to accept ancient knowledge as dogma, but the researcher’s curiosity often prevents him from doing so. Every time he encounters a new specie or plant, he runs to ancient sources to find a confirmation there, and only if he does not find it, does he dare provide his own description or share his observations. Out of fear of contradicting classical knowledge, Belon advocates for extremely careful examination of ancient sources before suggesting anything new, even though in reality, he is eager to search for unknown, plants and animals in distant lands not described or seen in classical sources.

It is also very important for Belon to establish the originality of his own work specifically in the French language. On the example of a thyme, Belon illustrates how people erroneously use names for plants. He calls on us to be precise about all plant names and not rely blindly on deceptive resemblance. According to Belon, the correct way of identifying different things, such as plants and animals, is to match their appearance with their descriptions in antiquity. There are

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many similarities between different kinds, and it is zoologist’s responsibility to indicate the differences between them. Belon says: “Et amenant ces exemples, je veux dire qu’il faut chercher la vérité des choses inconnues par celles qu’on connait.”

According to Belon, this aforementioned desire or curiosity for the discovery of new matters is often condemned by those who suggest that our ancestors lived happily and healthily without increased knowledge. In response to them, he says that they should equally condemn architecture as an example of curiosity or Aristotle who, unsatisfied with external animal parts, examined their internal anatomies. Belon says: “...je puis conclure que l’ignorant ne me peut raisonnablement arguer de curiosite inutile, ou non necessaire.

Therefore, the original question of why certain people travel and search for the unknown is answered in full at the beginning of Belon’s book. Certain members of humanity are not satisfied with what they already know – they want to go further. For his type of curiosity, these people sacrifice every aspect of their personal lives to provide precious knowledge that broadens our human understanding of the surrounding world.

Belon abstains from writing about matters to be found in countries close to his home, but instead wants to search for and describe strange and foreign matters. This goal defines his interest in travels to remote lands. Later, in the introduction to the second book, Belon will acknowledge that in history, often those who went beyond everything in search of new knowledge and described something they saw for the first time, were often accused of lying. In order to avoid this kind of accusation, Belon again indicates that he indeed described everything he saw with his own eyes and compared this information with an authority of the ancients. It is again an indication of his advocacy of a direct observation of matters with a reservation for classical sources.

Belon starts his journey to the East by visiting the island of Crete and describing its plants and animals. The first description of the fish Scarus, discussed earlier, is followed by ones of Crete’s birds. Belon believes that the role of a zoologist is to investigate different kinds of animals and carefully compare them with known and described species to produce their most accurate descriptions that reflect all previous knowledge and combine it with new knowledge. Belon is extremely precise in naming all the birds from the island of Crete noting their Greek, Latin, and French names. On the illustrative example of the roe deer found between Salonica and Siderocapsa it is seen how Belon decrypts the intricate names from vulgar tongue for the reader. Belon first investigates an animal that he encounters, then compares it to descriptions from antiquity (if that animal was known or mentioned), and finally summarizes all the well-known names for the animal in different languages. Belon claims that the name of this animal in the vulgar tongue is *zarcadia*, but he thinks that this name is also related to *dorus*. Latin grammarian Solinus used the term *capream* to describe an animal that was called *ibex* by the French. Belon’s contemplation of the connections between the name *zarcadia* and *dorus* is based on the fact that Theodore Gaza, in his translation of Aristotle, always employed *dorida* as *caprea*. The Romans called the roe deer *capriolo*, but its appearance was a little different (i.e. it had small horns that fell out every year; it was smaller than a stag; and it had no tail). Aristotle called this animal *dorus*, but Belon insists this animal matches an animal that Pliny called...
caprea. The Greeks gave this animal various names, such as dorcus, zax, or dorx, or dorcalis.\(^6\) This short examination and comparison of different descriptions of similar animals leads Belon to the conclusion that this animal was very well-known in antiquity and well-known by its vulgar name as well.

The descriptions of the different kinds of goats on Crete in next two chapters reveal another feature of Belon’s writing. While he is an independent scholar who is interested in accurately describing new species and clarifying old descriptions of well-known ones, he is not indifferent towards animals themselves. The descriptions of goats in these two chapters, for example, are full of his admiration for their abilities. In the first description, Belon mentions a wild goat referred to as ibexe by the French. If wounded by a peasant’s arrow, this goat can cure itself using the herb dictamnum. In a later edition, Belon adds that it is rather wondrous how this animal can leap from one seemingly inaccessible rock to another.

Another description here is of a sheep called strepsiros. This animal, which is not much different from a regular sheep, possesses straight horns. Belon provides a portrait of this animal, claiming that nobody before him has ever sketched the animal. The chapter is accompanied by Belon’s extremely long discourse on nature and different descriptions of unicorns mentioned by Aristotle, Aelian, and Pliny. Belon is convinced that an animal with a single horn exists, since it has been seen in so many places. However, the description of this animal is nevertheless absent.

The descriptions of snakes and oysters of an island of Lemnos display that Belon is again very careful with names and makes a clear distinction between vulgar names and the names given by authors from antiquity. He does not passively observe the animals he encounters but actively studies them by carefully cutting and anatomizing them. Again, as in the case of Crete’s birds and goats, Belon continues to provide handwritten images for his most important descriptions. Very often, he claims that one or another kind was never found or described before.

Belon is a naturalist but also a traveler whose scientific inquiry is not limited to his search for new, unusual plants and animals in the Levant. He is also interested in anthropological exploration and discovering new customs and ways of human life. He describes in detail all aspects of locals’ life, especially emphasizing everything unusual and often inexplicable to a European traveler. For example, Belon shares with his readers the astonishment he feels when encountering caloyers, the monks of Mount Athos who along with the locals exhibit weird dietary habits. According to Belon, the main singularity of these Greek monks and other people in this area is that, during their feasts, they do not eat sanguineous fish or any red meat for superstitious reasons. Instead, they live on plants, as well as dried fish, mussels, and oysters because these kinds of meet do not contain blood. Upon encountering an old man suffering from asthma, Belon tries to convince him to eat some good fish. The man responds that he would not eat it, even if he were at the point of death. Belon comments that this manner of living is distinctive to these Greek churchmen and common people who would rather die than eat any kind of meat or sanguineous fish. These dietary habits are the expression of local religious beliefs which Belon does not explain, most likely because he does not know them. The history of caloyers’ refusal to eat meat goes back to 4th century Egyptian monasticism, when monks had to refuse themselves many earthly habits, including eating meat. Besides demonstrating a broad

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knowledge and interest in disciplines aside beyond botany and zoology, Belons’ anthropological observations indicate other possibilities for regarding animals from other parts of the world and other cultures based on completely different beliefs.

In the discussion of the correlation between dietary preferences and attitude towards animals in a one or another cultural group, it is pertinent to think of the Greek philosopher Pythagoras and his community which exhibited food preferences similar to caloyers but for completely different reasons. They believed in the migration of souls after death into the bodies of other men or animals. For that reason, they insisted that both men and animals should be seen as a kin, with men having no superiority. Mary Ann Violin notices something about Pythagoras: “Eating animals flesh becomes cannibalism, and killing animals becomes murder, incurring the same bloodguilt as slaying a human.” She further explains that the theory about the migration of souls is not the reason, or more precisely, is not the only reason for Pythagoras’ attitude toward animals: Pythagoras’ prohibitions against killing or eating animals were not based on superstition, totemism or taboo. In Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Pythagoras is portrayed as pleading with men to show compassion for the suffering of sentient beings, especially the oxen, sheep, and goats who help him so willingly. In the examples of Pythagoras and caloyers in Belon’s book, completely different religious beliefs lead adherents to choose not to consume meat which opens new possibilities for relationship with animals. If animals no longer serve as food for humans, how then they should be perceived? If the Christian belief that the only purpose of animals’ existence on earth is to serve to man is dismissed, then why there are animals on earth? Does a different explanation of their presence independent from man’s existence change not only our belief in the hierarchy of species but also the whole structure of our relationship with animals?

After having visited several Turkish cities and villages, Belon notices that Turkish people also try to abstain from meat but for different reasons from the previous two examples. Turkish people hold in much greater esteem fish. Belon explains that in antiquity, meat was considered inferior to fish and the Egyptian monks avoided eating fish all their lives to prove that they could deprive themselves of such a delicacy. However, this preference can be mostly explained by the fact that the ancients knew much less about birds and other terrestrial animals than they knew about fish. The Grand Turk himself together with his predecessors preferred fish to meat. By consequence, fishing at the sea of Constantinople abundant in fish more than any other sea, represents a great source of profit.

Until visiting Constantinople, Belon only searched for and described animals in nature but after having found out about the Grand Turk’s wild animals, kept in a special place, Belon is now also interested in describing animals in captivity. According to Belon, the Turks take great pleasure in seeing singular and rare animals. For that reason, all wild animals that are caught are sent to Constantinople where they are carefully held and cared for. For example, there are bears, lynxes, wolves, wild asses, hedgehogs, and other animals that have been chained and tamed. There are small animals that are carefully looked after as well. Belon is truly amazed at how the Turks treat these animals and their ability to tame them. For example, Jannet, whose

7 Violin, Mary Ann, Pythagoras–The First Animal Rights Philosopher, Animal Action Information Service Columbus (Ohio, Between the Species, Philosophy, Summer, 1990), p. 123.
portrait Belon prints, is tame and allowed to walk freely in Turkish houses. Another example of the domestication of a wild animal is a consul’s civet, who was on business in Alexandria, where Belon was staying at the time. Belon was completely subjugated by the civet’s ability to bite men’s ears, nose, and lips without harming them in any way. Belon indicates that the ancients were very familiar with this type of animal, which they called *hyaenas*. They also mentioned that this animal lived in Africa. One of the Belon’s pictures shows that this ancient animal—*hyaena*—is actually a civet in his narration.

Additionally, later in the narrative when Belon comes to Cairo and stays there for some time, he notices again that all Grand Seigniors, even the very barbarous ones, were always presented with many strange animals. There were many of these in the Cairo castle, brought from many different countries. One of these curious animals attracted Belon’s attention. This animal is called in the local vulgar language *curnapa*, while the Romans called it *camelopardalis*, which came from the combination of leopard and camel. Belon comments on the physical beauty and unusual friendliness of this animal. He believes that by using a very long neck, this animal takes its food from the tree branches. The description is accompanied by an interesting picture of a giraffe.\(^8\) Finally, there is another passage about animals tamed and trained in Cairo. The Arabs are highly skilled in teaching different animals to perform tricks. They train goats, donkeys, and monkeys, and baboons. For example, the latter animals are trained to go from one person to another during a performance and ask for money, then the baboons take the money out and give it to their master.

The next geographical location worth mentioning in Belon’s narration is Alexandria. Alexandria’s inhabitants keep animals called ichneumons, which are primarily found in Egypt. Similar to the previously mentioned animals, they can also be tamed like a cat or a dog. This animal is extremely popular among the locals because it is a small animal that eats very quickly and hunts rats and snakes. The detailed description of this animal reveals that it eats all kinds of meat, including frogs, birds, snails, lizards, and chameleons. However, it is incapable of biting a large mass, such as man’s hand. The classical authors described this curious animal in great detail and attributed many singular virtues to it. Belon claims that his picture, which accompanies the chapter on this animal, is the first accurate picture in existence. Previous pictures only provided a vague idea of what the animal looks like.

Belon provides description of two river birds on the Nile and compares them to the ancient descriptions. The first one is called *crex*. The size of this bird is between a curlew and a sandpiper. It takes food from the ground and makes big noise when it flies. This bird has no name in a French language. The second one is the black *ibis* which he first thought was *haematopus*, but later realized his mistake. *Ibis* was first described by Herodotus and later, by Aristotle. This bird has a size of a curlew or even smaller and it is totally black and its beak is more than an inch long. It can be as tall as a bittern and has a neck as long as an egret. When Belon saw it for the first time, he thought its habits and appearance were very much like a bittern.

\(^8\) Surprisingly enough, according to notes in Belon’s book, while giraffe was mentioned by Pliny, Strabo, and Solinus, it was very little known in the 16th century.
The next animal observed by Belon on the Nile is a river horse, called by both the Romans and the Greeks *hippopotamus*. According to Belon, the Romans did not want to change the Greek name of this animal which is in their language meant *equus fluviatilis*, but instead called it *hippopotamus* because they did not see any resemblance of this animal with a horse. Belon continues that perhaps the Romans did not know the Greeks’ *hippopotamus* or that the one the Greeks called *hippopotamus* was really a different animal. Belon attached the portrait of this animal, at least, the one he thinks is *hippopotamus* for the Romans. The last paragraph, devoted to the animals of Nile, mentions the fish pike that was called by the Ancients as *oxyrinchus*. There are also two kinds of round fish, the size of man’s head, called by the Greeks as *flascopsari* and by the Romans *orbis*. The chapter is ended by the detailed image of vicious crocodiles, which are very common in the area and whose skin can be seen everywhere.

Often praised curiosity of somebody who voyages for the purpose of exploration is mentioned again in a chapter where Belon describes a small African ox. Such a person not only takes great pleasure in encountering a new animal but takes a special pleasure in finding an ancient name that applies to that animal. While seeing the small African ox, it occurred to Belon that this animal is what the Greeks called *bubalos* (but not a buffalo, which is totally different animal). This animal can typically be found in Africa but was brought to Cairo from a country called Asamia. Belon does not know the ancient name for this small buffalo that he calls *bubalus*. He considers it strange that Aristotle has not mentioned this animal because it is so common in Italy, Greece, and Asia. He spoke about *bubalus* in many passages and perhaps meant a small buffalo, which Belon is interested in. Other ancient authors whom Belon read led him to believe Aristotle was speaking about a different animal. Belon’s passion for finding new species and comparing them to ancient examples led him to examine a male and female of red or fallow deer in the courtyard of the castle where he was staying. He was looking for similarities with the *axis* described by Pliny but could not find any because these deer have different physical characteristics.

Belon goes with his expedition from Cairo to Mount Sinai and describes his journey there. He picks up different plants and examines animals. For example, he catches a viper and two horned ones, anatomizes, describes them in detail, and then stuffs their skin. He described vipers before in his other works but wants to correct mistake in the description of this animal, the mistake that a viper has eight horns repeated by many different authors, while a viper only has two horns as Belon saw after carefully examining the body of this animal. This animal manifests an admirable example of nature work which produced an animal that is able to produce their young alive, the same way as salamander does. On the same journey, Belon encountered chameleons which were very different from the Egyptian ones which he shows on the picture accompanying his very short description.

The journey to Mount Sinai was completed in twenty days. On the day ending Belon’s expedition journey, one of the Arabs saw a viper and killed it with stones because Arabs have a great fear of vipers. Belon notices that vipers in the area have a very flexible skin, because after having stuffed a killed viper, it became as twice size as it was, which does not happen with other kinds of vipers in other areas. Belon provides a curious picture of a animal with legs and wings

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9 According to notes, Belon’s book, Asamia was the Turkish name for Mesopotamia and Assyria.
which by no means can be called a snake, but a fantastic dragon. He insists he saw certain winged snakes with feet and able to fly from Arabia to Egypt. For the most part, all major description of animals end in the second book.

Belon’s third and the last book is a description of the Turks’ life that does not contain any descriptions of animals with the exception of the last chapter and very brief mention earlier in the previous chapter. Interestingly, and probably not by accident, the last chapter of the summary of Belon’s travels is completely devoted to animals. Accompanying the French ambassador on his mission to the Levant, Belon’s real purpose in this journey was to seize an opportunity and satisfy his naturalist’s curiosity through the discovery and examination of flora and fauna on the territories of the Ottoman empire.

The last chapter of the book starts by Belon’s observation about the Turks’ sheep. They are not left outside at night because the Turks believe that it will cause them to die. If sheep are left outside in July and August, they will raise their heads, catch the light of two stars that can be only seen at night during these two months when the stars reach their vertical zenith, and then die. This event only occurs in some parts of Turkey. Turks claim that this is the reason behind the deaths of their domestic animals. Other nations still suffer great losses because they do not understand the reason behind animal deaths and attribute them to some kind of witchcraft. Belon himself saw many flocks of sheep under cover while he was traveling along the shores of the sea of Pontus. As we saw earlier, Belon was also very interested in different snakes. Having a Turkish viper-collector who knew the modern Greek names of snakes was very useful for him. This collector together with Belon, looked for and found many snakes. Belon collected the skins of several snakes, birds, land animals, as well as collected plants and seeds. (He later sent them to England on a ship which was captured by corsairs, and everything was lost.) They also found a snake with a hard patch of skin on its forehead, which the ancients called aspis. Salamanders, pluvines, and mirtils are also common in this area. The armadillo is another animal that is mentioned in this chapter and is accompanied by an image provided by Belon. This animal is often seen on Turks’ cabinets of curiosities due to its unusually hard skin and large scales. It is a kind of Brazilian hedgehog that had already been seen in France. Finally, the last animal mentioned is the tartaret or tartarin. For Belon, this animal is actually a baboon, which Aristotle called simia porcaria. Belon’s intention is to discuss this animal in detail in another work.

After concluding his observations about the Levant, Belon asks the reader’s forgiveness for not providing adequate descriptions for some the images of plants and animals in the text. He promises to correct this omission and to speak about them all in greater detail in other books. He also wants other nations to profit from his research and observations as well as accurately publish his work in other languages, without observing the order or the exact words Belon used. Indeed, Belon wrote and published twelve other works on plants and animals, among which, for example, L’Histoire naturelle des étranges poissons marins, La Nature et diversité des poissons, Portraits d’oyseaux, animaux, serpents, herbes, arbres, hommes et femmes d’Arabie et d’Egypte, and etc.

Belon is undoubtedly very interested in the animal kingdom and has produced a very important account of animals previously unknown in France. (Before him, very few Europeans had visited the Ottoman Empire.) At the same time, by no means can Belon even remotely be called a defender of animals or fighter for their rights. He was a passionate zoologist and
traveler, concerned only with the accuracy and verisimilitude of his descriptions. On many instances, we have seen how he captured, killed, and examined one or another animal without any other thoughts except providing his reader with knowledge on one or another new or previously described species. His narration, however, provides us with interesting approaches to how animals are treated by the locals living in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, which often were different from those of Europeans, such as the refusal to eat read meat in some parts of it or the careful handling of wild animals in many Turks’ homes. These differences in approach to the treatment of animals, which are not really discussed even today, can be explained by differences between the Christian and Muslim religions – their vision concerning the animals-humans’ relationship, and the general understanding of the position and purpose of animals on earth.

Pierre Boaistuau and Ambroise Paré

Pierre Boaistuau and Ambroise Paré’s were not zoologists like Belon who was fascinated by the discovery of different enigmatic animal, and their works *Histoires Prodigieuses* and *Des Monstres & Prodiges* were very different in nature and their purpose from Belon’s zoological explorations. These two works did not treat directly the subject of animals or discuss animals’ relationship with man. Instead, they regarded monsters and unusual phenomena as an object of their exploration, but their books on monsters also included many descriptions of real animals. This curious coexistence of fantastic monsters and real animals in Boaistuau’s and Paré’s books can be explained by the fact that the definition of what can be considered a real animal or what is a monster or imaginary creature was not yet formed at the time. To be precise, all the creatures presented in Boaistuau’s and Paré’s books were believed to exist without any distinction between imaginary and real animals and, for that reason, even well-known to us today, really existing animals but unusual at Boaistuau’s and Paré’s time were qualified to be in the books on monsters together with fantastic, non-existent creatures treated like real ones at the time. Boaistuau and Paré were not the only scholars who wrote books on monsters in Renaissance. There were many other treatises on this topic that has long-standing tradition from antiquity, which we will briefly examine here.

Aristotle discussed the subject of monsters in his treatise *Generation of Animals*, in which he describes the reproduction of humans, animals, and plants. Aristotle comments on the cases in which offspring do not look like its parents, which means that “Nature has in a way strayed from the generic type.” He further states that “a monstrosity, of course, belongs to the class of things contrary to Nature,” although it is contrary “not to Nature in her entirety but only to Nature in the generality of cases.” Aristotle explains that nothing is really contrary to the nature of things as a whole. Therefore, the structure of nature includes monstrosity as well; even if abnormal formations seem to be contrary to nature, they nevertheless also represent part of the general order, meaning monsters exist “in accordance with Nature.” Aristotle notices also that

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people do not consider events that happen habitually as monstrosities. Thus, according to Aristotle, everything, including monsters, happens as a part of the natural order and, as a result, monsters have to be perceived as a rare but usual phenomenon. This observation can be applied to Boaistuau’s and Paré’s books, according to which monstrosity, instead of being the indication of something non-existent is nothing more than different representation of Nature’s design.

After the Greeks, the Romans seem to be totally captivated by the subject of monsters as well. In the first century B.C., Roman poet Lucretius examined monsters and described some of them in his poem De Rerum Natura. According to him, the earth produced many hideous creatures with formless faces, deprived of certain parts of their bodies or mixed in the sexes. This race of monsters later died because they could not support themselves. Lucretius also talks about the well-known mythological figures Centaurs, Scylla, and Chimera, and says that Centaurs could not exist because they could not grow from breeding men and horses. It is the same idea applied to Scylla and Chimera, which are no more than the tales. There is evidence that Cicero knew the poetry of Lucretius. Cicero himself inquires about the effect of a monstrous creature’s birth and asks how we should perceive such a shift from the natural order.

In the second book of De Divinatione, Cicero poses the question of whether we should be frightened if someone tells us that something hideous [portentuosa] was born from a man or domestic animal. Cicero claims that for everybody or everything, there is always an explanation; in other words, everything in nature has its reason to be. Even when people cannot find the reason of certain phenomena, it does not mean there is no reason for them. Man just does not have enough information or judgment to know the reason. Cicero denies the existence of miracles, basing his argument on the principle that miracles only exist in regard to people’s beliefs and knowledge about different occurrences. In this argument about how to explain the existence of extraordinary creatures, Cicero seems to be very close to what Aristotle argued in his Generation of Animals.

In the Christian era, monsters continued to be very present in many visual and literary works. The obvious problem in interpretation of monsters that appears in this period is the question how these dreadful creatures fit into the new Christian doctrine, how a Christian God allows monsters to exist, and what kind of message God is sending to people tolerating monsters.

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12 Lucy Hutchinson’s Translation of Lucretius De rerum natura (the University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp.163-164, lines 876-891. In this passage of his Book 5, Lucretius describes the creation of universe. We can read in this passage: “All forming earth then many monsters made/ Who most unnaturall looks and members had, / Androginous, in whom two sexes meete,/ Yett neither ownes, men without hands or feete,/ Some without mouths, some formelesse faces blind,/ Some nerveless clinging members, so conjoynd/ They could no actions, nor no motions make./ No perils shun, no needful succors take./ In vain such monsters strove she to create,/ Since nature could not lett them propagate./ Who neither could at their <full> strength arrive./ Nor find their food, nor Venus joyes receive./ For there must many things concurrent be / In such as generate posteritie;/ A male and female, and food fit for these, / Which may their generative strengths increase. /”
13 Lucy Hutchinson’s Translation of Lucretius De Rerum Natura (the University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp.164-165, lines 917-965.
on the Earth. Most theologians, during the first centuries after Christ, considered monsters as evil and as enemies of God. Over time, monsters become pagan enemies of God who were punished for not accepting Christ.

There is a great amount of work devoted to the subject of monsters in the Middle Ages. In the seventh century, for example, Isidore of Seville discusses the topic of monsters in his *Etymologiae*. Isidore of Seville considers monsters not to be contrary to the Nature, but contrary to what is known in nature. He also indicates that monsters were very likely created to indicate future events; in other words, they are used by God to show what is coming through certain defects of birth. Isidore of Seville continues his discourse on monsters, describing different kinds of monstrous individuals and whole monstrous races that usually live in some distant areas such as the Far East. He makes a distinction between “a portent” and “an unnatural being.” For him, a portent is a being of “transformed appearance,” such as a serpent born by a woman in Umbria; an unnatural being is a human with some sort of mutation. Isidore gives rather detailed descriptions of portents and unnatural beings of different sizes and mutations. He also depicts the monstrous races like the Giants, the Cyclopes, the Cynocephali, the Satyrs, and others. Isidore chooses not to doubt the existence of the creatures mostly described in Greek mythology. The way he presents the stories of monsters from different parts of the world and in different historical periods, with very few exceptions, does not leave any possibility for a medieval reader to think that all these stories might be fabrication.

**Pierre Boaistuaau**

Books on monsters usually aim at responding to three main questions: What categories of monsters existed in a certain historical period? What kinds of feelings did they provoke among the general population? How did scholars and religious authorities explain their appearance? Texts that fall within various monster genres usually contain several categories of monsters, such as individual monstrous children, exotic species, hybrid monsters “springing from the intercourse of humans and animals,” and etc. The emotions provoked by the appearance of different categories of monsters are usually strong and may include fear, disgust, surprise, shock, laughter, hate, curiosity, and other contradictory reactions. As is seen through antiquity and the Middle Ages, the explanations for monsters’ existence were variable, but generally limited to punishment for human sins, God’s anger, God’s warning, or even normal representations of regular natural course. The sixteenth century was an important period for the study of monsters. Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park suggest that there was a “a shift in the place and nature of wonders in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century European culture.” This “shift” was noticeable in general explanations of monsters’ appearances, their geographical migrations, and perceptions of

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17 The *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), Book XI The Human Being and Portents (*De homine et portentis*), pp. 243-246.

them. Usually, texts on monsters were accompanied by drawings of the creatures as they were described. Interestingly enough, despite an abundance of texts on monsters, many images and descriptions were consistent and usually migrated from one text to another. According to Daston and Park, attitude and emotions provoked by monsters were mixed and complex. They notice: “Instead of three successive stages, we now see three separate complexes of interpretations and associated emotions – horror, pleasure, and repugnance – which overlapped and coexisted during much of the early modern period, although each had its own rhythm and dynamic.”  

For the purpose of this work, we will only consider one category of monsters in Boaistuau’s *Histoires Prodigieuses*: this category includes both creatures that were described to possess a mix of animal and human features and real animals that, due to a lack of knowledge at the time, were assumed to be monsters. These descriptions of imaginary and real animals occupy about eight out of forty of his stories. Boaistuau’s does not offer us an original interpretation of causes for monsters’ birth but resumes the well-known argument, according to which monsters are the result of God’s anger and punishment for the parents’ sinful behavior. Almost immediately, Boaistuau slips in speaking and says that not all monstrous children are born as the result of mischievous parents’ behavior. There are plenty of parents who are virtuous and still have abnormal children. In that case, the monstrous child is not a punishment but a manifestation of God. Another cause, also mentioned in classical sources is the excessive imagination of a woman during the conception and others.

Similar to Belon, who passionately insisted on trustfulness of his travels and everything he explored, Boaistuau also seeks to depict exclusively what he saw with his own eyes or what is described in classical sources, the authority of which cannot be doubted. He says directly in one of his stories on animals: “...j’ay protesté plusieurs fois que je ne rempliray mes écrits d’aucune chose fabuleuse, ny d’histoire aucune, laquelle je ne verifie par autorité de quelques fameux auteurs Grec, ou Latin, sacré ou prophane.” In a contrast to Belon, Boaistuau is not interested in comparing classical and contemporary to him stories and supplement them with his own observations. He insists that all stories in his book are true but their trustfulness solely depends on classical or other’s authors authority and not the first-hand analysis we saw in Belon’s book.

Boaistuau chooses to start his cluster of stories about animals by discussing marine monsters because for him they are the most enigmatic ones. They represent a world inaccessible to man, and they are “ceux qui ont engendré plus d’estonnement & d’admiration aux plus excellens philosophes du monde.” We read at the beginning of the first animal story, entitled *Histoires prodigieuses de plusieurs poissons estranges, Monstres marins, Nereides, Syrenes, Tritons, & autres Monstres aquatiques qui se retrouvent em la mer:*

... il n’y a aucun tant stupide ou grossier, que s’il veult contempler de bon oeil les gestes de ces petits animaux, lorsqu’ils sont agités de l’impetuosité des ondes, ou qu’ils exercent leurs autres naturelles acions, qu’il ne desirast volontiers pour quelque espace de temps estre transformé en leur espace, ou se precipiteront volontiers en l’Element ou ils font leur demeure, afin d’en recevoir quelque plus

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19 Daston & Park, p. 176.
20 Boaistuau, p. 252.
21 Boaistuau, p. 163.
libre, & parfaicte congnoissance.\textsuperscript{22}

This is an exclamation of despair that man cannot comprehend the nautical world of the species, whose whole life is withheld from the human eye. Boaistuau characterizes the knowledge that man would get from penetrating into their space as “free and perfect”– the knowledge about animals that man does not have and, perhaps, will never be able to have. It is a complete confession of human ignorance and inability to access the world of animals.

Boaistuau carefully selects the marine monsters. His description of flying fish is a mixture of his own observations and the descriptions he found in Rondelet, Gesnerus, Aristotle, and Pliny. This description also envelops a wide spectrum of flying creatures – from flying fishes seen by voyageurs and scholars to fantastic creatures like dragons. Here, we read the phantasmagorical portrayal of this semi-real fish dragon:

..il a la teste fort hideuse, qui ressemble mieux en figure à quelque Serpent hideux, qu’à aucun poisson. Et si a deux grands aeslerons, qui ressemblent aux cartilages ou aesles de la Souris-chauve... Il a environ pied & demy de longueur, & si n’est point encore si bien deseché, que vous n’y sentiez quelque odeur de poisson, le reste se peut voir en la figure.\textsuperscript{23}

The story of fish Remora, borrowed by Boaistuau from antiquity, is an interesting example of how real scientific information is mixed in Boaistuau’s narration with chimerical ideas. Boaistuau insists that this small fish Remora has the ability to terrify and stop ships. Remora is so rare that all descriptions from antiquity contradict each and other, and they only agree on one thing: the “merveilleuse & estrange puissance” of this fish. People who saw the fish could not explain how such a small fish could cause so much harm to a ship. Boaistuau concludes his story of Remora by saying: “Il est donques force aux hommes de confesser qu’on ne peut assigner aucune raison naturelle de cecy, & toutesfois on congoist en ce petit poisson quelque presage fatal, & semble qu’il nous veuille annoncer les maulx & perils qui nous doivent advenir.” Is this another confession of the human inability to penetrate into the animal world and the acknowledgment of the supernatural power of some species, which is given to them by a super force?

The existence of Tritons and Nereids preoccupied philosophers since antiquity. Those who deny the existence of these half human, half fish monsters based their disbelief on the fact that sacred writing does not mention these creatures because the Earth is only for humans. On the contrary, those who believe in their existence either saw these creatures themselves or tell the stories of people who witnessed them. Boaistuau is inclined to believe in the existence of these creatures and brings up various stories about monsters of this kind. All these stories are accompanied by many details that make them more believable. Boaistuau always gives the names of the people who saw these creatures and the dates when it exactly happened. Another common thread for these stories is the tragic end for the mentioned. It is either killed or injured by the people who saw it or dies of new conditions to which humans exposed it and to which it is not accustomed.

The similar theme of monsters that exhibit human and animal features is discussed in

\textsuperscript{22} Boaistuau, p. 160.
\textsuperscript{23} Boaistuau, p. 166.
Boaistuau’s chapter entitled *Histoire prodigieuse d’un monstre ayant figure humaine, qui fus prins l’an mil cinq cens trente & un, en la forest de Haveberg: Duquel Georgius Fabricius envoya le pourtraict a Gesnerus, tire au naturel, comme il est ic figure*. The opening sentence of the chapter is “Celui qui mesure la grandeur des œuvres de Dieux selon la capacité de leurs entendemens, à peine se pourront persuader que ce monstre qui est icy figuré, ait esté en nature.”

This sentence is an exhaustive response to anyone who doubts the existence of the creatures presented in Boaistuau’s book and who, like Belon, advocates for the direct observation of all phenomena. Boaistuau is very much opposed to those who try to explain everything, even the existence of creatures clearly welcome by God, through their own, very limited vision of the world. He tells a story of a monstrous animal with a human face, taken from Gesner’s story of *De quadrupedibus viviparis*: several of these creatures lived in the forest in Saxony and even learned some of the human language, but their actions were very brutal, and they would even rape women publicly. A similar story about this kind of monster living in Germany adds that the monster could not eat and died from hunger. These monsters were also seen in Norway, according to another story. This time, besides having a human face, they also ate men and children. Here, Boaistuau recalls the descriptions of certain monsters in *De Civitate Dei*, where St. Augustine mentions monsters of different forms and where he poses the question if they come from the first man Adam:

> Je me recorde que saint Augustin en sa *Cité de Dieu*, faisant mention de certains monstres de formes estranges, qui se retrouvent es desers, & ailleurs, suscite la questions, s’ils sont descendus du premier homme Adam & s’ils ont ame raisonnable ou non, & s’ils ressusciteront au jour de la generale resurrection, comme les autres : mais par ce que la decision de ceste matiere est un peu trop prolique, pour la breveté de ce chapitre, je me reserveray en autre lieu plus commode, à la dissoouldre.

St. Augustine talks about monsters in the eighth chapter of book XVI in *De Civitate Dei*. He is interested in whether we should believe in the stories of monsters. He reports a few descriptions of dreadful beings, but he does not think that we should necessarily believe everything simply because someone else says it is so. However, if we choose to believe in the existence of monsters – individuals or even monstrous races – then we should consider them part of God’s plan. For Augustine, “God knows where and when each thing ought to be, or to have been created, because He sees the similarities and diversities which can contribute to the beauty of the whole.”

If people are shocked by the presence of unusual creatures, it is because they are blind to seeing the whole picture of the God’s perfect creation of the world and only consider monsters to be different as compared to most other people. God decided to create some individuals differently or even to inhabit some parts of the Earth with strange creatures; therefore, we should accept the existence of monsters.

Other examples of half human, half animals monsters include a monster that comes from a woman and male dog and whose existence is confirmed by two writings: one of Volaterranus

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24 Boaistuau, p. 252.
26 St. Augustine, *The city of God*, translated by Marcus Dods, Book XVI, Chapter 8 *Whether Certain Monstrous Races of Men are Derived from the Stock of Adam or Noah’s Sons*
and another one by Conrad Licostenes. There is also a mention of a monster that was a half-goat and half-human as a result of intercourse between a pastor and one of his goats, described by Celius Rhodiginus. This fact exemplifies those who abandoned God and “c’est ce que saint Paul dict au quatrieme chapitre des Epheses, que la peine des paillards, c’est tomber en aveuglement, & devenir enragés, apres qu’ils sont delaissés de Dieu, & ne voyent point, & ne peuvent escouter bons conseils & provoquent l’ire de Dieu contre eux.”

Here, Boaistuau traditionally explains the appearance of half-human, half-animals monsters as a punishment of sinful parent’s behavior. Boaistuau’s perplexion with these half-human looking creatures comes from the fact that these monsters possess human features. The broad question here is does the possession of the physical attributes of one species that certain creatures might exhibit also mean that they have other attributes; for example, if they have a human face, does it mean they also have a human soul? This question is important because Boaistuau and his contemporaries do not want to make a mistake of treating somebody as inferior based on the fact that he or she does not look completely human but, at the same time, might have a soul. Boaistuau follows St. Augustin in pondering the question of what the existence of creatures like that might mean. They are created by the same God who created people, yet what is God exactly saying by his creation?

The same question of understanding God’s intentions in creating certain creatures is addressed in the fifth chapter of Histoires Prodigieuses, where Boaistuau is interested in the question of monstrous birth and the reasons for this phenomenon. It was believed at this time that the main cause of all anomalous births was God’s punishment of parents for their sinful behavior. We read:

> Il est tout certain que le plus souvent ces creatures monstreuses procedent du jugement, justice, chastiment, & malediction de Dieu, lequel permet que les peres & meres produisent telles abhominations, en l’horreur de leur peché, parce qu’ils se precipitent indifferentemment, comme bestes brutes ou leur appetit les guide, sans respect ou observation d’aage, de lieu, de temps, ou autres Loix ordonnees de nature, comme sainct Gregoire enseigne en ses dialogues, de l’incontinence d’une nourrice qui se fist engrossir à son enfant, aage seulement de neuf ans.

However, Boaistuau corrects himself, saying that even though in most cases a monstrous birth is the result of the parents’ sins, sometimes abnormal children are born from innocent parents. In those rare cases, God wants to manifest his work in the birth of a defective child. Another reason for monstrous childbirth, as ancient philosophers indicated, was the ardent imagination of a mother of a monstrous child at the moment of conception. Boaistuau also invites the reader to look for reasons in astrology and to attribute abnormal childbirth to the stars. He criticizes ancient Romans, who despised all people with any kind of deformity and even forbade deformed virgins “celles qui auroient quelque membre difforme, ou qui auroient quelque autre vice sur leur corps” from becoming Vestals. However, in his time, Boaistuau continues, it is recognized within the Christian religion that monstrous creatures are creatures of God, and Christians very often place their children “boyteux, bossus, & contrefaicts” in religious institutions.

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27 Boaistuau, p. 403.
returns to the discussion of reasons for the birth of an abnormal child in the chapter on a monstrous child who was born the day the Genovese and Venetians were reconciled.\(^\text{31}\) According to Boaistuau, nature wanted her creation to be immortal and, for that reason, it gave all animals instruments to conceive and to bear children.

Besides creatures related to humans to one degree or another, there is also a discussion of animals who are a mixture of different species which is not so unusual, according to Aristotle: “Les animaux (dit Aristotle) qui sont de divers genres, peuvent coïr, & se joindre ensemble, mais que leur nature ne soit pas beaucoup différente, comme sont les Chiens, les Loups, & les Renards.”\(^\text{32}\) Boaistuau continues by giving examples of mixtures of dogs and bears, dogs and tigers, etc. He does not draw any conclusions out of these various stories; however, it is clear that he wants to show how other species are much closer to each other and can easily mix with each other. These creatures are much less surprising in nature and are more common than a mixture of humans with other species. The mixture of different animals does not puzzle humans in how to treat them because they all represent inferior species to humans.

An interesting part of the same chapter, where Boaistuau describes a mixture of dogs with other species, is the part where he just talks about regular dogs as a species that regardless of the fact that it does not possess reason, still exhibits marvelous qualities of devotion to men, sometimes stronger than among humans themselves. Boaistuau mentions Plutarch as the author who tells the stories of the fidelity of dogs. He also tells other stories on the same subject taken from classical sources. Even if Boaistuau is very far from questioning the value of reason, like Des Périers or Montaigne will do, he is, at the same time, puzzled by this revelation of the superior behavior of an inferior specie that often surpasses human behavior. Boaistuau says:

> Voici comment nous experimentons une plus grande fidélité & amitié en ces bestes brutes, qu’aux creatures raisonnables, lesquelles font le plus souvent comme l’aronnelle, ils s’enfuent dès que l’hyver vient: car des-que ils sentent que nous sommes combattus des traicts de la fortune adverse, ils s’enfuyent, & nous abandonnent.\(^\text{33}\)

The question here is why reasonable creatures of the human species do not exhibit the same qualities as inferior creatures – why are men not devoted to the representatives of the same species to the same degree as dogs? This question distantly echoes the question of why is man the only one specie that fights and kills each other at war while other species do not, which was raised by Montaigne in his Apologie de Raymond Seybond. In the same chapter, Boaistuau further says:

> Ce n’est donc que qu’un philosophe Indien nommé Dephile avoit acoustumé de dire, que ceste grande ouvriere nature ait gravé certaines loix aux animaux, qui devoyent estre comme exemples, & formulaires aux hommes, pour leur ayder à conduire l’estat de leurs vies, car si nous voulons considerer, & contempler les façons de faire des bestes brutes, nous trouverons qu’elles surpassent les hommes en beaucoup de choses, & semble qu’elles ayant quelque


\(^{32}\) Boaistuau, p. 324.

\(^{33}\) Boaistuau, p. 331.
vertu naturelle en chacune affection de courage, en prudence, force, couardise, clemence, vigueur, discipline, erudition, elles connoissent les unes les autres, discernent entre elles, appettent les choses qui leur sont utiles, fuient le mal, evitent le peril, trompent souvent & deçoivent l'homme, pourveoient à l’advenir, amassent ce qui leur est necessaire pour vivre, ce qu'estant consideré par plusieurs anciens philosophes, n’ont point eu de honte de disputer ou revoquer en doute, si les bestes brutes estoient participantes de raison, mesmes le sage Salomon nous envoye quelquefois à leurs escoles.34

In this passage, Boaistuau first mentions an Indian philosopher who suggested that animals could be examples for men in many areas and then mentions the ancient philosophers, according to whom animals possess natural innate virtue that leads them to always choose the right thing. At the end of this citation, Boaistuau contradicts himself. He enumerates the qualities such as discipline, prudence, erudition, etc. that are definitely related to reason, and at the end, he exclaims that if animals had reason, even Solomon would send men to study at animals’ schools. The question here is why animals are given a natural virtue and men are deprived of it. Isn’t reason equal to natural virtue, and, if it is, then how do men not have natural virtue? Furthermore, if reason has nothing to do with virtue, then the whole construction of reason as the most valuable and important quality falls apart. Then what kind of value can reason offer to its possessor if it does not instruct in virtue? How can animals can be virtuous and not reasonable creatures, while men are reasonable but not virtuous? This apparent incongruity remains unresolved in Boaistuau’s chapter.

Finally, there are a couple chapters in Boaistuau’s book devoted to terrestrial and flying monsters. One chapter describes a hideous serpent with seven heads. As in many other stories, this animal is portrayed by superlative adjectives, making the reader believe that it is the most unusual and the most ugly animal that ever lived or was ever seen. Boaistuau tries very hard to convince us that nature never produced anything or anybody equally as gruesome. However, this chapter is not devoted to this one particular serpent; it is more of a collection of stories about different serpents living in various parts of the world. Here, we read stories about a serpent brought alive to the court of the King Ptolemy II Philadelpus in Alexandria and a woman in Cracovie who gave a birth to a dead child who had a live serpent attached to his back. There is also another monster, Basilique, who makes trees die, breaks stones, poisons the air, kills birds, murders men at its own sight, and even suffocates other serpents. This particular serpent has so much venom that it is able to poison all the cities and provinces located close to where it lives.

The description of a bird that can only live in the air and has no legs, despite Aristotelian confirmation that there is no bird without legs, is presented by Boaistuau in his chapter entitled Histoire prodigieuse d’un Oyseau qui n’a aucuns pieds, & vit en l’air, & n’est trouvé que mort en la terre, ou en la mer. Boaistuau himself never saw the bird, as he says about many of his descriptions, but even those who saw it, like Conrad Pentigerus, never saw it alive. The main feature of this miraculous bird is the fact that it always flies and never stops. This rare bird has different names – sometimes it is called oyseau de paradis, sometimes apis indica. Different sources add some details about this bird, but all of these descriptions insist on the unusual ability

34 Boaistuau, p. 340-341.
of this bird to never stop or land on the ground. As for the food, this bird only eats “la rosée de ciel”.

Boaistuau’s book does not differentiate animal stories from other ones, nor does it offer any conclusion to his collection of monsters and unusual phenomena. There is also no system of citing classical philosophers, such as Aristotle or Plutarch, or zoologists contemporary to Boaistuau zoologists. Instead, this book is guided by an amazement and admiration for nature and its creation, which will never be fully comprehended by men.

**Ambroise Paré**

Ambroise Paré’s book of human wonder and imagination, entitled *Des Monstres & Prodiges*, stands alone among numerous books discussing animals in this period because Paré was not a zoologist or traveler who discovered novel animals in unknown lands and collected and presented information on them. For the most part, his animal descriptions are taken from classical sources from Aristotle or Pliny, contemporary zoological books on animals, travel journals, and the stories he heard or read. From this point of view, his observations about animals are by no means first-hand or original. Moreover, even if animals in whimsical or fanciful forms occupy a significant place in this book, Paré’s book can hardly be considered as the one about animals. Instead, this book has a different intention: it introduces different categories of monsters, some of which happened to be real animals, and some with borrowed animal parts or features. For Paré, monsters are things contrary to the course of nature and are very often signs of some disaster to come. Paré indicates that causes of the production of monsters include the glory of God, God’s anger, human imagination, demons, devils, the hereditary sicknesses, the size of the womb, and many others. Paré provides examples of every cause. Therefore, only selected animals that are qualified to be monsters appear in this book. These animals are presented in three clusters of stories: imaginary monsters that are a mixture of humans and animals, animals with abnormal limbs or frightening parts and features, and real existing animals unknown or little known in Europe. The chapters devoted to various real and imaginary animals are divided into marine, flying, and terrestrial monsters.

In the chapter entitled *Exemple de la commissio et meslange de semence*, Paré presents examples of creatures born from humans who had intercourse with animals and who now look half-animal and half-human or more like one than the other. Paré provides the exact dates when half-animal, half-human monsters were born. Some of these dates coincide with his time, but some of them are much earlier, and all are taken from a variety of sources. Paré reports that many of these abnormal creatures were immediately killed by those who found them because of the horror and fear their hideous appearance provoked. According to Paré, these creatures

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35 George Hoffmann provided a classification of all monsters described in Paré’s book.

36 For example, a monster seen in the year of 1110, who was a pig with a human head, hands, and feet in Paré, p. 140 or a colt with a man’s head and a body of a horse in the year of 1224 in Paré, p. 144.
illustrated by themselves the evidence of unnatural bonds between different species, which is against nature. However, not only humans commit crimes against nature; there are also non-human animals who cohabited with different species and produced monsters with various parts from manifold species. Paré says the following about this abnormal behavior of certain representatives of various species and even inanimate things:

> Le semblable se fait, si bestes de diverses especes cohabitent les unes avec les autres, a cause que Nature tasche toujours a faire son semblable: comme il s’est vu un aigneau ayant la teste d’un pore, parce qu’un verrat avoit couvert la brebis: car nous voyons mesme aux choses inanimees, comme d’un grain de froment, venir non l’orge, mais le froment: et du noyau d’abricot venir un abricotier, et non le pommier, par-ce que Nature garde tousjours son genre et espece.\(^{37}\)

It is forbidden to mix species because nature always strives for the preservation of a species’ purity. At the same time, the reason for mixed species is not always forbidden intercourse; sometimes certain positions of stars and constellations can lead to the birth of different monsters. Paré reports other sources arguing for the interdependence of such occurrences, while Paré himself does not believe in it. God is the one who established the order of things and he cannot be a subject to the stars.

In the appendices to the book of *Des monstres marins*, Paré tells the stories taken from various sources that contain descriptions and drawings of human encounters with different sea monsters. One of the sources mentioned by Paré several times is Rondelet’s book *On Fish*, from which Paré takes a description of a marine monster caught in the Norwegian Sea and named Monk because of its resemblance to a monk’s appearance. Another example from the same source is a monster covered with scales and pontifical ornaments, seen in Poland in 1531.\(^{39}\)

Another source, mentioned by Paré in the same chapter, is Gesnerus, who reports seeing some of these monsters himself or in the pictures of others. Among the ones Gesnerus mentioned is a marine monster seen in Rome that had the body of child with gigantic ears and a fish tail. Another very similar looking monster caught in the Illyrian Sea had horns and the body of a fish with human arms; it tried to capture a small child but was wounded by sailors. Paré calls this monster “diable de mer”.\(^{40}\)

Considering that most animals and creatures described in Paré’s book are totally imaginary and represent a mixture of classical myths and other fictional stories, a sudden digression in his narration devoted to crocodiles comes as a surprise. Paré starts his description of the crocodile by referencing the one given by Aristotle, and he says:

> Le Crocodile, comme escrit Aristote es livres de l’Histoire et parties des animaux, est un grand animal long de quinze coudees. Il n’engendre point un animal, mais des oeufs, non plus gros que ceux d’oye: il en fait soixante au plus. Il vit

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\(^{37}\) Paré, p. 143.

\(^{38}\) The question of nature will be discussed in detail in the last chapter of this dissertation.


\(^{40}\) Paré, p. 184.
longtemps, et d’un si petit commencement sort un si grand animal: car les petits esclots sont proportionnes a l’œuf.\textsuperscript{41}

The question is how the crocodile, whose existence and appearance was known to Paré’s contemporaries, found itself in a book about monsters, most of whom we now know do not exist. Apparently, the crocodile was in Paré’s time a rather unusual animal, but more importantly, it was defined as a monster because of its appearance, which provoked fear and disgust among men. Additionally, the crocodile combines features of animals that belong to different environments; it can live in water and on land, and it lays eggs which provokes uncertainty of where to place this creature.

Paré continues his chapter on marine monsters by providing the descriptions of different sea creatures found in Rondelet, Thevet, and Jean de Léry. Among the descriptions worth mentioning are the ones of a flying fish and a sea crab. Several sources described the human encounters with flying fish. First, Paré mentions André Thevet, who saw a shoal of flying fishes that flew far out of the water, preferred to fly at night, and often bumped into ship sails and fell into ships. Jean de Léry also mentions his encounter with a flying fish and provides more details on its appearance. Paré mentions that he himself has a flying fish in his office that he keeps as a memento. A whole section of the same chapter is devoted to the descriptions of whales. Paré admits that he stretches the notion of the word “monster” in order to include whales in this category. He considers whales to be the biggest monster-fish in the sea and provides a detailed description of a whale’s appearance and the ways by which whales are hunted and killed.

Paré presents three monstrous birds: the ostrich, the toucan, and the \textit{manucodiata}. He paraphrases the voyageur Thevet and says:

\begin{quote}
Thevet, en sa \textit{Cosmographie}, dit qu’il a Yeu aux terres neufves un oiseau que les Sauvages appellent en leur gergon Toucan, lequel est fort monstrueux et difforme, en tant qu’il ale bec plus gros et plus long que tout le reste du corps. Il vit de poivre, comme nos tourtes, merles et estourneaux font icy de graine de lierre, qui n’est pas moins chaude que le poivre.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

It is noticeable that local people qualify the toucan as a monster for the same reason as Europeans: the toucan’s monstrousity is in its disproportionally large beak.

The most evident feature of Paré’s descriptions is the same as in Boaistua’s book which is the absence of gradation between real animals and imaginary ones. Paré presents all these animals as existing without making any distinction between known animals such as crocodiles, the existence of which nobody doubts, and the animals whose descriptions are either found in historically or geographically distant sources or reported by some witnesses of questionable trustworthiness. This is clearly seen in the chapter entitled \textit{Des monstres terrestres}, in which the descriptions of real animals, such the giraffe, the elephant, the rhinoceros,\textsuperscript{43} and the chameleon are combined with descriptions of fantastic animals, such as the \textit{Huspalim} with red, spotted skin that only lives of wind, the animal \textit{Thanach} which looks like a tiger with the face of a man and is covered with black hair, the animal \textit{Haiit} “fort difforme, et est presque incredible qu’il en soit de

\textsuperscript{41} Paré, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{42} Paré, p. 212.
\textsuperscript{43} Paré’s description of rhinoceros is given in \textit{Discours de la licorne}, p. 255.
telle qui ne l’auroit veue”44, and an animal similar to the tortoise, the description of which is taken from *African History* by John Leo.

Paré never questions the existence of any of the animals described in his book, no matter how unreal they might seem to us today. The question remains here is why are some animals, like the sea horse, the crocodile, the crab, or the flying fish included in the book on monsters while representatives of other species are not? Perhaps, these particular species do not fit into human expectations or ideas how a species should look and where they belong? Both crocodiles and crabs are able to exist in water and on land, sea horses live in water but look like horses, and a flying fish combines the features of sea creatures and flying features. What can we say about the fact that many of the monsters described by Paré are well-known animals in today’s world, familiar to any child? All of the creatures that Pare includes in his book fall into the overall category of monsters, based on the premise that they differ from common perceptions of established species and their representatives. In other words, “monsters” are any creatures that do not fit man’s expectations about them. In fact, many animals that are well-known to us today were rarities in Paré’s time, and provoked astonishment as a result. Therefore, although different by many criteria, fantastic and real animals are actually very similar in their ability to induce this feeling of bewilderment. Monsters are not ugly or strictly fantastic category, but any beings, real or fantastic, who do not look similar in their features, but who are very similar in their abilities to provoke the feeling of astonishment because they do not fit into man’s expectations, as predetermined by specific historical and/or geographical perception. This single criteria allows us, more successfully than in case of human and animal, to produce a definition of who monsters are.

Today the standards of judging species have changed. The well-known to us today animals were not accepted in Paré’s time, because they represented the unknown and did not fit into idea or knowledge that Kant will later call *a posteriori*: the preconceived knowledge that humans acquired about different species in the course of human civilization, the knowledge accessible to humans.45 In his *Apologie de Raimond de Sebonde*, Montaigne will demonstrate that humans are never in a position to judge or evaluate these animal monsters by different, non-preconceived or pure knowledge, because this kind of knowledge is not accessible to the human mind.

Paré’s contemporaries—scholars and religious authorities—sought more than anything to comprehend God’s project with regards to monsters. Are they are accepted or even preferred by God, or do they personify punishment or rejection? Are they a warning to humanity or an illustration of humanity’s inability to comprehend God’s will? Paré’s and Boaistuau’s books demonstrate that monsters comprise categories of beings whose appearance, features, or abilities are recognized to be different from the majority, because they do not correspond to the expected appearance, or because they possess extraordinary abilities. In other words, they have something that distinguishes them from the rest, from the man’s knowledge about the world and its species. This simple definition of monstrosity does not allow, however, for an exploration of how

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44 Paré, p. 219.
45 To read more about Kant’s notion of *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge, see the third chapter of the dissertation.
monsters should be treated or what kind of relationship man should have with them, as monsters fall outside of man’s conception of the familiar world.

**Jean de Léry’s and Andre Thevet’s Travel Journals**

Another layer of texts that I propose to explore in this chapter is that of travel journals that summarize the ethnographical knowledge about the New World and provide very detailed information about animals that were previously unknown to Europe before. Travel journals were the logical response to the overwhelming amount of new knowledge emerging in Europe from new lands, which forced Renaissance scholars to reconsider or often completely change many of their established views and principles in various disciplines including botany and zoology. In order to address this knowledge, they had to offer a new systematization of species, add new information to previously known kinds of plants and animals and even include completely new kinds. This new information often contradicted classical sources, the reconciliation with which was important in the atmosphere of total revere for everything classical. These discoveries also raised additional questions of how to define the animal? How should these new kinds of animals be treated? Are they really different from previously known animals? Finally, the definition of man himself also had to be reconsidered in the light of the encounter with natives of other lands, such as the Tupinamba people described in the travel journals of Jean de Léry and André Thevet.

**André Thevet**

First, we examine the travel accounts of the controversial scholar, André Thevet, whose notoriously bad reputation during his lifetime discouraged many later critics from studying him. Consequently, there are very few translations of his works. According to his contemporaries, Thevet claimed credit for voyages that he never undertook. He cited information that he had not acquired, which distorted historical facts, and he exaggerated his role in many events in which he did not participate or played much more modest role than he presented. Only in the twentieth century was his scholarly reputation partially rehabilitated after some critics found certain valuable information in his books, such as original descriptions of sixteenth-century Canada. Thevet’s primary scholar, Frank Lestringant, acknowledged all the previous criticisms of his subjects’ works. However, he suggested that Thevet’s books should be read by taking into account that the author was a writer of fiction rather than the scholar he claimed to be.

Two of Thevet’s books, which describe his travels to different parts of the world, provide valuable accounts of various animals previously unknown or barely known in Europe before. Thevet’s first book, *Voyage au Levant*, is an account of his travels to the East. It was published upon his return in 1554. This book offers comprehensive descriptions of several groups of animals in the countries he visited, which were very unusual for Europeans. His second book, *Les singularitez de la France antarctique*, was published three years later in 1557 and was received a good reputation. The book gives an important and, in a certain sense, unique account of Canada’s fauna. Here, we briefly examine the accounts of the animals in both books.
The choice of animals in *Voyage au Levant* is particularly representative of Thevet’s conception of animals. He selected animals based on their gargantuan size and/or menacing looks, including elephants, giraffes, wolves, and bears. Some of these animals were obviously very well known in Europe before the geographical explorations of the larger world, but Thevet presents them as completely different variations within already known species and as having relationships with men than differed from those previously assumed, such as being used for novel purposes. Even wolves and bears, which were common in Thevet’s Europe, are depicted as mysterious entities in his narration; they are unusually dangerous and prone to slaughter. Local inhabitants in the countries Thevet visited had particular hatred for such animals. To amplify these sentiments of fear and disgust, Thevet employs examples of the same animals from antiquity. For example, in the chapter devoted to wolves, to illustrate his point, Thevet chooses the example of ancients who killed the invidious animal by first torturing it and then killing it slowly. We read in this passage:

> Cet animal fut tant odieux aux Atheniens & tenu pour si execrable, que assiduellemet ils lui faisoient la guerre. Que sils en prenoient quelcun, ilz l’attachoient estroittement à un arbre, puis à grans coups de flesches le faisoient cruellement mourir: ce qu’ils tenoient pour un tant singulier passetems.\(^{46}\)

The desire of Athenians to make wolves “cruellement mourir” is the key to this citation. Thevet seeks to depict animals that are especially vicious to men and that receive the same treatment from men as punishment. In an atmosphere where everyone believed that animals completely lacked reason, Thevet’s example seems contradictory because it places wolves on the same level as men by granting them the same form of punishment, which follows from the assumption that wolves perpetrated the treacherous acts of killing and eating men. Specifically, the act of killing men is not seen as a call of nature in predators, but instead as the result of a bad moral choice on the part of wolves. However, moral choice is usually understood as belonging the realm of reason, the existence of which is refused to animals in Western civilization. Another indication of the presence of reason in wolves is their conscious fear of rocks and sticks, which, based on the memory of previous events, is associated with wounds. Thevet’s chapter on wolves ends with the contemporary story of an especially vicious wolf that devoured several people and who was killed by a man named Sebastien de Rabutin. According to de Rabutin, the creature he killed was not a common wolf, as they were known in France at the time, but had the fur of a leopard.

All the chapters devoted to animals in *Voyage au Levant* are accompanied by vivid images that complete their description not only by providing accurate portraits of the animals’ physical characteristics, but also by creating a truthful representation of their surroundings and their relationship to local men. The chapter on bears is no exception. It features the striking image of a strange-looking bear being attacked by men from all sides who are trying to stab it with lances, despite the fact that the bear is not resisting. As shown later in the chapter, it is the image of a bear killed by Athenians who hated this animal so much that they chased it day and night with big forks made of metal or burnt wood. The bear’s persecutors, who were able to catch and kill it, were praised and rewarded by their lords in the form of reduced labor.

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In addition to this self-explanatory image, the chapter also provides valuable information about the reproductive habits of bears and their use in sixteenth-century Egypt. Among other elements of bears’ behavior, Thevet particularly emphasizes their propensity for honey, which is an excellent means of calming a troubled mind. The fact that bears understand the value of honey and are able to get it from beehives led many people to believe that animals possess the capacity to reason. Thevet says: “Ceci fait beaucoup pour ceus, qui pensent que les bestes ayent raison. Ce qu’a est plusieurfois debatu entre gens lettrez, & de bon sauoir.”

Later in this chapter, Thevet discusses different Roman writers, one of whom was Pliny, who believed there were no bears in Africa. Following Pliny’s information about bears, Thevet is inclined to believe that indeed “il y ha quelque aparence de raison” in animals.

One of the most interesting chapters about animals in Thevet’s *Voyage au Levant* is the chapter about elephants. At the beginning of this chapter, Thevet says the following:

Quant aus Elephants, ils sont bien les plus grans animaus qui soient au Monde, & qui approchent plus au sens et entendement humein: car ils entendent le langage du pais ou ils frequentent, &, qui semble trop plus estrange, obeissent à ce qu’ on leur commande. Ils reuerent le Roy, & fleschiffent les genous à ceus que leur maitre leur commande, ayans bonne & promte memoire de ce qu’ils doiuent faire.

In this eulogy to the elephants in the country that Thevet visits, not only is he fascinated by their gigantic size, but he also does not call into question their extraordinary ability to understand the local language, to follow the instructions of men, and to remember those instructions. Thevet supports his admiration for this remarkable animal with examples from antiquity that prove that elephants are strong and proud during times of war but nonviolent in times of peace.

Camels, in Thevet’s representations, are also gifted with many irrefutable merits that helped them to build relationship with men. During their first encounters with men, camels provoked a great fear among men but then quickly gained their trust by “simple bonté” and “basse humilité.” Later, men tamed camels the same way they had previously tamed horses, and they eventually introduced camels to children. However, according to the authority of poets, camels also suffered because of their request to God to grant them horns, which resulted in God being angry and giving camels short ears.

In a significant part of Thevet’s narration in *Voyage au Levant*, not only do animals exhibit reason, which is demonstrated by wolves being afraid of sticks and rocks, elephants understanding and remembering men’s language, and camels showing humility and kindness, but also men cannot help but recognize reason in animals by punishing them in the same manner as they would punish human criminals, by using deliberate cruelty to teach them a lesson and show other members of their species what could happen to them if they continued their vicious behavior.

Another of Thevet’s books that we examine here is *Les singularitez de la France antarctique, La cosmographie universelle*, and *Grand Insulaire*. Thevet’s scholar Frank 47 Thevet, p. 30.
48 Thevet, p. 30.
49 Thevet, p. 70.
Lestringant provides the most complete and detailed description of this book, commenting as follows:

Ce livre sera donc tout à la fois une aventure rapportée à la première personne; une encyclopédie portative; un guide nautique et une cosmographe pratique à l’usage des marins; un traitée philosophie naturelle incluant, avec un précis de l’usage des simples, un manuel de botanique, un livre de médecine et un bestiaire; une histoire des origines de l’humanité et des principaux arts et techniques, sans oublier, constitutive de toute pérégrination au péril du corps et de âme, une allégorie de la vie humaine – homo viator.  

Animals are not the major subject of André Thevet’s book. Nevertheless, in Singularitez he is interested in exploring them because they represent an important aspect of a new, completely unknown world, which Thevet describes for his contemporaries. Thevet’s descriptions of animals are very often the result of his surprise or admiration for their physical appearance or incredible abilities. In writing these descriptions, Thevet did not blindly rely on ancient sources but actively examined and experimented with descriptions of different kinds of animals. His new approach is evident in his discussions of dolphins or porpoises, such as the following: “Experience has made me more certain of this than the authority of Pliny or others of the ancients.” The illustration of his beliefs is evident in the descriptions of whales in Singularitez. This animal which is of his special interest because of its reproductive method of giving birth which differs from other fishes that lay eggs. Thevet is very proud of the secret he discovered about whales which neither the ancients nor Thevet’s contemporaries who wrote important treatises on fish (we assume that Thevet refers to Guillaume Rondelet, Conrad Gesner, and Pierre Belon.) knew. The secret is that whales eat only small fish because they have a very small throat. The reason why the Ancients and Thevet’s contemporaries were not able to solve this mystery lies in the imperfect method of their studies. Thevet says: “The Ancients, however great researchers they may have been, never took the pains to perform this as I did, nor have the moderns either, although they have taken undertaken to write and describe for us the history of fishes.” This citation is a direct critique of the method used in antiquity, which was, according to Thevet, no longer relevant to the growing practical needs surrounding the description of new species and their behaviors. Thevet’s discovery about whales, if it is original as he claims definitely has a practical use in dealing with whales. Additionally, similar to Paré, who qualified the whale as a monster, Thevet is also terrified by the monstrous size of this animal, which can strike and destroy ships with its tail. This puzzling contradiction in Thevet’s

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50 Lestringant, Frank, *Sous la leçon des vents, Le monde d’André Thevet, cosmographe de la Renaissance*, 197.


53 Thevet later goes back to whales and describes them in very similar terms, admiring yourself again for discovering why whales eat only small fish.

54 Thevet, p. 56.
representation of whales creates a curious image of this animal, which has a small mouth that is disproportionate to its size but extreme physical strength, which allows it to destroy big ships.

Many of Thevet’s descriptions lack details, which makes it difficult to know which animals he is describing. For example, it is hard to identify the biggest enemy of whales, which stabs them in their stomach with its sharp tongue, creates an injury that prevents them from escaping, and kills them quickly. Another example is the sea parrot fish, which has a huge beak and was identified as a giant octopus by a Thevet scholar.

In Newfoundland, the land poorly cultivated and mostly uninhabited, Thevet returns to his fascination with fearsome animals and monsters, and he describes the local dangerous animals, white bears, which natives try to capture, and wild oxen, whose hides natives use to make their clothing. In this land, many animals are white, which is not accidental but according to Thevet is caused by the the extremely cold climate of this region. Thevet is not particularly interested in birds, but he briefly mentions that they are not especially beautiful. The natives in Newfoundland blended naturally into the severe landscape with its white monster-like animals, and they stay in continuous health, which as Thevet explains is because they do not eat exotic food but only eat what satisfies their natural needs:

The natives desire nothing but what is necessary to their natural needs, so that they are not gourmets and do not seek them (exotic foods) in distant lands; and their nourishment is healthy, with the result that they do not know what it is to be sick. Rather they live in continual health and peace and have no occasion to be envious of one another because of their property or patrimony—for they are all almost equal in possessions and are all rich in mutual contentment and degree of poverty.55

The island of Assumption, which was discovered by Jacques Cartier, was not easily visited at the time because of its dangerous shoreline of reefs and sandbars. Thevet gives another description of dangerous animals and wild beasts that terrorize the island. These beasts are bears and large bulls, and other unspecified creatures. Thevet ponders the possibility of developing this island of beautiful meadows and mountains, but realizes that wild beasts completely dominate the island. As in the case of whales that terrorize ships, these animals would control humans. This time, the uncontrollable power of bears and large bulls presides over the island. These wild beasts also attack humans who come to the island to fish for cod. Because of the physical supremacy of animals, humans are not able to utilize the island and everything it has to offer.

Thevet is uncertain about why on many islands, such as the island of the Demons, that are distant from the mainland and uninhabited by humans, there are nevertheless many terrestrial animals and birds. Thevet believes in the interdependence of these two facts and makes an anthropocentric remark about this mysterious phenomenon:

Je scay bien que la chaleur et humeur cause la generation des choses inferieures mais aussy faut il regarder que en toute generation il faut avoir egard a la materie, et selon icelle il faut qu’ils vivent de ce dequoy ils sont engendrés. Or les choses qui ont sens faut necessairement qu’elles sortent de la commixtion des

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semences, et par ainsy ie dis que ie suis en doute (parlant selon la raison naturelle) comme ces bestes se sont engendrés en ceste Isle. De dire, que la putrefaction d’une chaleur humide engendre telle semence de vermine, ie ne puis le comprendre ny accorder, tant pour l’extreme froidure qui est en ce lieu là, d’autant aussy que la matiere y repugne.\[56

In this confusing and contradictory comment, Thevet seems to want to establish firstly that terrestrial animals represent low forms of life and secondly, that their birth and existence are completely dependent on man. These low forms (animals) also increase because of warmth and moisture. None of these conditions is met on all these islands because they are uninhabited and cold. The lack of necessary conditions should completely disprove Thevet’s theory, but he only ponders in puzzlement and tries to search for another, more rational explanation, which he quickly finds: natives bring many animals to the islands in their small boats. Thevet also has a totally rational explanation for the abundance of birds on the islands: many of them are migratory. The rivers on these islands are also abundant in different kinds of fishes, marine horses, and whales, which come from the open sea.

In Florida, Thevet describes various animals among which are stags, hinds, goats, bears, leopards, lynxes, wild dogs, turkeys, partridges, hares, parrots, crocodiles, and others. Among the well-known animals, Thevet describes a beast called a **sucarath**, which when chased, puts its babies on its back and covers them with its long wide tail. The description of the **sucarath** does not remind us of any known animals, which increases the impression that this animal is a fantastic creature similar to those described in abundance in the books of Boaistuau and Paré.

According to Thevet, Florida is abundant in a diversity of birds, deformed fish very different from those in Europe, and all kinds of monstrous beasts, such as large bulls. These bulls have horns a foot long and a hump on their backs like camels do. Moreover, very long hair covers their body. Their tail is like a lion’s tail. Thevet notes that similar species of bulls can be found in Poland and Lithuania. He claims these animals are enemies of the horse, and he asserts that they never saw a horse before the Christians discovered this land. These bulls are ferocious animals and are impossible to tame unless they are taken from their mothers at a very early age.

Another description is that of big fish similar to the sea cow found in one of the lakes in the surrounding areas of Mexico. This large fish is called the **andura** by the natives of the Antarctic. This fish has ears different from the terrestrial pig. Thevet claims to have the skin of this animal, which he pictured in his office. The image corresponding to this description represents the mixture of a sea cow with another animal because it also has extra features, such as long pointy ears and a big spine. It is very possible this animal is a combination of two or even three different animals that existed in this area or was derived from stories that Thevet read or heard about. In this account, he describes it as an animal that really existed and that he saw himself. This animal, which Thevet calls **hoga**, gives birth to its babies in the same way that whales do. The fish is able to change its color and sometimes is yellow, green, or red. It eats the leaves of a tree to which the natives gave a name that means herbivore, similar a sea cow. According to Thevet, it has many teeth and devours all other fish. This contradiction in the eating habits of this animal again challenges its mysterious existence.

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Another animal living at the head of the same lake is a serpent that the natives call the velachif and which they eat. It is a huge and hideous creature, and even when dead is hard to lift. This serpent is poisonous, and if it bites a human or an animal, there is no antidote for its venom. The serpent resembles a crocodile, in that it is an amphibian living on both land and in water. It manifests various colors, especially red. The Mexicans hunt it and eat it, and its meat is one of the most delicate in existence.

Thevet often says that in addition to the serpent, many of the inhabitants of North America eat animals. For example, they eat the crocodile meat, which is pretty and white. They roast all meat roasted over coals and barbecue it. However, we should also remember that many tribes living in these lands, as described by Thevet, also eat human flesh without distinguishing between humans and other animals. The similar acceptance of eating human flesh can be found in China in the sixteenth century.57

Thevet invests much effort in his descriptions of animals, and he devotes several chapters in both his books to them. He is mainly inspired by animals that provoke shock and fear as the result of their gigantic size or their monstrosity, as expressed in their unusual abilities, environment, or appearance. Thevet also aims to surprise and entertain his reader by revealing the existence of certain animals and warning them against others. Thevet can hardly be put in the same category of travelers and researchers, such as Pierre Belon, who advocated for direct observation and who was not often at ease in reconciling his practical observations with the authority of classical scholars. Thevet provides simplistic descriptions often completely taken from other sources; even when he uses first-hand experiences of his descriptions, it is difficult to believe him, because of his notoriously poor reputation as a scholar. Nevertheless, his attempts to comprehend the natural world of distant lands he visits and to demonstrate the animals’ abilities beyond the accepted norms are appreciated, even if he cannot provide us with any further explanations or conclusions of those abilities.

Jean de Léry

Among the numerous reasons that Thevet’s contemporary Jean de Léry, who also traveled to America around the same time, took up the pen and gave an account of his voyage in Histoire d’un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil, was to dismiss the lies with which Thevet, according to Léry, stuffed his book. Léry confirms that despite of the fact that he and Thevet never met in America, Thevet accused the ministers (one of whom was Léry) who accompanied Villegagnon in Brazil, so that he (Léry) was in danger for his life. Léry is also furious because Thevet’s books are full of confusing episodes, various inventions, and multiple exaggerations of Thevet’s own role. Finally, he asserts that Thevet gives a completely erroneous representation of all the events taking place in Brazil. However, in addition to dismissing Thevet’s lies, Léry, is also interested in creating a veracious account of his and his companions’ mission in Brazil, including and a detailed description of everything he saw and experienced. His narration of the events he witnessed and the nature and people there is more logical than that given by Thevet.

57 See the dissertation chapter two, p. 46.
Jean Léry’s *Histoire d’un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil* is also structured very differently from Thevet’s book. Léry divides his book into different chapters, each of which describes a certain aspect of the life of the Tupinamba people or details about the natural environment. Léry also devotes several chapters of his book to descriptions of animals. At the beginning of the chapter ten, Léry first talks about the relationship between the Tupinamba people in Brazil and the local animals. The Tupinamba people do not have any domestic animals but use wild animals for their food and household needs. In a difference to Paré’s or Boistuau’s books, all the animals mentioned in this chapter are well-known in the fauna today. However, most of them were discovered for the first time by European explorers in Léry’s time. The first most common animal in this area, which is mentioned by Léry, is the *tapiroussou*, which is the modern tapir. The *tapiroussou* is a half-cow, half-donkey, which the Tupinamba value highly for its skin, which they use to make shield, and for its flesh, which they eat. Léry says it is similar to beef. There is also a kind of deer called *seouassous* and a boar called *taiassou*. Besides tapir, deer, and boar, there are also *pag* or *pague* (a large rodent), *sarigoy* (the oppossum), *tatou* (the armadillo), and various kinds of monkeys.

In Léry’s description of the Tupinamba people and their relationship to the local animals, it is clear that the Tupinamba do distinguish between animals and humans. They eat venison, fish, and human flesh. They kill and eat the prisoners of war, and they cover themselves with their thighs, legs, and other body parts in the same way that they decorate themselves with pieces of venison or fish. The surgeon on the ship on which Léry traveled brought to Europe several jars full of human fat, which he collected when the Tupinamba people were cooking their enemies. Another example of the fact that the Tupinamba treated humans similar to animals, without believing that the human species was superior in the hierarchy of species, is their treatment of the *jan-ou-are* (moderne jaguar), which is similar to the torturing and killing of wolves described in Thevet’s book. The Tupinamba have a great fear of the predatory *jan-ou-are*, because it often catches them and never fails to kill them. In return, if a Tupinamba catches this animal, he seeks for a revenge and punishes the representative of this species by killing it slowly: first, the Tupinamba catch it in a trap and then they torture it by wounding it with arrows before leaving it to suffer for a long time before killing it. In this way, the animal is punished for its cruelty to the Tupinamba people. This method is no different from that the use to punish their human enemies. Similar to the equal punishment of certain animals described in Thevet’s book, the Tupinamba do not differentiate between humans and animals. A representative of any species that shows extreme cruelty to the Tupinamba is severely punished regardless of its species. Cruelty is considered the result of moral choice made by the doer of that cruelty. The Tupinamba punish the wrong choice made against them. Consequently, non-humans are assigned the ability to make this choice, which derives from reason. Hence, animals are equated with humans.

In the chapter eleventh, the descriptions of birds also reveal two interesting facts about the Tupinamba’s belief system. Firstly, the Tupinamba do not eat eggs, because they believe that eggs are poisonous. They consider Europeans to be too gluttonous because of their habit of eating eggs, which the Tupinamba equate to eating a hen. Secondly, the Tupinamba people believe that by eating an animal, the human inherits the animal’s skills and character. For example, they refuse to eat ducks, because they think if they eat one of these birds, the duck’s
heaviness and slowness will prevent them from running from their enemies. It is for that reason that they do not eat slow animals, even slow fish, such as the ray.

In addition to different kinds of parrots, toucans, and other birds, this chapter describes bats, bees, and different kinds of insects among which is an insect that the Tupinamba call the ton, which is similar to a flea but is a vermin that crawls under fingernails and toenails. Individuals who do not get rid of this insect in time have damaged hands and feet that are covered with small bumps. The scorpions in this area are smaller than those in Provence, but they are very dangerous.

Fish and other denizens of the deep are depicted in different chapters of the book. For the first time, Léry and his companions encountered fish during their navigation to America. In addition to catching different kinds of fish three or four degrees from the Equator, Léry vividly describes the first time he saw flying fish, which he previously believed did not exist. This fish was flying very high and jumping into the ship, so it was relatively easy to catch by hand. In the sea, this fish never rests because it is constantly pursued by other fishes. It flies as it tries to escape from other fishes, but it is caught in the air by sea birds. This impossibility of a fish flying in order to avoid persecution no matter where it goes is elaborated on by Lestringant:

Cette double péripétie contrastée: danger dans l’air et danger dans l’eau, amène tout naturellement une allégorisation du motif. La situation instable et transitoire du poisson volant s’efforçant en vain d’échapper au péril mortel qui le guette en haut et en bas, à l’air libre et dans les profondeurs de la mer, est tout à fait comparable à celle de l’homme vivant en ce bas monde, à quelque état qu’il appartienne, au plus élevé comme au plus humble.58

The interesting allegory of the flying fish calls to mind the depiction of humans as not being able to find any security in their lives, which was described by the Spanish Renaissance writer Fernandez de Oviedo:

... de manera que ni arriba, ni abaxo no tenian seguridad, y este mismo peligro tienen los hombres en las cosas desta vida mortal, que ningun seguro ay para el alto ni baxo estado dela tierra.59

In addition to flying fish, Léry’s and his companions were also able to catch many different kinds of fish during their long voyage. Léry mentions bonito, albacore, dorado, and even sharks. Léry devotes an entire chapter to fish, in which he adds information about some other kinds of fish. In a contrast to Boaistuau and Paré, fantastic marine creatures, such as tritons, sirens, and so on, are not depicted in Léry’s book. He briefly mentions them but with certain reservation. He gives the impression that he is an upholder of the practice of direct observation. Since he never saw any of these creatures, he is inclined to believe that tritons and sirens are nothing more than the fruit of somebody’s vivid imagination.

According to Thevet’s and Léry’s observations about how the Tupinamba people live, they are not too fastidious to eat any kind of local animals nor do they do not mind devouring human flesh without questioning whether humans are a different species or the same species. In

59 Lestringant, p. 249.
that regard, they treat animals and man equally. They use a practical approach to using both animals and humans for food and household items. They consider that both animals and humans that can hurt them are equally representatives of another hostile tribe. They punish them, make them to suffer, and kill them. This vindictive approach is not limited to animals. The savages punish everybody and everything if they hurt them, including inanimate objects such as rocks. According to the Tupinamba’s belief system, everything, even inanimate objects and every living creature, including humans are part of nature and should not be distinguished or treated differently.

In addition to providing an interesting description of new animals that were discovered in America, both Thevet and Léry used the example of the Tupinamba people, who lived in the territory of Brazil to reflect on other forms of human societies that were very different from the French and other European cultures. Thevet was astonished to see humans living in ways that reminded him of animals. He concluded that humans would be very close to living their lives as animals if God did not enlighten them. Léry also commented that the Tupinamba did not worship any gods and were absolutely ignorant about the creation of the world, which therefore placed them in the category of non-human “other.”

The detailed consideration of people living in other parts of the world by their own rules—which was incomprehensible to Europeans challenged the Renaissance notion of man. Thevet and Léry’s travel journals demonstrate that they sought to know who could be considered and defined as human and non-human. The curious co-existence of gods, men, and animals in Des Perier’s Cymbalum Mundi,60 explored in the second chapter of this project can be also considered as a part of this quest for a definition of man. Later in the century, Montaigne will also ask the same question about whom we should consider man. In the search for an answer to this question, he will refute the value of speech, fairly giving the example of a child who cannot talk.61

Indeed, in order to observe the Christian belief in man’s superiority, which is based on Aristotelian teaching, it has to be determined who can be considered a human and thus superior to others species. However, the precise moment of creating a strict definition of man, whom other animals have to serve, is problematic. If the borders between species are vague, if some humans live worse than animals do, if some have no idea about religion, if others do not talk, then how can man, whose essence is unclear and certainly cannot be defined, be superior to any other species? Some argued that the presence of a rational soul (or reason) explained a natural pre-existing difference between man and animals, but it did not explain the cultural differences between men. As Fudge suggested, there are two separate levels of being a human: natural and cultural.62 According to Early Modern thinkers, education was necessary to be human; correspondingly, men who did not receive an education were placed in the non-human category and were equated to animals. Thus, the concept of humanity becomes intricate or, as Fudge argues, “begins to collapse into absurdity.”63 In the French Renaissance, the inability to form a definition of man, when so many attributes of belonging to the human species were no longer

60 See the second chapter on this topic.
61 To read more on this subject, see the chapter three of the dissertation.
63 Fudge, p. 58.
considered valuable, left the followers of Aristotle with little choice except that of engaging themselves in a realm of self-canceling ideas.

The question why the scholars discussed in the chapter did not break with the Aristotelian tradition of subjugating animals and refusing to acknowledge their rights while completely relieving men from any moral obligations toward them is not relevant here. These scholars were not in the position to or did not have any interest in discussing Aristotelian philosophy because they were not philosophers. Belon was a zoologist and diplomat, Paré was a doctor, Boaistuaau was a writer and translator, Lery was a traveler, and Thevet was a Franciscan priest and cosmographer. Developing a new philosophy on animals was never their objective. However, it could be declared that these scholars prepared the fertile ground for the new way of thinking about animals found in Des Périers and Montaigne’s philosophical works. Belon’s, Thevet’s and Lery’s extensive traveling and Boaistuaau’s and Paré’s thorough studies of classical texts and contemporary-to-them works discovered a new path on two significant phenomena on which other scholars could reflect. The first phenomenon is the existence of various species with extraordinary abilities about which Europeans did not have any previous knowledge. They found that people existed in other parts of the world who either had different relationship with animals and/or saw the whole natural order of things differently. In the wave of acute interest in everything from the antiquity period, the second phenomenon is the discovery of new classical texts that gave other scholars access to other views on animals different from the Aristotelian views. The scholars discussed in this chapter provided scientific and practical knowledge, and they interpreted the classical descriptions of animals and encounters with them. However, the information they provided was reworked; the new ideas about the approach and treatment of animals were crystallized and presented in des Periers’ and Montaigne’s writings.
Chapter 2

Writing a Literary Text from an Animal’s Perspective: Conversing Animals in Des Périers’ Cymbalum Mundi

«Voire dea, je parle, et pour quoy non? Entre vous hommes, pource que à vous seulz la parolle est demouree et que nous povres bestes n’avons point d’intelligence entre nous, par cela que nous ne pouvons rien dire, vous sçavez bien usurper toute puissance sur nous, et non seulement dictes de nous tout ce qu’il vous plait, mais aussi vous montez sur nous, vous nous picquez, vous nous battez ; il fault que nous vous pourtions, que nous vous vestions, que nous vous nourrissions ; et vous nous vendez, vous nous tuez, vous nous mangez. Don’t vient cela ? C’est par faulte que nous ne parlons pas. Que si nous sçavions parler et dire noz raisons, vous estes tant humains (ou devez estre), que après nous avoir ouy, vous nous traicteriez aultrement, comme je pense.  »

Phlegon, Le cheval, Dialogue III, Des Périers, Cymbalum Mundi

A Literary Text Written from an Animal Perspective

In the overwhelming majority of zoological texts and traveling journals from the sixteenth century, animals are, for the most part, presented as silent objects serving to satisfy the scientific curiosity of scholars and amateurs. Authors of these texts do not make a goal of and, for obvious reasons, are not in the position to convey an animal perspective. It is apparent that the only way to achieve the dream of understanding the animal perspective is by endowing the animal with the ability of speech through a human voice. This fantasy cannot be satisfied in any kind of scientific texts; however, it can be realized in a literary text, which allows for more imaginative leeway and power to depict talking animals.

A literary text has a unique ability of granting speech to animals and can represent an imaginary animal perspective, invented by the author of that text. An author of such a text is not and cannot be looking to describe the real animal perception of the world, which remains unknown to us even today, but he, instead, can make something out of an animal by giving it any

64 “I’m talking. And why shouldn’t I? Because you alone have the power of speech and we poor beasts appear unintelligent, since we cannot talk, you men have certainly usurped authority. You not only say what you please about us, but you mount us, spur and beat us. We have to carry you, provide hides for you and furnish food for you. You sell us, kill and eat us. Why do such things go on? It’s because we can’t speak. You are so human or should be, at least, that if we knew how to speak and reason with you, you would, I’m sure, treat us differently after having listened to us.”


fantastic role or perception he wishes. The text of this kind is looking to enrich our lives by giving us the access into the animals’ minds we do not comprehend. Of course, this appealing fantasy has obvious limitations. The fictional animal perspective exists again strictly for humans who always want to understand the mystery of the unknown, to bring animals near to them in order to examine and perhaps criticize them. A text of this kind also satisfies a false man’s belief that all animals unconsciously want to have a privilege of living a human life. Even if animals do not understand what human life is, they want to be humans. Together with that, such a text demonstrates human limitation. In order to understand other species, we have to humanize them.

Despite the disadvantages of a fictional perspective, a literary text still represents a myriad of unlimited possibilities to use or play with animals by making them the main characters. However, strangely enough, not many writers, even in centuries before the Renaissance were interested in giving authority to animals and speculating on what they might think or say. It is not surprising considering that animals in the history of Western philosophy are usually perceived as a base from which humans ascend, as a vehicle to underline human exceptionality. The base opinion about animals is necessary for philosophers to put together the argument about man’s singularity and supremacy. Animals and men are located on opposite poles of the philosophical debate which constructs the vision of the universe. According to Aristotle, the best thing in man is his intellect which all animals lack; the best and most continuous life is contemplative one. He says at the end of Nicomachean Ethics: “If only very few selected humans can reach the contemplative type of life, while most men, and men of the most vulgar type, seem (not without some reason), to identify the good, or happiness, with pleasure, then animals a priori can not have any hopes to reach that type of life.”

This concept of regarding animals as a criterion by which humans can be measured is analogues to the one of virtue and vice. Montaigne in his essay On Cruelty asks: “Si la vertu ne peut luire que par le combat des appetits contraires, dirons nous donq qu’elle ne se puisse passer de l’assistance du vice, et qu’elle luy doive cela, d’en estre mise en credit et en honneur.” Using historical examples taken from antiquity, he demonstrates that indeed virtue cannot exist without vice, because it can be measured only by contrast with it. By drawing a parallel with Montaigne’s argument, we can see the dependence of humans on animals’ existence. The belief in human excellence depends on the concept of animals, on their image as mute and brainless beasts.

However, there are important examples in which this idea of men and animals existing in opposition is challenged. In Plutarch’s dialogue between Autobulus and Soclarus in The Cleverness of Animals, Soclarus argues for the necessity of having a counterpart to everything created according to Nature’s design:

67 Montaigne, Les Essais (Gallimard), p. 444.

“If virtue can shine only by clashing with opposing appetites, shall we then say that it cannot do without the assistance of vice, and that it owes to vice its repute and its honor?” Michel de Montaigne, The Complete Works, Everyman’s Library, Alfred A. Knoff New York London Toronto, 2003, p. 374.
just as the immortal is opposed to the mortal and the imperishable to the perishable, and, of course, the incorporeal able to the corporeal; just so, if there is rationality, the irrational must exist as its opposite and counterpart. This alone, among all these pairings, must not be left incomplete and mutilated.68

In this citation, Soclarus claims that every natural phenomenon exists as a pair of two opposite things and, consequently, nothing can exist by itself without opposition. If we believe that men possess reason, then it should be that another who does not have it and that ‘other’ are animals. This idea seems very logical to Autobulus, Soclarus’ opponent, who is identified as Plutarch’s father, and who does not object to the general principle of necessity that every existing phenomenon have a counterpart. However, he finds an unexpected response by referring to as “unreasonable” those who attempt to find opposition in different species with souls, and seek to divide all living creatures into rational and irrational categories. He believes that all species are more balanced, and include both sentient and insentient and imaginative and unimaginative aspects. Animals have a soul and, by consequence, they have reason or intelligence and cannot exist as the antithesis of men. In Cleverness of Animals, Plutarch is not seeking to challenge the Aristotelian belief in the use of reason as criteria to determine the position of inanimate objects and living creatures in the hierarchy of things on earth, but his divergence with Aristotle comes from the fact that Aristotle does not believe that animals possess reason and Plutarch does.

Plutarch’s ideas did not receive much attention in the history of Western civilization; and his works written in defense of animals were nothing more than a rare voice among the overwhelming majority of opinions who believed in the absolute absence of any kind of rationality in animals and who continued to use them to praise the human intellect. One of the possible reasons for this lack of attention to Plutarch’s ideas is man’s fear that the acceptance of the intelligence of animals would unavoidably lead to questions about the status of men as reasonable creature. Another explanation can be that he was not considered a major thinker. However, for our purposes, his ideas are suggestive and influential.

One of the very few Renaissance literary texts actually offering an animal’s perspective is Des Periers’ book Cymbalum Mundi. In this text, written as a collection of dialogues, there are different conversing animals: a horse Phlegon in the third dialogue and two dogs proffer their view of humanity by conversing with each other in a human voice in the fourth dialogue of the collection. One interesting fact from a later period can help us to appreciate the rarity of the text in which animals express their vision instead of serving as a tacit embodiment of human qualities. Seventy five years after the Cymbalum Mundi, Cervantes chose to copy the fourth dialogue of two talking dogs from Des Periers’ book and include it in his Novelas exemplares under the title of El coloquio de los perros.69 A Spanish copy of Cervantes’ Novelas exemplares, published in 1613, has a remark on the first page that Cervantes did not invent the dialogue of

the dogs but admitted to borrowing the idea from des Périers’ fourth dialogue of *Cymbalum Mundi*.

Notwithstanding the explicit singularity of such a text, the horse monologue and dogs’ dialogue in *Cymbalum Mundi* have not inspired many reflections among critics. *Cymbalum Mundi* is traditionally read as the discussion of belief and disbelief and not a literary text devoted to animals. Most critics almost intentionally avoid the fourth dialogue of the book as the piece which did not line up with the first three. Max Gauna’s description of the fourth dialogue perhaps most accurately presents critics perception of it in comparison to other dialogues of the book: ”What is the fourth dialogue is about is genuinely obscure, and there is less that can be said about it which is uncontroversial.” However, Olivier Pot’s article *Le livre et la parole dans le Cymbalum Mundi: entre hommes et bêtes* offers a useful attempt to propound the discussion of man-animal interdependence. Pot believes that des Périers followed Plutarch’s path by giving the gift of language to animals in *Cymbalum Mundi*. Instead of seeing two talking dogs as a miracle presented for human entertainment, des Périers describes them as a moral allegory. In Pot’s view, human language in a dog’s mouth becomes a symbol of human misery.

The explicit tendency among des Périers’ critics to regard numerous animal characters in *Cymbalum Mundi* may be seen as an extension of a medieval allegorical tradition of using animals either as the personification of certain human character features or as the representation of social classes or groups. Examples of this use of animals are evident in two major medieval texts: *Le Roman de Renart*, the collection of different episodes around the main character, based on oral tales about animals that incarnate different human features, and one of the romances of Chretien de Troyes, *Ivain ou le chevalier au lion*, in which a lion, first saved by the main character, becomes a loyal companion to the knight and is ready to sacrifice his own life for his master at any moment.

The presence of animals in des Périers’ work is explained by critiques falling strictly within the same allegorical tradition. For example, Max Gauna tells us that the episode of the horse Phlegon from the third dialogue of the book has been interpreted for a long time as “l’exploitation inhumaine des pauvres par les riches.” Another example is the explanation of the whole fourth dialogue of two talking dogs, Hylactor and Pampagus. One critic, Peter Nurse, for example, attempts to identify the story of how two dogs acquired their ability to speak through chasing and biting to death their master, Acteon with the story of the betrayal of Christ. He erroneously believes that the dogs regret their actions, when, in fact, they only regret the good life they had led when Acteon was alive. Another critic, L. Delaruelle, identified Hylactor as Estienne Dolet, whose ear was cut off.

To accept such readings, we would have to ignore two major directions being taken place during the 15th and especially the 16th centuries in Europe with regard to animals. The first was

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72 Bonaventure des Périers, *Cymbalum Mundi*, édition critique par Max Gauna, note, p. 86.
73 *Cymbalum Mundi* by Bonaventure des Périers, translated by Bettina L. Knapp, notes, p. 79.
the new knowledge about animals brought to Europe as a result of geographical exploration and, hence, the increasing interest in animals and their relationship with men. The second direction is the obsession with Greek and Roman texts in which the question of animals and their place in the hierarchy of species is very extensively discussed. By believing in the strictly allegorical use of animals in *Cymbalum Mundi*, we totally dismiss the larger context of the “animal question” in the Renaissance.

The final argument in favor of des Periers’ interest in understanding animals and their relationship with men is the noticeable influence of Plutarch’s texts about animals in *Cymbalum Mundi*. There are two major texts in which Plutarch expounds his views of animals: *The Cleverness of Animals and Beasts are Rational*. In the first text, Plutarch, on behalf of Autobulus, attempts to dismiss the Aristotelian belief in the absence of reason in animals and, using many persuasive examples, demonstrates that animals are not only intelligent but often surpass humans with regard to certain aspects of their lives such as resolving problems of survival, raising their offspring, and constructing houses. According to Plutarch, they also care, have purpose of life, memory, and moral qualities. Besides, Plutarch condemns hunting as a cruel spectacle of the suffering of animals that are very often totally harmless. Furthermore, Plutarch is an adversary of the division of species into rational and irrational categories.

The second Plutarch text devoted to the question of animals, entitled *Beasts are Rational*, is an unusual text, almost unique. In this text, Odysseus comes to Circe to request a favor - to restore the Greeks, who were turned into beasts, to their original humanity. Circe tells Odysseus to first ask their permission to turn them back into men. Odysseus believes that Circe is making fun of him. He does not accept the idea that a beast who was once a man would not want to revert to his original form. However, when Odysseus meets Gryllus, who was once a man, he realizes how wrong he was. Gryllus tells him “the soul of beasts has a greater natural capacity and perfection for the generation of virtue.”74 He uses numerous examples to prove his point, but the dialogue is suddenly interrupted. The critics do not agree on whether the ending is lost or if there is no need to continue the discussion since it becomes evident to Odysseus that Gryllus has no intention of becoming a man again.

**Speech**

*Cymbalum Mundi* is a literary text that consists of four “poetiques, fort antiques, ioyeux, & facetieux”75 dialogues that are very loosely connected to each other. This cluster of dialogues is preceded by the address of the enigmatical Thomas du Clevier, who claims to be an author of this text, to his mysterious friend Pierre Tryocan. It was by Tryocan’s request that Clevier translated *Cymbalum Mundi* from Latin into colloquial French prose. Du Clevier immediately says that his intention was to give his reader thoughts instead of words, alluding to the obscurity of the text. He also asks his friend Tryocan not to share *Cymbalum Mundi* with anyone out of fear that the text might end up in a printer’s hands and thus be diminished in value. If Tryocan keeps the work in secret, Du Clevier promises to send him more interesting works. The address

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74 Plutarch’s *Moralia, Beast are Rational*, p. 501.
75 Bonaventure des Périers, *Cymbalum Mundi* p. 54.
is not signed “Du Clevier” and there are no other explanations or introduction to the dialogues. Each dialogue is preceded by a list of characters who participate in the dialogue; however, there are no details regarding these characters or the setting for their conversations.

From Mercury’s monologue at the beginning of the first dialogue, we learn that he descended from the sky to the earth, sent by Jupiter to rebound a handsome book that “tombe tout en pieces de vieillesse”. Upon his arrival on earth, Mercury encounters Byrphanes and Cyrtalius, both of whom immediately recognize him but pretend not to know who he is in order to steal his book. By selling his book, they hope to reap a great profit and achieve glory “de disrober non seulement ung larron, mais l’auteur de tous larrecins, tel qu’il est.” Under the pretext that Mercury committed blasphemy by saying that the wine he drinks at the White Cal Tavern is better than Jupiter’s nectar, Byrphanes and Cyrtalius are able to get rid of Mercury before he notices the loss of his book.

In the second dialogue, Trigabus blames Mercury for his earlier trick on philosophers in which he leads them to believe he had a magic philosopher’s stone which he smashed into a million pieces. Since the day this happened, philosophers have not stopped searching for the pieces all over the earth but are unable to recover any of them. Mercury is curious and wants to take a closer look at these philosophers who are very much like “petiz enfans, qui s’esbattent à la pouldrette”. He takes the precaution of changing his appearance to ensure they will not recognize him. Having witnessed the miraculous transformation of Mercury from a young and handsome man into an old man, Trigabus is now eager to know the magical words that can help him change his appearance. Trigabus recognizes the great power which this ability can bring to its possessor. Mercury promises to reveal the words to Trigabus before he leaves, but then he breaks his promise. At the very end of the dialogue, he pretends to whisper something into Trigabus’ ear, but the latter cannot hear anything Mercury says. Trigabus is convinced Mercury did not say anything and never had any intention of revealing his magic power to anyone else.

The third dialogue is quiet different from the first two because it is divided into two parts and deals with different topics. Although the imaginary title for the first dialogue could be *Mysterious Jupiter’s Book* and the imaginary title of the second dialogue could be *In Search of Philosophers’ Stone*, it would be almost impossible to give a title to the third dialogue. In the first part of the dialogue, Mercury laments the loss of Jupiter’s book and the fact that it was replaced with a book containing reports on all of Jupiter’s love affairs. Mercury reads a different memorandum that instructs him to deliver different messages from the gods to other gods or people and to bring and do certain things. The memorandum from Juno to Cleopatra consists of an extensive list of animals performing different tricks:

Premierement, ung perroquet qui sache chanter toute l’*Iliade* d’Homere; ung corbeau, qui puisse causer et haranguer à tous propos; une pie qui sache tous les precepts de philosophie; ung singe, qui joue au quillard; une guenon, pour luy tenir son miroir le matin quand elle s’accoustre; ung miroir d’acier de Venise, des plus granz qu’il pourra trouver.79

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76 Bonaventure des Périers, *Cymbalum Mundi* p. 62.
77 Bonaventure des Périers, *Cymbalum Mundi* p. 60.
78 Bonaventure des Périers, *Cymbalum Mundi* p. 68.
79 Bonaventure des Périers, *Cymbalum Mundi*, p. 81.
The list of animals is not explained in the dialogue. However, it is possible to draw a parallel with the list of animals mentioned in the fourth dialogue. In the fourth dialogue, one of the dogs named Pamphagus complains about humans’ constant search for everything novel. He warns another dog named Hylactor that humans will eventually lose their interest in a talking dog, saying that:

Ung present n’est jamais si beau ne si plaisant qu’à l’heure qu’on le presente et que avec belles parolles on le faict trouver bon. On n’a jamais tant de plaisir avec Lycisca que la premiere foys qu’on la couvre. Ung collier n’est jamais si neuf que le premier jour qu’on le mect: car le temps envieillit toutes choses et leur faict perdre la grace de nouveauté. Auroit-l’on prou ouy parler les chiens, on vouldroit ouyr parler les chatz, les beufs, les chevres, les ouailles, les asnes, les porceaulx, les pulces, les oyseaulx, les poissons et tous aultres animaulx.\(^80\)

Although these animals do not talk in the present, they might start talking in the future. It is interesting that the representative ability of many of the unusual animals that Juno wants Mercury to bring to her is also related to talking such as a raven who talks about all subjects or a magpie who knows all philosophy.

Mercury’s monologue is interrupted by the sight of Cupid. Mercury tells him the story of his misfortunes and worries about Jupiter’s lost book. Cupid has heard some talk about the book, but his interests lie elsewhere. Cupid then sees a beautiful young girl named Célia who he causes to fall in love with her suitor. The presence of Célia in the third dialogue is limited to her monologue in praise of love. Mercury is not interested in Cupid or Célia, rather, he is irritated by man’s constant expectation of him to create something novel to talk about, so he decides to reinstate the power of speech in the first animal he sees. He intentionally pronounces the speech that gives the power of human speech to animals. The first animal he sees is a horse. Mercury does not know anything about the horse that is identified as Phlegon.

The most intriguing part of the third dialogue is horse Phlegon’s conviction of the human preoccupation with language. He is aware of the fact that men would not consider animals as “stupid beasts” if the latter could express themselves naturally and communicate to men in a language they could understand. The epigraph for this chapter is a part of Phlegon’s speech in which the horse says men use language as a weapon against unarmed animals. He blames language for all animals’ miseries and, most of all, for their subjugation by men. Phlegon asserts that if animals could restore their power of speech which they had in the past, men would see them as similar to themselves and treat them very differently.

In the context of Phlegon’s speech regarding how humans overrate the importance of the ability to speak, it is helpful to remember Weil’s book, entitled Thinking Animal. She analyzes Wolfe’s critique of scientists and humanists who support animal rights philosophy, according to which certain animals should have more rights than others.\(^81\) Chimpanzees in the Great Ape Project, mentioned in the introduction, are an ocular demonstration of such a philosophy. Apes represent an inferior version of men, they can even learn human language and, based on this

\(^{80}\) Bonaventure des Périers, Cymbalum Mundi, p. 96.
\(^{81}\) Weil, p. 21.
criterion, have privileges in researchers’ eyes over other animals and should be treated differently.

The blind human belief in the manifestation of reason in language and humanity’s desperate search for allusions for a reason in different non-human animals over the centuries do not allow them to see the limitation of this belief. A high brain capacity as the single standard for the position of species in the hierarchy of species on earth makes it very difficult to determine whom we should count even as human. In other words, the restricted definition of men as superior species on the grounds of intelligence and capacity for language creates manifold problems. Weil is concerned with identifying reason and language with humanity for it defines “the human in ways that exclude some humans.”

Another very important aspect of Phlegon’s speech in Des Perier’s text is worth mentioning. The talking horse Phlegon naively believes that the cruel treatment of animals stems from man’s ignorance of animal suffering. If the tool of language was available to animals, men would discover the inner life of animals and would need to treat them accordingly. In other words, if humans recognized animals’ relative equality through their ability to communicate, first, they would realize that animals suffer as much as humans do, and, secondly, they would stop or reduce their merciless abuse of animals. However, in the very same dialogue in Cymbalum Mundi, there is a dismissal of the hope for fairer treatment of animals. After hearing about the beating and stealing of food from his horse, Phlegon’s groom Statius threatens Phlegon with a cruel punishment. The only reason he does not execute his threat is because Ardelio, another character from the third dialogue, reminds him of the monetary value of a talking horse. Des Perier’s unfavorable vision on men is culminated in this episode, according to which men are always subjugated by their dark force expressed in curiosity, boredom or greed.

Phlegon’s idea of unfair treatment of animals is discussed in Plutarch’s The Cleverness of Animals, when Autobulus argues that

living is not abolished nor life terminated when a man has no more platters of fish or pâté de foie gras or mincemeat of beef or kids’ flesh for his banquets – or when he no longer, idling in the theatre or hunting for sport, compels some beasts against their will to stand their ground and fight, while he destroys others which have not the instinct to fight back even in their own defense.

In other words, the cruel treatment of animals is not necessary for human survival and, for that reason, cannot be justified by any kind of philosophical argument.

Phlegon not only finds humans to be cruel and unfair towards animals, he also reprehends them for being rather duplicitous. Not only do they refuse the pleasures they enjoy themselves, like sex, to animals, but they have a different set of rules even for their neighboring humans. Phlegon claims: “Vous hommes voulez ung droict pur vous et ung aultre pour voz voisins; vous estes bien contens d’avoir tous voz plaisirs naturelz, mais vous ne les voulez pas laisser prendre aux autres, et mesmement à nous povres bestes.”

The most important idea in this citation is that humans are not consistent with each other. They create one set of laws for themselves, while they expect their neighbors to obey totally different laws. The horse expresses his lack of hope of

82 Weil, p. 21.
83 Plutarch’s Moralia, p. 353.
84 Bonaventure des Périers, Cymbalum Mundi, p. 87.
being treated fairly by men due to the fact that men do not treat even each other fairly. The examples of how men attempt to take advantage of each other and even gods come earlier in Cymbalum Mundi. But it is important that this time, condemnation of human behavior comes from another species. In the next dialogue, two dogs demonstrate their total solidarity with each other, something one might expect from creatures of the same species. Des Periers’ main goal in horse’s speech is to talk and defend animals, but he also uses animals to make a moral choice about humans. He uses allegory but not allegorical at the same time.

There is another intriguing moment at the beginning of the Phlegon’s speech. The horse does not seem surprised by his own ability to express himself. He claims animals could talk in the past but were later deprived of their own ability. Des Periers did not invent the idea of a glorious past when animals could speak and had better lives; rather, he borrowed this belief from classical Greek culture. In the introduction to his book The Talking Greeks, John Heath describes the vision Greeks had of that past:

> The Greeks occasionally envisioned a golden age, before the tripartite division of gods, men, and animals became necessary, in which animals could converse with humans. Golden age visions of the past have always been useful for thinking about the defects of the present and the glories that might yet come to pass… Animals often played a central role in these imaginary constructions of paradise and the examination of the present.\(^85\)

In this citation, Heath attempts to explain that the phenomenon of talking animals is always associated with a better time for the Greeks. Animals’ deprivation of speech represents an inability to experience outside perspectives and different knowledge, which could help them to reflect better on their own lives.

When Mercury is about to make a horse talk he says: “…je m’en voys faire, tout à ceste heure, que ce cheval-la parlera a son palefernier qui est dessu, pour veoir qu’il dira: ce sera quelque chose de nouveau, à tout le moins.”\(^86\) Mercury himself is not sure what the horse will say, but he knows it is going to be something new. Though depicted without specific details, this moment in the dialogue allows us to picture a scene, in which a horse is nothing more than a silent object of the landscape. However, within minutes, the whole scene is changed. By Mercury’s wish, the horse is taken from the picture and transformed into an intelligent creature who blames both his personal groom and all humanity for being cruel toward animals. The phenomenon of the talking horse seems to interrupt the regular course of time, which seems to be Aesopian. The first words out of the horse’s mouth are as follows: “Il a esté ung temps que les bestes parloyent.”\(^87\) It is unclear if the golden time celebrated by Greeks returns to earth or if this scene signifies the beginning of something else. We continue to wonder if it is an unforeseen event and how it might affect the regular course of life.

We can see the con-natural resemblance in the depiction of animals in one of Rabelais’ books. In one of the chapters of Pantagruel, he introduces a fable about a fox and a lion who tried to cure the feminine organs of an old lady. The fox and the lion speak with human voices in

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86 Bonaventure des Périers, Cymbalum Mundi, p. 85.
87 Bonaventure des Périers, Cymbalum Mundi, p. 86.
this episode while the old lady does not speak at all. The dialogue begins the same way as Phlegon’s speech in *Cymbalum Mundi*, referring to the gold past “au temps que les bestes parloyent (il n’y pas troys jours)...” However, we have to keep in mind, that this is not the historical past but an imaginary ideal past, a different dimension of sorts, which cannot be placed or described within normal temporal limits. The marvel of talking animals does not belong to any epoch, past or future; it happens outside of any time frame.

According to the Greeks, not only could animals speak in the golden past, but gods, humans, and animals were not yet divided into different groups, all co-existing together. In the first three dialogues of *Cymbalum Mundi*, we discover a curious mixture of different humans and God-like characters that argue, discuss, and suggest incomprehensible ideas by disregarding all logic in their conversations. With the exception of Mercury, there are different characters in each dialogue; however, there is a loose connection between the topics these varying characters discuss. By the time the reader reaches the fourth and last dialogue of *Cymbalum Mundi*, all human and God-like characters completely disappear, only to be replaced by two dogs, Hylactor and Pamphagus, whose sole connection to the previous subject of the dialogues is the discussion of humankind.

The two dogs discuss the value of talking in human voice and share their observations about humanity. The Western thinkers in the whole course of moral philosophy are continuously preoccupied with understanding and describing men, suggesting remedies to human flaws, and improving human life. But being men themselves, they are writing about men from inside of their own species. The text of *Cymbalum Mundi* presents an imaginary vision on humanity produced by an inferior species of animals. Men can comprehend the animals’ vision of them but only because the dogs use the same vehicle of communication, habitual for men – the human voice. The dogs’ thoughts are adapted to human understanding through speech. Therefore, the literary texts with talking dogs grant access to the animals’ world, unattainable otherwise.

Much as the horse Phlegon did earlier in the text, the dog Hylactor recognizes the value of speech for humans and sees how important the phenomenon of a talking animal is for them. At the beginning of his monologue, he has the following to say about the event of a talking animal: “Je ne pense pas que l’on ayt veu chose plus merveilleuse, plus exquise, ne plus delectable.” However, it quickly becomes clear that the gift of talking is useless outside of society. Unsuccessfully, Hylactor appeals to his fellow dogs, but not one of them is capable of comprehending or responding to him. Hylactor describes his encounters with other dogs: “Ilz sont estonnez que si cornes leur venoyent; car, voyans cela, ilz ne scavent que penser, si je suis home disguise en chien ou chien qui parle.” In despair after not being able to find even one talking dog, Hylactor decides to search for a poison that will deprive him of the ability to talk, believing he would be much happier if he were unable to speak like all other dogs. In his last attempt to find a talking companion, he addresses one of the Gargilius’ dogs and, miraculously, the dog responds to him in a human voice.

**Social World**

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88 Bonaventure des Périers, *Cymbalum Mundi*, p. 90.
It is clear from the beginning of the fourth dialogue, that Pamphagus and Hylactor are the only two dogs in the world who can talk. After a long quest to find another talking dog, Hylactor is happy to finally find Pamphagus. Hylactor is eager to know how they both acquired the miraculous gift of speech. Pamphagus knows the reason, revealing to Hylactor that during the chase after Acteon, their former master, they both ate part of his tongue. We are also informed that it was Diana’s wish to endow two dogs with the ability to speak by eating her enemy’s tongue. However, the abilities of the two dogs are not equal. Pamphagus, understanding more than Hylactor, can even read.

Without providing much detail about Acteon’s death, Des Périers, relies heavily on Ovid’s version of the Greek myth of Actaeon’s transformation and death found in *Metamorphoses*. Des Périers does not even invent the names of Hylactor and Pamphagus, instead borrowing them from *Metamorphoses*. Pamphagos and Hylactor are briefly mentioned in the list of the many dogs that attacked Acteon. It is not clear what guided des Périers in his choice of these two particular names for his two characters: in *Metamorphoses*, Pamphagos is mentioned at the beginning of the list, while Hylactor is mentioned at the very end. We find the following passage in Ovid: “… Pamphagos et Dorceus et Orbasos, Arcades omnes… et acutae uocis Hylactor.”

Considering the popularity of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* during the Renaissance, as Nancy Vickers suggested, it should not come as a surprise that the story of the dog’s master Acteon in *Cymbalum Mundi* is a shorter of version of Ovid’s story.

It must be stressed that Acteon was not exactly a human. Rather, he was a hero and, for the most part, a god in Greek mythology. He was the son of Autonoe and the minor god Aristaios, He was also a grandson of Apollo and was taught by the centaur Chiron. The choice of Acteon demonstrates the intimacy of the relationship between gods, humans, and animals in *Cymbalaum Mundi*. Whereas Acteon gives his power of speech to his dogs, after being turned into a stag, he loses his ability to talk. We read in Ovid the description of the moment when he sees his reflection in the water and realizes he is no longer a man: “Me miserum!” dicturus erat; uox nulla secuta est; / Ingemuit; uox illa fuit, lacrimaeque per ora/ Non sua fluxerunt; mens tantum pristina mansit.”

The statement “*Me miserum!* “ (“Unhappy me!”) in this citation belongs to Acteon; however, he is no longer in the position to speak in a human voice. Ovid has to use the future participle “*dicturus*” of the Latin verb “*dico*”, which can be translated as follows: he (Acteon) was about to say “Miserable me!”, but could only groan (“*ingemuit*”); his voice fades away (“*uox illa fuit*”), and only his former mind (mind of a human) remains (“*mens tantum pristina mansit*.”) Acteon loses his ability to speak but remains a man in the last moments of his life when he is chased down and bitten to death by his own dogs. While Vickers argues that popular in Renaissance Acteon’s myth is about gender and power, Des Periers displays that this myth is about the limits of the human.

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92 Ovidi, P. Naso, *Les Metamorfosis*, p. 62
*The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, an English version by A. E. Watts, University of California Press Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1954 « Unhappy me! » his power of speech was flown:/He groaned, and all his utterance was a groan./ Tears he could shed; o’er cheeks not his they ran:/A stag in shape, in mind he still was man.”
For evident reasons, Des Périers chose not to include Acteon’s internal discourse in *Cymbalum Mundi*. The dialogue is written from the dogs’ perspective, and they are not in the position to know Acteon’s experience or feelings during this scene. Nevertheless, the idea of not being able to profit from certain species’ capabilities if you belong to another species is still reflected in Des Périers’ work. Diana’s punishment and death sentence for Acteon is his transformation into a stag; her gift to Hylactor and Pamphagus is the ability to speak. However, outside of their species, this gift is useless. As with many other specific attributes of particular species, language has limited value; it is valuable as long as there is somebody who can appreciate it.

Hylactor is aware of the fact that his gift of speech could bring him glory and a happy life among humans once they find out he is the first talking dog, but he is not looking for human acceptance and admiration. Speech is a manifestation of reason that is overrated by men and has very little, if no value, for dogs. If Hylactor is the only talking dog, his remarkable ability would not be appreciated by his species. Language is only valuable for humans, because they can share it and appreciate it. For animals, it is not a gift, it is a burden. It is quite interesting how a primitive reflection of a dog can in a moment challenge a solid belief in the power of speech, a power which, supported by different philosophical and religious teachings, served as a basis for human superiority.

The other dog Pamphagus is even more negative toward his new found ability. He is not interested in the glory achieved by talking, because as soon as men learn of his gift, they will consider him to be similar to them and expect him to lead the life of a human. Pamphagus is not seduced by the advantages of leading a human life. He is aware that by revealing his talent to humans and leading a life like theirs, he will not be an animal anymore. Des Périers invites us to think about the responsibilities that come with the gift of speech. You cannot have human attribute of speech without assuming humanity as well. Pamphagus realizes it and he is not interested in giving up his animal identity.

Both Hylactor and Pamphagus have a very strong sense of connection to their own species. Hylactor, before finding Pamphagus, is searching for another talking dog and could care less if he is placed on a pedestal by humans. Pamphagus does not want to live in a way contrary to a dog’s nature. Pamphagus’ unwillingness to become something new and different can be read from various angles. On the one hand, he might be presented as an opposition to humankind; he is not fascinated by the potential advantages of his new and is afraid of becoming somebody else. On the other hand, he realizes that by becoming human, he will not be an animal anymore and might forget what it means to be an animal.

Aristotle considered language to be a manifestation of reason, the most important aspect of which is the conscious choice of an action. Both Pamphagus and Hylactor certainly demonstrate their capacity for reasoning. They can recognize that speaking would enable them in the society of humans. They (especially Pamphagus), can even predict the outcome of that glory and its negative impact on their life as a dog. But Pamphagus is also conscious of the fact that language is a skill that comes from the human world to which he cannot belong in his current state. He realizes that the goddess Diane played a very wicked trick on him and his companion Hylactor by granting them access to a world in which they are nothing more than temporary visitors, a world in which they might possibly become objects of amusement, experiment, and
eventually oblivion. These dogs will never acquire equal treatment in a human world. Unless they completely accept a human identity and abandon their canine world, they will always be treated cautiously, and sometimes hostiley, as the ‘other’. If they did accept a human identity, they would most likely have no recollection of their animal life.\footnote{In his story \textit{A report to an Academy}, Frantz Kafka explores the possibility of such a future in which an animal turns into a human. The protagonist of the story is an ape, who as the result of a scientific experiment has become a human. Scientists are waiting for a report on his life as an ape, one which he is not able to give. He completely forgot his life as an ape after becoming an ordinary human. His animal identity is thus completely erased. Weil, p. 5.} Therefore, it becomes clear that acquiring the human tool of speech requires the full acceptance of human identity and full refusal of their dogs’ identity which are not ready and do not want to do.

However, besides the fact that speech is associated with a human identity and is not valuable outside the human specie, the phenomenon of talking and its merit in general are problematic for Des Périers. Talking is what separates animals from humans and what defines animals’ status with regards to men. Silence, on another hand, is a property of animals, and by definition, is an attribute of inferiority. (Animals’ ability of producing different sounds is not really counted because these sounds are deprived of meaning for humans.) But here then lies an evident contradiction for Des Périers that is related to an interesting status of silence in Renaissance. Silence was broadly employed by different authors in the Renaissance. Hether Ingman suggests there are different reasons of Renaissance authors’ interest in the subject of silence.\footnote{Ingman, Heather and Ingman, F., \textit{Silence, Harpocrates and the “Cymbalum Mundi”}, Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance, T. 51, No. 3 (1989), pp. 569-577 (published by Librairie Droz, 1989).} First of all, human language was not considered suitable for everything. For various reasons, it could not be used to discuss religious matters. First of all, in that period, it was too dangerous to discuss religion and had to be avoided. But besides, representing a physical danger for men, human language was also considered to be too feeble to discuss the mystery of God. In other words, the power of language was limited to simple matters and, by consequence, its value was diminished by its partial or sometimes full exclusion from religious discussions. Additionally, the value of language was challenged by the existence of a long classical tradition of association of silence with wisdom, the tradition that received further development by Renaissance scholars.

Des Périers is not convinced that speaking necessary manifests reason while on many occasions the opposite phenomenon silence can exhibit more effectively sense of things that cannot be explained by words. Des Périers, perhaps, borrowed and extended this idea of frequent value of silence over speaking from a Greek author Lucian, in one of dialogues of whom, \textit{The Cock}, there is a brief passage on speaking versus silence. In Lucian’s dialogue, the character of Cock claims that he used to be Pythagoras in a previous life, something that another character Micyllus finds difficult to believe, particularly because the Cock is very different in many respects from Pythagoras. The Cock’s major difference is that he is very noisy, while Pythagoras “advocated a course of five years’ silence at a stretch.”\footnote{Lucian, p. 108.} This passage probably inspired Des Périers to think in this direction and discuss the question of talking versus silence on multiple occasions in \textit{Cymbalum Mundi}. 

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In the middle of the fourth dialogue between two dogs in *Cymbalum Mundi*, the dog Pamphagus claims he does not share the existence of his talking ability with anybody else. When another dog, Hylactor, enquires as to why Pamphagus keeps his gift a secret, the latter responds to him: “Pource qu’il ne m’en chault, car j’ayme mieulx me taire.” In his next cue, Pamphagus further elucidates his lack of interest in acquiring the glory that a talking dog might achieve among men. For him, talking is an exclusively human domain, while animals are always identified with silence. Finally, he advises to Hylactor “Si tu consideres bien, il vault mieulx que tu soys encore à parler, que sit u eusse desja tout dict.”

The horse Phlegon from the third dialogue is thrilled to obtain the ability to talk, which had been lost since “temps que les bestes parloyent”. He believes that by talking he will gain the appreciation and better treatment from humans. For Hylactor, talking might also open a door into human world. Pamphagus, however, is the only one who does not want to be human. He praises silence over speech, which he considers to be an empty, superficial feature of humankind. He, who is depicted as the wisest and most accomplished of the animals, celebrates silence as an alternative to speech, because he is only one who understands that the latter is the major reason for humans’ belief in the inferiority of animals.

At the very end, the two dogs, Pamphagus and Hylactor find a package of letters on the road. Pamphagus who can both speak and read reports the content of the letters to Hylactor. Pamphagus is called by somebody and has to leave immediately. The two dogs hide the letters in one of the holes in the pyramid and cover them with a stone. The dialogue of two dogs is ended by Pamphagus saying: “Hastons-nous, je te prie, et nous taisons, que noz gens, qui sont icy près, ne nous oyent parler.” Hylactor promises to Pamphagus not to talk to anyone and rushes home in a fear of not being able to control himself. In the last cue, Pamphagus expresses his doubt in Hylactor’s ability to hold his tongue. It seems the question of talking versus silence is resolved in favor of the latter. The reader might immediately decide that des Périers is taking Pamphagus’s side in preferring silence to talking.

In Des Périers’ representation, Hylactor and Pamphagus are animals with the ability to speak and some ability for reasoning. They find themselves in a curious transitional state, caught between two very different worlds: human and animal. They are not like other dogs because they talk, and therefore they cannot be understood within their own species; nor are they like humans, however, because they still retain some of their species’ attributes, such as their animals’ instincts.

**Appetite**

The idea that animals’ actions are based on their instincts and not on mental reflection has its origins in Aristotelian teaching. It is indeed in Aristotle’s writings that we find the conception of instinct, even if the Greek philosopher does not actually use the word. Aristotle argues in his work *On the Soul*, that plants, animals, and men possess different kinds of souls. Plants possess

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96 Des Périers, p. 95.
97 Des Périers, p. 96.
98 Des Périers, p. 98.
only the power of self-nutrition, while animals possess the same power in addition to the power of sensation.\textsuperscript{99} However, they do not have the power to think like men. There is a significant difference between perceiving something through the senses and understanding something. For Aristotle, the perception of specific objects cannot be erroneous and all animals can perceive different objects. Thinking can be true or false and “thought is found only where there is discourse of reason.”\textsuperscript{100} For Aristotle, the concept of thinking is complex and consists of two parts—imagination and judgment. While most animals—with the exception of ants, bees, and grubs—have imagination, they completely lack judgment or opinion, the formation of which requires belief. The only power of sensation is in disposition to animals which conducts their lives. Plutarch does not agree, however, that it is possible to have sensation “without some action of the intelligence.”\textsuperscript{101} As indicated, Aristotle does not use the word “instinct” in his work \textit{On the Soul}. The idea of instinct takes its full representation in Stoic philosophy.

The theory on the instinct or impulse that conducts animals’ lives is supposedly explained in the works of Zeno, the founder of Stoic philosophy, who wrote a treatise \textit{On Impulse, or on the Nature of Humans}. Another Greek stoic, Chrysippus, \textit{prima facie} addressed the same topic. However, none of their works survived and we can only have a general idea of their theories, which are described for the most part in \textit{Lives of Eminent Philosophers} by Diogenes Laertius. He explains that, according to Stoics, self-preservation is animals’ first impulse and it directs their lives. He quoted Chrysippus, who supposedly said in his book \textit{On Ends}: “The dearest thing to every animal is its own constitution and its consciousness thereof”; for it was not likely that nature should estrange the living thing from itself or that she should leave the creature she has made without either estrangement from or affection for its own constitution. We are forced then to conclude that nature in constituting the animal made it near and dear to itself; for so it comes to repel all that is injurious and give free access to all that is serviceable or akin to it.”\textsuperscript{102} According to Stoics, nature makes animals “follow the direction of impulse,” while “the rational beings” are led by reason which “supervenes to shape impulse scientifically.”

In \textit{Cymbalum Mundi}, Hylactor laments the loss of his and Pamphagus’ master and remarks: “C’estoit ung homme de bien que Acteon, et vray gentilhomme, car il aymoit bien les chiens. On n’eust ose frapper le moindre de nous, quoy qu’il eust faict. Et avec cela, que nous estions bien traictez!”\textsuperscript{103} Rosanna Gorris Camos observes the affinity between how dogs depict Acteon in \textit{Cymbalum Mundi} and the representation of a man of wisdom in des Périers’ poem \textit{L’homme de bien}.

However, even if we admit that this relationship exists, Acteon’s brief description is unlikely to lead us to this conclusion. The dogs only discuss how they were treated by their master without giving any other details concerning his life or moral qualities.

Despite Acteon’s exceptional qualities, which are praised by dogs, he does not escape the dreadful fate of being attacked and bitten to death by his own pack of dogs. Notwithstanding Des

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{The Complete Works of Aristotle, On the Soul}, p. 680.
\textsuperscript{101} Plutarch’s \textit{Moralia}, p. 329.
\textsuperscript{103} Bonaventure des Périers, p. 92.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Le Cymbalum Mundi}, actes du Colloque de Rome (3-6 novembre 2000), edites par Fracno Giacone, \textit{Le bain de Diane : mythe et transmutation dans le Cymbalum Mundi} (Librairie Droz S. A., Geneve, 2003), p. 180
Periers’ intention to dismiss the boundaries between humans, animals, and even gods in *Cymbalum Mundi* and his challenge of the Aristotelian vision of man’s superiority through language, he refuses to doubt animals’ instinct as the major force directing the course of their lives. Acting contrary to their favorable feelings toward their master and against their own interests, Hylactor and Pamphagus never doubt or regret their attack on Acteon. Following their natural instinct, the two dogs, along with others from the pack, are unable to recognize their master or make the right moral choice.

Hylactor and Pamphagus are aware of how their lives changed with the death of their master. Pamphagus says:

> Helas! Il est vray. Le maistre que je sers maintenant n’est pas tel, il s’en fault beaucoup, car il ne tient compte de nous, ny ses gens ne nous baillent rien à manger la pluspart du temps ; et toutes les foys que l’on nous trouve en la cuysine, on nous hue, on nous hare, on nous menace, on nous chasse, on nous bat tellement que nous sommes plus murdris et deschirez de coups que vieulx coquins. 105

The striking contrast between two kinds of lives with two different masters does not compel Hylactor and Pamphagus to apprehend the cause of their own unhappiness. They are the ones who bit to death their kind master, Acteon, but they fail to take responsibility for their actions. They both accept as their destiny the course of events in which they were active participants. The only reflection Hylactor offers to his inconsolable friend Pamphagus is to forget former joys, exercise patience, and hope for better days.

The dogs’ plaintive discussion of the dramatic death of their god master who loved dogs and their inability to even imagine behaving contrary to their canine nature reveals the complexity of their position in *Cymbalum Mundi*. Des Périers challenges the Aristotelian vision of animal irrationality by allowing animals to be full characters in his work by granting them speech and even rationality; however, he does not completely dismiss their animal nature or suggest animals are just like humans. By virtue of being animals, Hylactor and Pamphagus are still unable to distinguish right from wrong, to make a choice based on thinking. In other words, they do not quiet possess the same consciousness as humans. One might conclude that possessing the ability to speak does not in itself guarantee that the right choice will be made.

**Desire**

Animals are led by instincts; in the literature, they traditionally represent desire and force that are uncontrollable by reason. Juliana Schiesari states regarding Acteon’s myth that:

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*Cymbalum Mundi, Four very Ancient Joyous and Facetious Poetic Dialogues* by Bonaventure des Periers (Bookman Associates, INC., New York, 1965), “Alas! It’s true. The master I now serve isn’t like him. What a vast difference there is between the two. He doesn’t concern himself about us, nor do his servants, most of the time they provide us only with a bit of food. Whenever they find us in the kitchen, they make a rumpus, threaten to throw us out, and beat us till we’re as bruised and broken as a pack of villainous old rogues.”
What all versions of the Acteon myth present is … the figural slippage of the beast as metaphor of desire whereby it comes perversely to occupy at some point or other every single term of the relation: subject, object, and intermediary. To desire or to be desired is to become a beast, just as beasts in the intermediary role can in turn become either subjects or objects of desire.\(^{106}\)

In Rabelais’s *Pantagruel* dogs appear in two different scenes, the first of which is the chapter in which Pantagruel’s companion, Panurge, tells the story of his auspicious escape from the Turks. Taking pleasure in viewing the fire-stricken city, of which he himself is the initiator, Panurge is suddenly attacked by a thousand dogs that are attracted by his slightly burnt flesh. Similarly, a bit later a pack of dogs terrorizes the noble lady courted by Panurge. Even the descriptions of the dogs in these two episodes of *Pantagruel* appear to be very similar. We can read in the Turks’ episode that “sortirent plus de six, voire plus de treze cens et unze chiens, gros et menutz, tous ensemble de la ville fuyant le feu.”\(^{107}\) In the episode with the noble lady, it almost seems as if they are exactly the same dogs: “tous les chiens qui estoient en l’église accoururent à ceste dame, pour l’odeur des drogues que il avoit espandu sur elle. Petitz et grands, gros et menuz, tous y venoyent, tiris le membre et la sentens, et pissans par tout sur elle: c’estoyt la plus grande villanie du monde.”

In *Pantagruel*, the literary image of Turks as dogs from the first scene materializes into a real pack of dogs that follows Panurge outside the city. The dogs, attracted by the smell of the sex of the female dog, symbolize violent male desire in the episode with the noble lady. They represent the reality of men who, hiding behind the mask of the rules of courtesy, truly only wish for total power over the female body. Rabelais does not see a notable difference between these dogs, who openly express their physical needs, and men, who debate over the idea of “fins amor.” Even if the pack of dogs plays a similar role in both *Cymbalum Mundi* and *Pantagruel*, in both cases: they chase and attack someone; des Périers and Rabelais have different goals in portraying these dogs.

By contrast, in des Périers’ text, dogs chase and kill Acteon, who was a human who experienced cruel treatment after being turned into an animal. Acteon represents the human desire for cruelty and injustice. Later in the sixteenth century, in the essay *De la Cruaute*, Montaigne argues that nature provides man with the instinct of inhumanity, which predisposes him to be cruel toward other men and animals. Montaigne disapproves of any harm inflicted upon animals: “Nous devons la justice aux hommes, et la grace et la benignité aux autres creatures, qui en peuvent estre capables. Il y a quelque commerce entre elles et nous, et quelque obligation mutuelle.”\(^{108}\) It is not accidental that Montaigne mentions Plutarch earlier in the same essay. Plutarch was against hunting and even fishing, viewing these occupations as deriving amusement from animals’ sufferings. We can assume that des Périers is influenced to include Acteon’s myth as a result of reading Plutarch, who mentions Artemis immediately following his speech against hunting.\(^{109}\)

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Humankind through the animals’ eyes

One topic, consistently discussed by gods, humans, and animals in all four dialogues, is the nature of mankind. There are two characteristics mentioned with regards to humans in the dialogues. The first is men’s greed expressed in general preoccupation with money and the desire to steal everything that is available. The second is men’s inability to be satisfied with anything in life and being in a constant search for something new and unusual. In the first dialogue, immediately upon arrival in Athens in order to bind Jupiter’s book, Mercury becomes afraid of the Athenians, who have a reputation of charging people double price for any item, as they would charge him eight times the amount for binding a book. Two friends Curtalus and Byrphanes, after recognizing Mercury dressed exactly the way the poets describe him, immediately come up with idea of stealing a book from him. Besides the obvious financial advantage of selling an expensive book, they also hope to acquire glory and virtue by robbing the author of all thefts. Mercury, even before finding out he was robbed, complains how difficult it is to deal with all men.

The second dialogue starts with the discussion of the philosopher’s stone, which was scattered into a million grains of sand and which philosophers are trying to find - even a tiny piece of the stone gives the one who finds it the power of performing miracles. In the second dialogue, some people claim they found pieces of the stone, but Mercury does not believe them because no one has performed any miracles. One of the characters Trigabus claims he found fragments of the philosopher’s stone and now he can not only convert metals into gold, but also transform men and their opinion which is otherwise impossible to do. The dialogue ends with a reflection on mankind: Trigabus ponders and laments the idea of how foolish and unreasonable mankind is; they always make noise out of nothing and wish to accomplish the unachievable.

In the third dialogue, the defective opinion about humans comes from the horse Phlegon. It is very possible that des Périers employed the famous episode of a talking horse in Homer’s epic Iliad for the third dialogue of his book. As Heath describes this episode, one of Achilles’s immortal horses talks back to him in response to his angry threat in the previous scene. Achilles’s horse not only talks back to him but also pronounces his fate. It is also curious that Hera granted a temporary gift of speech to Achilles’s horse. As Heath notes, animals usually do not have the power of speech in Greek literature but they often function as “an instrument of fate.”

The horse Phlegon in Cymbalum Mundi claims his groom treats him very poorly, by starving him to death and disregarding the horse’s natural needs. Greed, as the most illustrative quality of humans manifests itself by Ardelio’s recognition of the talking horse’s selling value and his advice to Phlegon not to “ruffle a hair on his head.” Human’s obsession with everything phenomenal is evident as well in the dialogue. The talking horse produces an excessive animation in the city: people rush to the place where the horse is located and want to know what the horse has to say. Astonished Phlegon’s groom is at first not even able to comprehend what the horse is saying. However, a few seconds later, the groom realizes the horse is accusing him of a bad treatment. Mercury, who has restored the power of speech to the horse, is glad he was able to

stir up a commotion in the city that many people witnessed. Mercury is sure somebody will write a book in which this story will represent an embellished truth.

The discussion of humankind and the value of talking as a representative feature of men is the main topic of the fourth dialogue of Cymbalum Mundi. The dogs deliver the rather unflattering image of humans that was already demonstrated by the Gods and proven by men’s behavior in the first three dialogues. The dogs repeat the multifarious generalizations about human nature made by other characters in the previous dialogues. Humans talk all the time and find their glory through language. If humans hear or find something new, human curiosity is excessive. Very small, unimportant things amuse men tremendously. However, the constant search for novel, distant, and unachievable goals make human life miserable, because this desire always leaves them unsatisfied. In the contrast with the three previous dialogues, the fragments of ideas about humankind are distilled and presented clearly in the form of the two dogs’ dialogue. The dogs demonstrate a very clear and complete picture of mankind: they know exactly what to expect from humans and how to manipulate their knowledge of them for their own benefit. Roles between men and animals are completely reversed in the text. Animals are no longer a subjugated, silent species, created for men’s convenience. They comprehend human life without opening themselves to humans. Men become a tacit species under animals’ direct observation and they are absent to defend themselves in the dialogue.

The fourth dialogue of Cymbalum Mundi comes as a complete surprise for the reader. It is not obviously related to the first three dialogues and can be actually read as a separate story or one-act play with its own beginning and a valid conclusion. The major differences between the fourth dialogue and the preceding ones are the absence of the main character Mercury and the general reduction of other personages as well. In the fourth dialogue, there are only two dogs that never get interrupted or visited by humans or Gods. It is impossible to ignore the relative simplicity and clearness of the fourth dialogue. The author almost breaks his own promise given in the preface to the work, the address of Thomas du Clevier to his friend Pierre Tryocan, in which he says his work was not supposed to be a direct translation, word by word, from Latin. His intention is to give speakers thoughts and reflections instead of words.

Indeed, on the surface, the fourth dialogue seems to have very little mystery or understatement. Des Périers intentionally denies it has the complexity and ambiguity of the previous three dialogues. However, this contrast of the dogs’ dialogue with the previous ones, in which many characters are involved in intricate and confused relationships, is unlikely contingent. The appearance of a talking horse in the third dialogue acts as a preparation for the dogs’ conversation in the fourth dialogue, which is now pure animal speech without any human witnesses, a dialogue of two animals who are fully capable of understanding and appreciating each other and who share the same beliefs and desires. As a mockery of the Aristotelian belief in human superiority based on reason and the ability to distinguish between good and evil, Des Périers demonstrates that human relationships modeled after those of gods’ are often deprived of reasoning and morality while animals’ relationships are reasonable and ingenious. The form of dialogue involving only two animal interlocutors allows us to appreciate the simplicity and clarity of their relationship.
Form of the *Cymbalum Mundi*

The dialogue between two dogs in *Cymbalum Mundi* is interrupted by Pamphagus’ sudden urgency to leave, on a claim that somebody is calling him. He abruptly stops Hylactor attempting to tell Pamphagus several fables that he heard a while ago, but Pamphagus has no interest in listening to these fables because he is in a hurry and he already knows all of them. In the last moments of the dialogue, Pamphagus expresses his fear of Hylactor’s lack of power to keep his gift of speech secret. According to Pamphagus, once discovered, the phenomenon of a talking dog would quickly lead to Hylactor becoming the talk of the town among superficial and curious humans. Hylactor, in his turn, confirms Pamphagus’ fear by admitting his weakness of not being able to control himself; however, he promises to never speak to anyone again to avoid the temptation of revealing his secret. In spite of Hylactor’s assurance, in his final cue Pamphagus expresses his disbelief of Hylactor’s promise and concludes his monologue with an unflattering remark about men who are attracted to everything novel and strange.

This final moment in the dogs’ dialogue also completes the book of *Cymbalum Mundi*, leaving the bewildered reader alone with his uneasiness of such an ending and numerous unanswered questions. What could this absence of closure mean? Is the truth hidden, and is an astute reader supposed to guess through the clues given in the dogs’ dialogue? Or is it opened to different interpretations and is there no single truth that Des Périers wanted to tell to his reader? If there is no truth, then what was Des Périers’ goal in writing *Cymbalum Mundi* in the literary form of a dialogue, a genre that *a priori* searches for truth as the result of a debate between two opponents?

Without pretending universality, one might argue that most philosophical dialogues, beginning with Plato, are written in search of the truth to a philosophical question. The truth can be established by two opponents, first by presenting their often completely opposite opinions, second by producing different arguments in favor of one or the other opinion, and finally by accepting one of the opinions or a combination of both opinions as the right one. An author of a philosophical dialogue usually identifies his vision with one of the interlocutors; thus, the form of a dialogue allows the author to express his opinion and to share his ideas with the reader.

In other words, the dialogue form is often employed by philosophers in order to proffer their opinion and to foresee and dismiss possible objections to that opinion. In other words, dialogical form has a pedagogical purpose: it is used to educate the reader. Consequently, the reader of a dialogue expects to have access to the author’s philosophy, and subsequently acquiring the knowledge that the philosopher is trying to share with his readers.

Des Périers inherits the form of the dialogue from several classical authors. They are Plato, Cicero, and Lucian. However, during the Renaissance, the interest in distinctive classical approaches to writing dialogue by these three major classical authors was reflected differently in various European countries. While the Ciceronian model prevailed in Italy, in France and Spain, the satirical works of Lucian, mostly written in the form of dialogues, were broadly employed as models for writing in this genre used.\(^\text{111}\)

\(^{111}\) Cox, p. 22.
There is no evidence suggesting that Lucian’s works were known or read throughout the Middle Ages, but by the fifteenth century they had been rediscovered and introduced to the European public. Lucian was a successor of Plato. Later in antiquity, the Roman dialogue found its representation in Cicero’s works. Plato, Cicero, and Lucian each employed the dialogue format of dialogue with very different goals and visions of this genre in mind. Virginia Cox argues that in spite of Plato’s intention to describe the city of Athens, his dialogues were more philosophical than historical; he was to a greater degree concerned with “dramatic context.” Meanwhile, Cicero was seeking to depict realistic dialogues, taking place between historical figures in authentic surroundings. Historical verisimilitude played a crucial role in his writings, while it was not the primary focus for Plato.

In contrast to Plato and Cicero, Lucian put no effort into creating plausible situations. His dialogues were the result of pure flights of imagination; the invented conversations of invented characters. Jesus Gomez provides an accurate description of Lucianic dialogue when he says ninguno de los dialogues de Luciano tiene lugar en un marco especial o temporal explícito…Luciano no plantea sus dialogues como una discussion filosofica ni como una conversacion erudite, sino como un breve intercambio de opiniones en el que rara vez hay un maestro que ordene el desarollo del dialogo.

Indeed, it is enough to go through a few Lucianic dialogues to notice all of these characteristics. It does not matter if we examine his dialogue Charron or the Observers, in which Hermes shows Charon “a bird’s-eye view of mankind” and satirizes it, or if we look at the short Praise of the Fly, written in a great rhetorical form of encomia while talking about the insignificant subject of a fly. Both of these examples demonstrate the general strategy Lucian used in most of his works: the use of dialogue, as a convenient vehicle to present differing opinions on many topics without ever revealing his own.

Des Périers’ dialogue of the two dogs clearly does not follow Plato’s dialogical model of educating a reader. Even if we suppose that there is a pedagogical purpose in Des Périers’ dialogue, it is hidden so deeply that it is impossible to know what it is. There is no figure of a philosopher to educate the reader, or any kind of an authoritative voice that guides the reader to the truth. In most classical dialogues, one interlocutor is wiser and knows more than the other. This condition is partially observed in Cymbalum Mundi.

From the beginning of the dialogue between the two dogs, it is evident that Pamphagus knows more then Hylactor. He can read, and he explains to Hylactor how they both acquired the gift of talking by means of Acteaon’s tongue. However, the value of knowledge itself is immediately dismissed or, more precisely, challenged by Pamphagus himself who says “je vouldroye bien que je n’en sceusse ja tant, car de quoy sert cela à ung chien, ny le parler avec?” Knowledge as a category has a very limited importance; it is useful only within the

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114 Cymbalum Mundi, p. 94.
context of place and time, but becomes completely useless if it is taken out of its context. As we can see in the example of Pamphagus, knowledge (including reading) has no value for dogs; it is even harmful to them because it separates them from self-similar creatures.

In spite of his obvious skepticism regarding the general value of knowledge, Pamphagus continues to be depicted as intellectually superior to Hylactor. He is the one who takes control of the dialogue and who is not looking for humans’ admiration. He claims to know human nature very well, which he describes to be rather primitive and predictable. Moreover, it is Pamphagus who ends the dialogue and makes a conclusive cue. However, the important question is: if these details indicating Pamphagus’ superiority over Hylactor are enough to put him in the same rank of characters as Socrates, who is the educator? Even if we pause for a moment and accept that Pamphagus’ role is to explain, educate, and prevent Hylactor from making the mistake of talking to humans, we should not forget that Pamphagus is not a human, but a dog talking to another dog. This makes the pedagogical value of the dialogue very problematic. The dialogue is not intended for dog readers because as we know from the dialogue, Pamphagus is the only existing dog that can read. Consequently, the only possible reader of this dialogue is a human. In that case, the question persists: what pedagogical lesson does this dialogue teach a human reader? Is it even possible for a human reader to understand and use dogs’ philosophy? How does it change the role of a reader who becomes an involuntary witness to animals’ conversation? Is this dialogue between two dogs even intended to be heard by humans, or is it heard by mistake?

For some of these questions, we can attempt to obtain partial answers in the text itself. There are a few details in the text indicating that the dialogue is not designed to be heard by humans. First of all, Pamphagus clearly makes conscious efforts not to be noticed or heard by humans. At the end of the dialogue, he makes sure that his absence (due to the encounter with Hylactor) from Gargilius’ pack is not noticed. He asks Hylactor: “…il faut faire semblant d’avoir bien couru et travaillé et d’estre hors d’aleine.” In his last cue, Pamphagus reminds Hylactor: “Et n’oublie pas de bien ouvrir la bouche et tirer la langue, affin de faire les mines d’avoir bien couru.” Finally, as mentioned earlier, Pamphagus is very concerned about Hylactor’s inability to keep his gift secret from humans. The dialogue between the two dogs takes place exclusively in the presence of only two participants. This distinguishes it from the first three dialogues, including the dialogue in which the horse starts talking. There are no witnesses to the dogs’ dialogues, and if we believe in Hylactor’s promise to Pamphagus to never speak again, then according to the original design, the dialogue is not heard and never will be reported to any human.

How then we can explain the role of a reader in this secret dialogue taking place in an undetermined setting, about which we have no knowledge and that we cannot imagine because we are not given any description of it (except perhaps that it is close to a forest, taking the fact that Gargilius’ pack is going hunting into consideration)? If the dialogue is not intended to be heard by humans, then the reader is not allowed into the world of speaking animals and he accesses it only by accident. At the same time, we know that dogs are given the gift of speech by

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115 Des Périers, p. 96 “…we’ll have to pretend to be out of breath from all the running during the chase.”
116 Des Périers, p. 98 “…don’t forget to pen your mouth and stick out your tongue to give the impression of having run hard.”
the goddess Diana, and that the dogs talk to each other by means of human language. In that case, why are they given this communication tool used by a population that is not invited into their conversation and is unaware of it? Further, why do the dogs need a third party mediator to comprehend each other?

Perhaps the answers to these questions can be related to the idea that Des Périers chose to imitate Lucian’s dialogical form. Lucian is considered to have invented a new literary genre using a comic dialogue, which relies on traditional philosophical dialogue to present humor.\textsuperscript{117} It is unlikely that Lucian had a pedagogical purpose in mind when writing his dialogues: rather, he just wanted to amuse his readers. After Lucian’s work was rediscovered during the Renaissance, his light form of dialogue, which consists of questioning an opponent and presenting various opinions in a humorous way, became very popular in France and that was probably the major reason why Des Périers chose Lucian as his model. At the same time, Lucian’s approach to using dialogue corresponds quiet well with Des Périers’s purpose of talking about serious topics in a humorous way without revealing his own point of view. On the one hand, Des Périers’s dialogues indeed seek to entertain and puzzle the reader. Des Périers clearly expresses his purpose in writing in one of his other works entitled \textit{Novel Pastimes and Merry Tales}, in which he advocates for living a pleasant life full of joy. In the preamble to the same work, he makes reference to Socrates’ way of life:

\begin{quote}
Let me tell you that I don’t believe what they say about Socrates, that he was without passions. Not even Plato not Xenophon could make me believe it. And even if it were true, do you think I’d praise that great severity, rust-icy, grumpiness, seriousness? I would praise a lot more a man of our day who was called the joker because he was so jolly in life.\textsuperscript{118}
\end{quote}

At the same time, it does not seem fair to limit Des Périers’s intention to entertain his reader without considering his desire to instruct his readers or without at least reflecting on his motives for doing so.

Following Lucian, Des Périers also chose to include a variety of different characters in the four dialogues in his \textit{Cymbalum Mundi}. Some of these characters are gods, others are mortal human beings. Of the different topics that Des Périers addresses in \textit{Cymbalum Mundi}, one is strikingly similar to a topic presented in Lucian’s dialogues. Both men consistently portray humanity as being greedy, superficial, unreasonable, and careless. “What a troubled existence ill-starred humanity does have, with its kings and gold ingots and sacrifices and battles – and never giving a thought to Charon!”\textsuperscript{119} exclaims one of Lucian surprised characters, who cannot believe that humans, whose life is so short and troublesome, can be so preoccupied with small things without ever thinking and preparing for their death.

With all the things that clearly demonstrate Lucian’s influence on Des Périers, the idea of animals presenting their own philosophy, nevertheless, belongs solely to Des Périers. Although

\textsuperscript{117} Lucian, \textit{Selected Dialogues}, translated and an Introduction and Notes by Desmond Costa (Oxford, University Press, 2005), p. IX.
Lucian wrote numerous dialogues, it is not possible to find even one instance in which animals talk exclusively to each other and discuss their animal life by comparing it to humans, nor can we find any indication of how the animals challenge the value of language. However, it would be erroneous to say that Lucian was not interested in using animals or that he did not include them in his dialogues. He simply had different reasons and motivations for doing so. Lucian’s dialogue, entitled *The Cock*, in which there are two characters—a cock and his master Micyllus—is very interesting in relation to Des Périers, because it shows the degree to which Des Périers was familiar with Lucian’s writings. At the beginning of Lucian’s *The Cock*, Micyllus discovers that his cock can speak. That scene is a very similar to the last section of Des Périers’ third dialogue in *Cymbalum Mundi*, in which Statius is astounded by the fact that his horse is talking. In *The Cock*, Micyllus reacts the following way when his cock addresses him: “God of portens! Heracles preserve us from the evil to come! My cock has spoken with a human voice.” Later on, he continues: “Am I dreaming still, or is this bird really talking to me? - In Hermes’ name then, good creature, out with your better reason; I will be mum, never fear; it shall go no further. Why, who would believe the story, when I told him that I had it from a cock?” In *Cymbalum Mundi*, we read: “Qu’est-ce à dire cecy? Par la vertubieu! mon cheval parle!” Later, echoing Micyllus’s cue from Lucian’s dialogue, Statius says: “Par la morbieu ! il ne fut oncques parlé de chose si estrange que ceste-cy. Bonnes gens, je vous prie, venez ouyr ceste merveille, autrement vous ne le croiryez pas. Par le sambieu ! mon cheval parle.” In addition to being stunned by the fact that an animal is talking, both characters, Lucian’s Micyllus and Des Périers’s Statius, express the desire to share their knowledge about talking animals with others. The difference between the two dialogues is that Micyllus has no witness to the event and he knows nobody will believe him, while Statius calls other people to witness the miracle of the talking horse and, immediately, another character named, Ardelio hears the horse talk.

However, apart from the presence of a talking cock and a human character expressing his astonishment about that occurrence, Lucian’s and Des Périers’s dialogues are very different. Lucian is not interested in presenting animals or in talking about them. Even if at some point in the dialogue Lucian touches very briefly on the general question of animal life by admitting through the confession of the cock that an animal’s life is much easier than a human’s life, his intention in choosing a cock as a character is very different from Des Périers’s. Lucian is not interested in the animals themselves nor he is seeking to reflect on their relationship to humans. His ultimate goal is make fun of Pythagoras’ philosophy, which posits that people should not eat animal meat because, after they die, their human souls might reincarnate into a body of an animal and, by eating meat, they might accidentally eat one of their ancestors.

Despite the fact that Des Périers work bears an external resemblance to Lucian’s dialogical form and borrows certain characters from his predecessor’s work. Des Périers had a different intention for embracing animals in *Cymbalum Mundi*. Lucian aimed at employing animals (in addition to *The Cock*, Lucian also wrote *Lucius or the Ass.*) as a rhetorical vehicle to entertain his readers; he also sought to satirize different philosophical teachings and to challenge certain human opinions on a variety of different subjects. Des Périers chose to write philosophic-

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121 Des Périers, p. 86.
satirical dialogues in which he was seeking to draw attention to the animals themselves, to
explore their relationship to humans and to question humanity’s certitude with regard to the
power of language. He was puzzled by the solid belief in the superiority of humans based solely
on their ability to speak, while for him, even the question of what is more valuable – talking or
silence – had not yet been satisfied.
Chapter 3

In Quest of the Definition of Knowledge: the Question of Human Rationality Versus Animals’ Ignorance in Montaigne’s Les Essais

« Il n’est desir plus naturel que le desir de cognoissance. Nous essayons tous les moyens qui nous y peuvent mener. Quand la raison nous faut, nous y employons l’expérience. Qui est un moyen de beaucoup plus foible et plus vil. Mais la verité est chose si grande, que nous ne devons desdaigner aucune entremise qui nous y conduise. La raison a tant de formes, que nous ne scavons à laquelle nous prendre. L’expérience n’en a pas moins. La consequence que nous voulons tirer de la conference des evenements, est mal seure, d’autant qu’ils sont tousjours dissemblables. Il n’est aucune qualité si universelle, en cette image des choses, que la diversité et varieté. »

Montaigne, De L’Experience122

Introduction

The presence and representation of animals in Des Periers’s Cymbalum Mundi, discussed in the previous chapter of this project, can be debated by some scholars. The obscurity of the text itself has encouraged some critics to explain it as a continuation of medieval allegorical tradition, or considered it anthropocentric in nature. By contrast, Montaigne’s genuine interest in animals themselves and their relationship to men cannot be denied by any critic or a reader well acquainted with the essays. In such essays, as De la Cruauté the second part of which is entirely devoted to animals, or Apologie de Raimond Sebonde, Montaigne fully elaborates on this subject. Montaigne argues in De la Cruauté that nature provided man with an instinct of inhumanity that predisposes him to be cruel toward other men and animals. Additionally, he disapproves of any harm inflicted upon animals, by saying “Nous devons la justice aux hommes, et la grace et la benignite aux autres creatures, qui en peuvent estre capables. Il y a quelque commerce entre elles et nous, et quelque obligation mutuelle.”123 In the following essay, Apologie de Raimond Sebonde, Montaigne further develops the subject of animals and consecrates the whole part of Apologie to the discussion on animals. But before we can explain Montaigne’s philosophy on animals, we should ask “Why are there animals in Montaigne’s Essais?”

123 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 457.
As we saw in the previous chapters of this project, the subject of animals became very important in the sixteenth century due to two major factors: the new knowledge brought about by the geographical exploration and the rediscovery of classical texts in which there were discussions on animals. Montaigne obviously could not remain unresponsive to these processes taking place in his time. Therefore, the question “Why are there animals in his Essais?” perhaps has to be reformulated and we should ask instead: “Did Montaigne adopt certain radical position towards animals and their relationship with men, the position that was quite different from many or most scholars of his time?” If we answer positively to this question, we then should ask the second question: “why?”

In his interdisciplinary work on men/animal relationship during the Early Modern period, Nathaniel Wolloch argues anthropocentrism was the major foundation of Western cosmology at the time. He says: “Anthropocentrism did not just take the form of specific references to ancient and medieval authorities. It was, first and foremost, a general cultural attitude which was basically taken for granted.” In other words, Wolloch believes the Early Modern period is the time when anthropocentrism flourished more than in antiquity, when Aristotelian ideas about animals were broadly spread among scholars, or even more than in the Middle Ages, when Aristotelian ideas about animals became a foundation of the Christian religion. In the Middle Ages, animals were employed as the most common allegory for the representation of human virtues and flaws. Interestingly enough, in these conditions of all-embracing anthropocentrism, Wolloch admits the presence of pro-animal philosophers who, according to him, “faced a difficult struggle, since they were challenging a fundamental and long-standing philosophical tradition.” Wolloch explains that these pro-animal philosophers were desperately looking for any elements of support in the past culture, and many of them addressed the classical ideas of someone like Plutarch, who propagated animal rationality, in hopes of securing justification for their own ideas. Wolloch says the following about the phenomenon: “Theriophily in its various manifestations became ever more popular in early modern Europe, mainly as a literary device making use of animal stories to chastise people, but also occasionally exemplifying authentic pro-animal views.” In this citation, Wolloch is very cautious in choosing words to describe the manifestation of theriophily in the early modern Europe. Even though he cannot completely deny it, he diminishes it as much as he can by insisting on the continuation of medieval allegorical tradition of animals’ usage. By briefly touching on different philosophers who demonstrated their pro-animal views, such as Pierre Charron or Justus Lipsius, Wolloch insists on the fact that among them there were no pure adherents of theriophily. Interestingly enough, Wolloch even mentions des Périers’s fourth dialogue in Cymbalum Mundi, which features two conversing dogs and a speaking horse in a third dialogue. However, he sees these scenes as isolated pro-animal discussions in the general anthropocentric framework. The only exception Wolloch discusses who does not fit into this portrayal of the man-animal relationship of the period is Montaigne, whom Wolloch admits was a radical representative of Early Modern pro-animal thought that featured a philosophical belief in the equal status of animals with regards to men and an ethical

124 See the introduction of this dissertation.
126 Wolloch, Nathaniel, p. 30.
belief in the fair treatment of animals. Wolchoł’s conclusion is Montaigne holds a peculiar position with regards to animals within the atmosphere of all-consuming anthropocentrism.

Despite the Montaigne’s distinctive thoughts on the man-animal relationship, critical studies have generated rather limited reflections on this topic. Montaigne’s scholars are almost never solely interested in animals as a separate topic in the essays. They often talk about nature and man and only talk about animals in the essays when they have to mention animals with regards to other topics. We will briefly look at a few influential studies on Montaigne.

Among various topics discussed by Starobinski in his book Montaigne en mouvement, an important critical analysis of Montaigne’s work, the subject of animals as a separate topic never comes up. Starobinski is obviously interested and attempts to interpret Montaigne’s position with regards to nature in order to comprehend what it means for a man to live according to it, but the topic of nature, on the contrary to what one might expect, is never discussed in relation to animals. Starobinski believes the question of nature is very complex, but this complexity is reserved strictly for men. He says the following about human life: “Nous aurions pu croire que notre séparation d’avec la Vérité transcendante nous laissait en proie à l’arbitraire et à l’aveuglement; or, voici qu’une loi s’énonce, non par-delà notre existence, mais à l’intérieur de celle-ci. La Nature nous inclut en elle. Elle est active en nous.”

There is a definite line between man and all other creatures in Montaigne, according to Starobinski. Man in Starobinski’s interpretation of Montaigne has a different, contradictory nature, but this contradiction and quest for a balance between finding nature inside himself and the power to contravene nature makes him opposed to and, by consequence, superior to others. Starobinski poses the rhetorical question:

L’homme n’est-il pas, de tous les animaux, le seul qui ait pouvoir de refuser et de contredire la nature?... ‘la nature’ de l’homme consiste paradoxalement dans la faculté rationnelle de contredire et de figurer le donné naturel, de particulariser l’universel. Nous ne serons peut-être pas plus heureux, quand nous voudrons laisser faire la nature, que lorsque nous souhaitions en apercevoir le vrai visage.

In other words, Starobinski is convinced Montaigne is seeking to establish “dignitas hominis”. Very little is said about animals in another influential work on Montaigne Rigolot’s Les metamorphoses de Montaigne. Rigolot briefly touches the question of nature when he analyses Montaigne’s essay Du Repentir. Rigolot defines the verb “se repentir” (to repent) in Montaigne’s work as a search for the absolute determinant of human life, rejecting any temporality and instability. Any finished, absolute form contradicts Montaigne’s whole notion of human and universal existence as something artificial and unachievable. We read in Montaigne: “Le monde n’est qu’une branloire perenne: Toutes choses y branlent sans cesse, la terre, les rochers du Caucase, les pyramides d’Egypte: et du branle public, et du leur. La constance même n’est autre chose qu’un branle plus languissant.” According to Rigolot, the whole notion of repentance is artificial, contradictory to nature and, therefore, has to be rejected. Artificiality is associated with culture. Rigolot gives an example of the Latin language that Montaigne consciously chooses not

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127 Starobinski, Jean, Montaigne en mouvement (Gallimard, 1982), p. 258.
128 human dignity
129 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 844-845.
to employ, as it is “pas [sa langue] maternelle.” Rigolot argues: “Dans la dernière couche du text, Montainge revient même sur cette intrusion fortuite de la “nature” dans le language de la “culture”. 130 In the moment of extreme emotions, Latin words cannot be used because they do not come from nature; they represent culture.

Elsewhere in Les metamorphoses de Montaigne, Rigolot discusses the notion of knowledge. He says:

On a fait remarquer que ce mot “branle” etait “un des termes les plus frequents et les plus significatifs “des Essais”. Comme Pythagore, au dernier livre des Metamorphoses, Montaigne signale par la conception “heraclitienne” du monde, le sujet de la connaissance etant toujours changeant et incertain. Il faut pourtant revenir à l’origine socioculturelle de ce vocabulaire pour en apprécier la signification dans le texte des Essais.131

What is pertinent to our argument is Rigolot’s comparison of Montaigne to Pythagoras, who shared the Heraclitian concept of the world governed by a law of change, in which knowledge together with many other categories is a very unstable.

In contrast to the two works on Montaigne, Thierry Gontier’s book De l’homme à l’animal offers a rather comprehensive analysis of the subject of animals by examining Montaigne’s and Descartes’ arguments on the nature of them and the relationship between “l’animalité” and “l’humanité.”132 But at the same time, it is not again a discourse on animals, because Gontier is convinced that any discourse on animals unavoidably and sometimes unconsciously becomes a treatise on man: animal nature is always defined in its proximity to and divergence from human nature. The interpretation of animal and human natures is never possible when including one without the other, for it always requires a comparison of the two. In this sense, man seems to be the key to interpreting animal actions and the object of the discourse on animals. Gontier states in the introduction that he is not seeking to provide a zoological or biological history of animals and is only interested in the subject of them to the extent of their relations to man. The examination of the nature of animals will help him construct his philosophical argument on Montaigne’s and Descartes’ visions of man. Gontier’s research goal is to elaborate what exactly modern philosophers rejected in the traditional vision of the man-animal relationship (primarily attributed to Aristotle) and what they sustained and perhaps slightly transformed from that original argument.

In The Political Philosophy of Montaigne, David Schaefer allots a specific role to Apologie de Raimond de Sebond, by claiming that the essay “is more systematic and serious in its tone than many of the other chapters, it is integrally related to the rest of the book as the core to the outer surface.”133 Schaefer provides a helpful summary of Montaigne’s views on the parity of animals with the human species: he lists numerous animal qualities and characteristics that make animals not only equal but even superior to man in Montaigne’s argument. Schaefer

130 Rigolot, p. 109.
131 Rigolot, p. 203.
emphasizes Montaigne’s defiance of the uniqueness of human speech that was historically the
trump of those who believed in man’s ascendancy.

Schaefer dedicates two chapters of his book to animals: chapter two is “The “Apology,”
Sebond and His Book; Human Beings and Animals” and chapter eight is “From God to Beast:
Montaigne’s Transvaluation of Value,” but his discourse on animals in those chapters is reduced
to the very minimum. He chooses to replace Montaigne’s use of “animaux” with “beasts” which
might be explained by the general ambiguity of the two terms. By taking into consideration the
distinction between these two terms, offered by Gontier, one might clearly see Schaefer’s attitude
toward man-animal relationship in his choice of the term “beast” over “animal”. These details
suggest Schaefer genuinely believes in Montaigne’s use of animals in the traditional way, that is,
as the tacit instrument of challenging mankind and criticizing the merit of human reason. Schaefer
finds Montaigne’s examples of the cleverness and morality of “beasts” to be undoubted
exaggerations based on unreliable stories taken from Pliny, Herodotus, and Plutarch, the classical
authors who did not witness any such events. Schaefer is certain that Montaigne could not be
serious by assigning reason and free will to animals but was instead seeking to question human
behavior that was not often governed or motivated by those categories.

The brief analysis of several critical works on Montaigne reveals that critics have paid
little attention to animals in the Essais. For the most part, these critics claim that animals are
present in human life and they are nothing more than another topic, among many others,
mentioned in Montaigne’s work. Their presence is conditioned by the necessity to use them as a
vehicle to discuss men and human nature, or as the counterpoint against which to compare men.
To sum up, philosophers do not seem to believe Montaigne developed his own philosophy on
animals worth examining. Therefore, our goal in the next part of this chapter shall be to focus on
the subject matters of animals in Essais to crystalize his philosophy on animals.

In a Shadow of Animals’ Excellence

It becomes clear very early in the essay Apologie de Raymond Sebonde that the generally
accepted post-classical belief of Western civilization in men’s supremacy over animals is
completely defeated in Montaigne’s philosophy. According to Montaigne, this centuries-old
opinion is nothing more than a creation of men’s own sick imagination. There is no real evidence
suggesting that man is a master of the universe and that everything in nature is created for his
service. Montaigne argues that this erroneous confidence in human superiority is mostly based
on the presence of reason in men, which is considered to be a unique human attribute completely
denied to animals. It is also based on the peculiarity of human nature that tends to reject
everything new, unknown, and, by consequence, incomprehensible. This human propensity to

134 Gontier claims that animal “est le genre commun des vivants capable de sensation, genre auquel
appartient l’homme; la bête se définit par son absence d’intelligence, et donc en opposition à l’homme.
L’homme est un animal, mais il n’est pas une bête.” Gontier, Thierry, De l’homme à l’animal, p.14.
refuse everything incomprehensible that animals represent for men is obviously rather a condemnation of humankind’s own imperfection.

Founding his opinion on the direct observations of different non-human animals, described by a number of classical authors, Montaigne sees no evidence of human superiority over animals. He claims that, as the conclusion of this direct observation, it is evident that animals resemble man in many areas. There is nothing unique about man that can raise him above other species. There is nobody but man himself, by virtue of his own blindness and monstrous vanity – and certainly without any reasons – who has assigned himself this exceptional status of a superior being, a status neither proven by God nor accepted by other species living on earth. It is only in the human imagination that man is significantly different from other beings. In reality he is neither better nor worse than non-human animals, but rather very similar to them. He says:

"J’ay dict tout cecy, pour maintenir ceste ressemblance, qu’il y a aux choses humaines: et pour nous ramener et joindre à la presse. Nous ne sommes ny au dessus, ny au dessous du reste: tout ce qui est sous le Ciel, dit le sage (Lucrèce), court une loy et fortune pareille... Il y a quelque difference, il y a des ordres et des degrez: mais c’est soubs le visage d’une mesme nature... Il faut contraindre l’homme, et le renger dans les barrières de ceste police. Le miserable n’a garde d’enjamber par effect au delà: il est entravé et engagé, il est assubjecty de pareille obligation que les autres creatures de son ordre, et d’une condition fort moyenne, sans aucune prerogative, praeeexcellence vraey et essentielle. Celle qu’il se donne par opinion, et par fantasie, n’a ny corps ny goust."

In this citation, Montaigne invites us to ponder on the conditions of man which are no different to other creatures living on earth. It is interesting that Montaigne uses the word “miserable” to describe man. For man is miserable not because of his pitiable living condition but “miserable” to be blind to believe in his singularity in comparison to other creatures on earth. It is useless for man to fight to prove his exceptionality because it is against nature. Thus, misery is a misery of perception, not condition. Montaigne quotes Lucretius: “Indupedita suis fatalibus omnia vinculis. (All [things] entangled in the fateful trammels of their own being.)” and “res quaeque suo ritu procedit et omnes foedere naturae certo discrimina servant.” (.each of these things comes forth after its own manner, and all preserve their separate marks by a fixed law of nature.) In these citations, Lucretius wants to say that every creature and organism is predestined to follow the circle of life, which it cannot escape. Nature gave to everybody and everything their own specific role and cycle, which they must sustain. They cannot attempt to change something unmodifiable. By citing Lucretius in this paragraph, Montaigne wants to say that man also has his specific cycle; he cannot be different from animals or any other things because man is a part of the same order, which makes him automatically subjugated to the same laws introduced by nature.

Montaigne explains that there are far more differences between various men than between a given man and a given animal. Man is a part of nature in which everything is equally

135 Montaigne, p. 481.
137 Titi Lucreti Cari, p. 481.
balanced and envisaged according to God’s design. If one species is given advantageous characteristics, another species, deprived of those characteristics, acquires something else instead. In this context, reason as a representative man’s characteristic, cannot be a characteristic assuming a sign of superiority and God’s favoritism, as many believe, but more like an alternative to other characteristics that man lacks (for example, a lion’s strength or a dog’s sense of smell). Therefore, reason completely loses its exceptional status. Instead, it becomes just one of many other possible characteristics of living beings on earth. To choose reason and praise over other characteristics now become absurd.

If reason is just one among many hundreds or even thousands possible features of different species, one might imagine there are some more valuable skills or qualities that can be found in different species on earth, the qualities that man lacks. Based on the presence these important qualities for their survival or organization of life, Montaigne argues that in many areas certain species of non-human animals surpass man. He says in the *Apologie de Raimond de Sebonde*: “Nous reconnoissons assez en la pluspart de leurs ouvrages, combien les animaux ont d’excellence au dessus de nous, et combien nostre art est foible à les imiter.” Montaigne explains that the major advantage animals have over man is that through nature they achieve great results in the organization of their lives; man either does not accomplish the same or achieves them by the force of art. Montaigne supports his vision by long citation from Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* who argues that in difference with animals, man is born totally helpless and needs various supports and years of learning before he can take care of himself.

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Then again, the child, like a sailor tossed ashore from the cruel waves, lies naked on the ground, dumb, lacking all help for life, when first nature has cast him forth by travail form his mother’s womb into the coasts of light, and he fills the place with woful wailing, as is but right for one for whom it remains in life to pass through so much trouble. But the diverse flocs and herds grow up and the wild beasts, not to have they need of rattles, not must there be spoken to any of them the fond and broken prattle of the fostering nurse, nor do they seek diverse garments to suit the season of heaven, nay, and they have no need of weapons or lofty walls, whereby to protect their own, since for all of them the earth itself brings forth all things bounteously, and nature, the quaint artificer of things.”
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In this description of a newborn baby, Lucretius summarizes his vision of man who is not only born incapable to take care of himself, has to rely on others, and learn many things, but also whose doleful weep signifies his destiny of someone who “in vita restet transire malorum.” By contrast, animals are not in need of help from others, they need neither clothes nor arms to protect their possessions, because they are given everything by nature.

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138 Montaigne, Gallimard, p.477.
139 Lucreti, De Rerum Natura, Libri VI (Ex Officina Academiae Scientiarul FRSS, MCMXLV, 1945), pp. 294-296
140 remains/has to go through misery of life
Montaigne goes through the long list of different qualities and skills to prove that animals share many human qualities and sometimes certain kinds of animals even surpass man. Montaigne claims animals have intelligence which is, in some species, equal to human, or they have a different kind of intelligence that is more advantageous for survival of their species. Animals possess intelligence and all sorts of different knowledge that exist in them naturally and not as the result of any kind of training. Their life serves as an exemplum of a perfectly regulated and complex society where everything is well thought through and carefully observed, a society which man mistakenly refuses to recognize as equal to his. Montaigne provides many examples of animal behavior to demonstrate that animal actions are not a sequence of senseless, automatic movements programmed in them by nature, but are the result of profound reflection on their part. These vivid examples demonstrating intelligence in animals stir his admiration. His first example, the perfectly organized society of bees – can hardly provoke any objection from us. Montaigne inquires: “Est-il police reglée avec plus d’ordre, diversifiée à plus de charges et d’offices, et plus constamment entretenue, que celle des mouches à miel?” Montaigne cannot understand how reason can be denied to animals. If we were to only take bees as an example, we see a perfectly constructed order that cannot be achieved without planning and reflection on their part. In the example of bees, society and reason go together. Animals’ superiority over men manifests itself in animals’ productions and does not require human approval.

At the same time, it would be foolish to assert that all animal skills are acquired from nature and are never learned. Animals are very capable of learning new things that they can certainly improve through practice and education. Montaigne uses the Aristotelian example to illustrate that animals are no different from men, that they are intelligent and capable of learning. Montaigne says: “Aristote tient que les rossignols instruisent leurs petits à chanter, et y emploient du temps et du soing: d’où il advient que ceux que nous nourrissons en cage, qui n’ont point eu loisir d’aller à l’escole soubs leurs parents, perdent beaucoup de la grace de leur chant.” Montaigne wants to say here that nightingale is no different from a man and learn from its parents.

Montaigne also employs other examples, for the most part from Plutarch, to confirm the original premise that there are few differences between animals and men; consequently, man is not above or below animals, he is just like them. He suggests that in order to stop rejecting animals’ intelligence and their similarity to us, we should carefully examine animals as we would study remote countries and cultures we do not understand – but still admire their originality.

Montaigne reminds us on multiple occasions that men have very a limited ability to comprehend animals’ lives and communications. Therefore, men are desperately looking for patterns of behavior in animals that remind them of their own. While there is no certain explanation for many examples of animal behavior, men have a tendency to explain them in familiar terms. Hence, Montaigne suggests that it is very possible that certain species of animals participate in religion just like men do. He uses the example of elephants, who can often be seen

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141 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 476.
142 Bird nest constructions are another example of this kind. Birds have a unique ability to choose the right place for their dwelling and they also choose the right material to build it. The same goes for spiders, whose perfect construction of a web cannot be done without profound consideration.
143 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 487.
raising their trunks and fixing their eyes towards the sun, similar to men raising their arms in
prayer. Montaigne says:

Nous pouvons aussi dire, que les elephans ont quelque participation de religion,
d’autant qu’après plusieurs ablutions et purifications, on les voit haussans leur
trompe, comme des bras; et tenans les yeux fichez vers le Soleil levant, se planter
long temps en mediation et contemplation, à certaines heures du jour; de leur
propre inclination, sans instruction et sans precepte. Mais pour ne voir aucune
telle apparence ès autres animaux, nous ne pouvons pourtant establir qu’ils soient
sans religion, et ne pouvons prendre en aucune part ce qui nous est caché.144 145

Here, Montaigne is not really interested in convincing his reader that elephants practice religion
just as man does. Instead, he insists there is no way man can know for sure if elephants, and
perhaps other animals, have religion or not because man has no means to obtain that kind of
knowledge. The only reason why man might be inclined to believe that elephants and not other
species have religion is because elephants’ actions remind man of his own gestures during prayer.
However, it is possible that other animals practice religion as well, but man has no access to
visual signs that would represent that practice. It is equally possible that animals do not have
religion and that elephants’ behaviors mean something else inaccessible and inexplicable to man.
Anything is possible, and man is never in a position to know or judge other species.

Montaigne suggests that animals share other attributes of human life, such as the capacity
for feeling attachment to other animals or men. In some species these feelings can sometimes be
even more strongly expressed than in men. There are cases when domestic animals, mostly dogs,
voltarily choose death over life after their owner dies. These examples demonstrate the
stronger attachment of certain animals to their owners than between men. Not only do animals
become attached to men but they also become attached to each other. Montaigne believes that
attachment has nothing to do with reason in both men and animals: “Il y a certaines inclinations
daffectation, qui naissent quelquefois en nous, sans le conseil de la raison, qui viennent d’une
temerité fortuite, que d’autres nomment sympathie : les bestes en sont capables
comme nous.”146

The key word in this citation, “comme nous”, seems to emphasize animals’ resemblance to man,
but at the same time, the characterization of that resemblance is problematic for Montaigne. Just
before the citation, taken as an epigraph to this chapter, Montaigne indicates that in search of
truth, man first relies on reason. Reason fails because it is always shifting and practiced from
multiple perspectives, making it impossible to determine the idea that leads to ultimate truth.
When man gives up on reason, he clutches at experience, which is even weaker than reason
because all events representing experience are dissimilar, regardless of their apparent

144 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 491.
145 Another example suggesting that animals might observe certain religious rituals is the ants’ supposed
burial of their dead. Montaigne retells this example as described in Cleanthes. Supposedly, ants leave their
anthill and meet with other ants from another anthill to discuss the procedure of burial, just as men do.
They do a few trips from one anthill to another, trying to come to an agreement. Finally, one group of ants
brings a worm to the other group as if paying a ransom for the deceased one. When the exchange is
accomplished, one group of ants carries away a worm on their backs, leaving the body of a dead ant to
another group. Nevertheless, Montaigne reminds us that all these observations are no more than conjecture
by men. Men are not in a position to communicate with animals, to comprehend their lives, and, by
consequence, cannot even have any opinion about them.
146 Montaigne, p. 495.
resemblance. There are no parameters or criteria that can be used to identify similarity among the objects of phenomena. Therefore, Montaigne defines the resemblance of events as their dissimilitude. We can conclude that if animals resemble man (“comme nous”), then in reality they are very different.

Animals are able to choose of their friends and their opposite sex. This ability for choice suggests \textit{a priori} an involvement of reflection or reason. Animals are not exempted from negative emotions characteristic of men, such as jealousy or envy. It is important for Montaigne to find and demonstrate the presence of human qualities and life style in animals in order to approximate them in a hope of better understanding and compassion on part of man.

Montaigne goes further by providing different examples that demonstrate that animals can even surpass men in gratitude and fidelity. He retells the story described by Apion, who witnessed the unusual case of a lion’s gratitude to a slave who previously had saved his life. Among other honorable qualities to which animals are not strangers are magnanimity and clemency. When a big dog was sent from the Indies to King Alexander, and was offered different animals to fight, he only accepted a lion because only a lion was worthy to fight with him. In another example, a tiger chose starvation for three days rather than eat a child put into his cage. By sharing many human qualities, animals can equally either surpass men or sometimes even exhibit qualities that men lack. For example, some animals have powers of prognostication or an ability to choose the healthiest of their offspring.

There is another area in which Montaigne is quite certain that animals surpass men, it is in the moderation of their desires. Montaigne divides all desires into three categories: natural and necessary (such as eating and drinking); natural and unnecessary (such as intercourse); and finally, neither natural nor necessary (such as, for example, exquisite food). There are no non-human animals that exercise this last category of desires. Men are the ones who invent and obsess over superfluous and artificial desires. Even if sometimes animals exhibit an excess of desires, overall their desires are much more regulated and self-controlled than for humans.

A special place in Montaigne’s comparison of animals and men occupies his discussion of war. Montaigne says the following about the phenomenon of war:

\begin{quote}  
Quant à la guerre, qui est la plus grande et pompeuse des actions humaines, je sçaurois volontiers, si nous nous en voulons servir pour argument de quelque prerogative, ou au rebours pour tesmoignage de nostre imbecillité et imperfection : comme de vray, la science de nous entre–deffaire et entretuer, de ruiner et perdre nostre propre espece, il semble qu’elle n’a pas beaucoup devoquy se faire desirer aux bestes qui ne l’ont pas.\footnote{147}
\end{quote}

The main thrust of Montaigne’s premise is that there is no other species except men who engage themselves in exhausting wars with the purpose of exterminating the representatives of their own species. While not all non-human animals can be completely exempted from fighting each other (Montaigne gives the example of the impetuous encounters of honeybees), nothing can compare to how “furiously” men fight, very often with the purpose of the complete destruction of the opposite side. For example, the main difference between the fighting of man and animals is their

\footnote{147} Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 497.
approach: men fight “furiously” while animals fight “nobly,” which makes the latter reminiscent of aristocratic heroes from antiquity.

In this regard, we can place Montaigne in a tradition of humanist thought going back to Erasmus. We find exactly the same accurate observation on the absence of wars within the same species in all non-human animals in an earlier text written by Erasmus, entitled *Dulce Bellum Inexpertis*. Here, we read:

At mihi sane plusquam ferinum, plusquam belluinum esse uidetur armis confligere. Primum enim pleraque brutorum animantium in suo quodque genere concorditer et ciuiliter degunt, gregatium incedunt, ope mutua sese tuentur. Ne ferae quidem omnes dimicant (sunt enim et innoxiae, sicut damae et lepores) sed omnium efferatissimae, ueluti leones, lupi, tigrides. Quamquam nec hae belligerantur inter sese quemadmodum nos: canis caninam non est; leonum inter se feritas non dimicat; draconi cum dracone pax est: inter uenena conuenit. At homini nulla fera perniciosior quam homo.\(^{148}\)

In this citation, Erasmus also comments on the uniqueness of men’s blood-thirstiness in their relationships with each other. This is not characteristic of animals. Despite the fact that the utterances of the two philosophers are analogous, Erasmus and Montaigne come to their observations from the antagonistic sides, which need to be explained and compared.

The opinions of these two thinkers on the phenomenon of war are not dissimilar. We read in Erasmus:

Quod si quicquam est in rebus mortalium quod cunctanter aggredi conueniat, immo quod oporteat modis omnibus fugere, deprecari, propellere, certe bellum est, quo non alia res uel magis impia, uel calamitosior, uel latius perniciosa, uel haerens tenacius, uel tetrior, et in totum homine indignior, ut ne dicam christiano.\(^{149}\)

Montaigne comments on Virgil’s description of a battle between two opposing armies by saying: “Je ne voy jamais cette divine description, qu’il ne m’y semble lire peinte l’impetue et vanité humaine. Car ces mouvements guerriers, qui nous ravissent de leur horreur et espouvantement,

\(^{148}\) Erasme, *Dulce bellum inexpertis*, Latomus Revue D’Etudes Latines, Berchem-Bruxelles, 1953, p. 28

\(^{149}\) Erasme, *Dulce bellum inexpertis*, Latomus Revue D’Etudes Latines, Berchem-Bruxelles, 1953, p. 28
cette tempest de sons et de cris.” And he adds Lucretius’ citation: “Fulgur ubi ad caelum se tollit, totaque circum/ Aere renidescit tellus, subterque iurum ui/Excit tur pedibus sonitus, clamoreque montes/licit reiectant uoces ad sidera mundi.” This Lucretius’ passage is taken from the moment in the second book of De Rerum Natura, where he argues that if the nature of things is hidden from us, by consequence the movements of things are also unavailable for our vision. Different phenomena cannot be recognized or explained from the distance and have no significance for someone who is very far from the place the phenomena take place. Montaigne cuts Lucretius’ quote but we can read further in De Rerum Natura: “Et tamen est quidam locus altis montibus, unde/ Stare videntur et in campis consistere fulgor.” Here, Lucretius explains that for somebody who is up in the mountains, the image of the impetuous battle appears as nothing more than a speck sparkling in the field. This speck is no different from a blurry image produced by a flock of sheep. Earlier in the same passage, Lucretius says: “Nam saepe in colli tondentes pabula laeta/ Lanigerae reptant pecudes, quo quamque vocantes/ Invitant herbae gemmantes rore recenti,/ Et satiati agni ludunt blandeque coruscant;/ Omnia quae nobis longe confusa videntur/ Et velut in viridi candor consistere colli.” Both images put side by side are perhaps different in color but similar in their function, they both represent the movement of atoms that cannot be seen by human’s eye and therefore, they cannot be understood or interpreted by us. In other words, the Lucretius passages help us to understand relativity of all events and phenomena, which can only acquire certain meaning if they are judged by those who are given tools for their interpretation and are able to attach that meaning to them. In both Lucretius examples, those tools include the capacity of the human eye to see an event if an observer can get close enough, and the knowledge the individual has prior to observing an event. An observer must know that a situation where people are striking each other furiously with weapons is a battle, which leads to death and destruction. If the observer does not possess this foreknowledge, for example, about weapons as symbols of war, it would be impossible for him/her to identify the event as battle, even from a close distance. Both vision and knowledge of war are necessary to make a correct judgement about the battle presented in Lucretius’s passages. Without these tools, a scene of horror can easily be mistaken for a flock of sheep peacefully pasturing in a field personifying peace and tranquility. Montaigne’s own take on this description of a furious battle described by Lucretius is the following: “Cette effroyable ordonnance de tant de milliers d’hommes armez, tant de fureur, d’ardeur et de courage, il est plaisant à considerer par combien vaines occasions elle est agitée, et par combien legeres occasions esteinte.” In this last citation, Montaigne disdains the idea of battle itself as a useless and ridiculous

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150 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 498.
151 “... and a sheen rises there to heaven and all the earth around gleams with bronze, and beneath a noise is roused by the mighty mass of men as they march, and the hills smitten by their shouts hurl back the cries to the stars of the firmament,” Titi Lucreti Cari, De Rerum Natura, libri sex, p. 253.
152 “... yet there is a certian spot on the high hills, whence all seems to be at rest and to lie like a glimmering mass upon the plains.”, Titi Lucreti Cari, De Rerum Natura, libri sex, p. 253.
153 “For often the fleecy flocks cropping the glad pasture on a hill creep on whither each is called and tempted by the grass bejeweled with fresh dew, and the lambs fed full gambol and butt playfully; yet all this seem blurred to us from afar, and to lie like a white mass on a green hill.”, Titi Lucreti Cari, De Rerum Natura, libri sex, p. 253.
154 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 498.
occupation provoked by very small, insignificant causes and, by consequence, demonstrating human foolishness.

Despite of the fact, that both Erasmus and Montaigne condemn the idea of war, their positions regarding the animals themselves are very different. Montaigne believes animals do not fight with representatives of their own species, because they are superior to men in many areas and the absence of war is just one of them. At the same time, Erasmus has no intention of defending animals. He places men in opposition to animals and, for the most part, reproduces the familiar Aristotelian argument in favor of men over animals. He claims that many animals are born to fight, and many are equipped with different tools for fighting such as “bull with horns” or ”the raging lion with claws”. However, only man has no tools for fighting or defending himself. He is born naked and weak, with a very soft skin. By nature man is created to depend on others. Men also have a love for companionship and for saving each other. According to Erasmus, war is the property of savage animals. He says that some grammarians believe in the connection of the word bellum “war” and bellua “a beast”, which suggests that war belongs to the world of animals and not of men. Further reflection on animals prompts Erasmus to notice that even if animals fight with different species, they never fight armed; they use their own natural weapons while men fight with artificial weapons created against nature.

It is hard to reconcile Erasmus two self-excluding ideas. On the one hand, war is a property of “wild beasts” and is contrary to men’s nature. On the other hand, men are the only species that kill their self-similar companions, while all other so-called “wild beasts” do not kill within their own species. He further develops this second idea by saying that even when non-human animals fight with animals of other species, they do not use artificial weapons, and the reasons for their fighting are much more serious than for men. Erasmus is not concerned about this obvious contradiction in his reasoning, which can be explained by his self-evident disinterest in considering animals or in speaking on their behalf. He only regards animals in opposition to men, as a personification of everything men should avoid, and possessing qualities that men should overcome when found in themselves. By insisting that war is a property of animals, Erasmus hopes to deter men from it, since men do not want to equate themselves with “brutes”; they are so much better, and “placed in this world as a kind of image” of God.\footnote{Bellum Two Statements on the Nature of War, an Essay on War written in 1545 by Erasmus (Imprint Society, Barre, Massachusetts, 1972), p. 15.}

However, at some point, Erasmus makes a feeble effort to explain this contradiction in his ideas. He says that by nature war is foreign to men and, indeed, is a property of animals, but men became corrupted by wild animals during the time when primitive men lived in the woods. They were attacked by animals and had to defend themselves. Eventually, they began to hunt other animals, proceeding from the harmful beasts to harmless ones:

O cadauerosas uoluptates! Processum est longius. A noxiis feris itum est ad pecudes innoxias. Saeuitum est passim in oues, /Animal sine fraude doloque,/ saeuitum in leporem, non ob aliud crimen nisi quod esculentus esset. Nec temperatum a boue domestico qui suo sudore diu familiam aluerat ingratam; nulli uolucrum, nulli piscium generi parcitum est, et eo processit gulae tyrannis ut nullum animal usquam tutum esset ab hominis crudelitate. Verum hoc quoque
persuasit consuetudo ut saeuitia non uideretur in ullum animantis genus, modo ab hominis caede temperaretur.\textsuperscript{156}

The hunger or physical appetite combined with the habit of killing all kinds of animals blinded men to the cruelty of their deeds and transformed them to creatures who now participate in killing representatives of their own species. Erasmus further explains how the vice of killing live creatures spread to men, starting from single combats to forming armies. From this point, Erasmus is no longer interested in comparing men and animals. He proceeds with his condemnation of the idea of war.

Erasmus’s insistence that animals do not fight within their own species finds its development in many other writings of thinkers of the same period. As J.R. Hale summarizes for us the Renaissance vision regarding war among men or animals:

In discussion of violence the ferocity of beasts was emphasized in order to criticize man for perverting it, not inheriting it. Animals, it was repeated over and over again, do not indulge in intra-specific slaughter. When they kill it is for food, or in the defense of territory or of their young. Only man is greedy beyond his day-to-day needs, only man covets more land than he requires for survival, only man chooses to make a career of fighting, a tragic and servile life… which is so austere and rigorous that the brute beasts hold it in horror.\textsuperscript{157}

Hale concludes: “Only through being nursed on animal milk was there any chance of man containing an animal nature. He was potentially better, he was often worse, but he was entirely different from the beasts.”\textsuperscript{158} As we saw earlier, Montaigne definitely did not share this vision of the uniqueness of mankind, and instead insisted on men’s similarities to animals.

Montaigne supports his reflections on exceptional animal qualities by providing convincing examples of their behavior taken from different sources. In order to understand if there is any system in these examples of animals, we must look at the sources that he used. The authentic and fantastical stories about various animals he retells in Apologie de Raimond de Sebonde are the stories that Montaigne either read or heard. These anecdotes can be divided into three different categories. The first, and biggest, is a cluster of anecdotes that Montaigne borrowed from Hellenistic sources, and retold by commenting on them. The second category consists of anecdotes about animals that Montaigne had heard from his contemporaries. The third category is not even a collection of anecdotes about animals, but rather Montaigne’s own uncoordinated reflections on different species and the organization of their lives, based on direct observations of these animals. It is not clear if the choice of particular animals or the narrations themselves are the result of random choice on Montaigne’s part, or whether they were carefully

\textsuperscript{156} Erasme, Dulce bellum inexperti (Latomus Revue D’Etudes Latines, Berchem-Bruxelles, 1953), pp. 34-36.

“Cadavéreuses voluptés! On alla plus loin. Des bêtes nuisibles, on en arriva aux animaux innocents. On s’en prit un peu partout aux moutons. Animal sans ruse ni dol,/ on s’en prit au lièvre, pour la seule raison qu’il était de chair délicate. On n’eut même pas ses sueurs, la famille ingrate; on n’épargna aucune espèce d’oiseau, aucune espèce de poisson et la gourmandise devint à ce point tyrannique qu’aucun animal ne se trouva plus nulle part à l’abri de la cruauté humaine.” pp. 35-37.


\textsuperscript{158} Hale, p. 347.
selected and considered. In any case, it is useful to see what kind of animals and what stories Montaigne employs to illustrate his views on animals and their relationships to men.

Montaigne’s essay abounds in anecdotes about different dogs often possessing many talents and unique skills. Montaigne uses the example of dog-leaders of the blind in order to inquire how it is possible that dogs do not have reason - as the followers of anthropocentric views suggest - when they can comprehend that they are solely responsible for the safety of their masters and have to serve them all the time. To further advance his argument on dogs’ intelligence, Montaigne retells the story (taken from Plutarch), where, a dog had a part in a theatrical play. In that role, a dog, after eating a certain drug, was supposed to tremble, fall dead, and allow himself to be pulled away before the eyes of astonished spectators. The example of a dog demonstrating its acting skills, even under the influence of a certain drug, appeals to Montaigne because it completely rejects the idea of the animals simplicity. Another dog story comes from the same source of Plutarch. While on board a ship, a dog was able to raise the level of oil in a jug so that he could reach it. The dog started throwing pebbles into the jug until the oil reached the desired level where he could easily lick it. For Montaigne, this was an excellent illustration of a refined mind capable of complex reflections.

Montaigne is genuinely interested in different kinds of birds and often admires their exceptional abilities. Crows also use the trick of intentionally raising liquid levels when they are thirsty. For Montaigne birds’ unmistakable competence to choose the proper place and accurate material for their dwelling is phenomenal. In order to construct nests, birds unequivocally apply surprising and considerable natural knowledge. They consider hundreds of factors, just as an accomplished architect would do, but they differ in that they make no mistakes. Their nests are a model of architectural accuracy. They know exactly what shape to choose or what floor to lay to make it soft for their nestlings. But birds’ talents are not limited by their architectural skills. Certain birds - such as blackbirds, ravens, magpies, and parrots - can also be taught to speak in a human language. The ease with which they imitate speech alone proves that they have a power for reason. Montaigne’s example, taken from Aristotle, and according to which a nightingale teaches his offspring to sing, dismisses the argument of those who believe that only men are capable of learning. Birds are also capable of prognosticating the future. Among the most ancient and reliable ways of prediction was to predict the future from the flight of birds.

Montaigne’s belief in the similarity of animal reasoning to that of humans is illustrated by an example of fox who was employed by the inhabitants of Thrace to determine if it was safe to cross a frozen stream. The fox would put his ear to the edge of ice to hear how close the water was to the surface. From this noise, he was able to decide if it was safe to step onto the ice or not. This fox behavior demonstrates a sequence of certain deductions. To suppose that a fox can perform all these tricks logically, following one step after another, and without reflecting on what he is doing, is totally irrational. This story about a fox is one among many that proves that animals use all kinds of contrivances to protect themselves from other animals, nature, and humans.

Montaigne devotes many of his stories to elephants that, according to him, surpass men in many areas. In the country of Juba, if an elephant is caught in a deep pit prepared by hunters, they bring many stones and logs to help him get out. Montaigne tells a fantastic story of another elephant in a private house in Syria, whose keeper was stealing half of his portion. When one day
the elephant’s master decided to feed the elephant himself, he poured the proper amount in front of the animal. Without hesitation, the elephant separated half the portion with his trunk, showing that he was not given the “correct” amount before. Elephants were also used by ancient armies brought from the east, and who were often the strongest and most powerful because elephants are not only very puissant but also very intelligent. Finally, elephants are one species that might have religion, as we discussed earlier.

The numerous examples describing the distinctive qualities of certain species that often surpass human qualities raise many questions for Montaigne’s readers. There is no doubt that Montaigne succeeds in showing animal worthiness and superiority in certain areas of life, but his method of choosing different examples remains quiet puzzling. Why and how did he choose certain examples over others and why are some of these examples are thought provocative while others are completely ridiculous? What is his reasoning? How does he use exemplary material?

Regarding Montaigne’s examples in the the *Essais*, John D. Lyons says: “Montaigne is much more concerned with example’s power to interest us, even to fascinate and astonish us, than in purely ethical or even demonstrative value. Indeed, Montaigne’s emphatic comments on example in the concluding essay, “Of Experience”, state that examples do not provide useful information about permanent pattern to human life.”¹⁵⁹ Montaigne finds an example for everything. Examples are paired with their counterparts, and as the result, nothing can be ever proved and learned from this pile of examples because every example contradicts another one. In other words, Montaigne’s examples should not be taken seriously, examined carefully, and followed, nor avoided. Their value, according to Lyons, lies in the domain of momentary emotions expressed in admiration, surprise, or shock. In this regard, the apparent disparity in significance and seriousness of examples is not really important. Montaigne’s purpose is to find an example which can sink into the reader’s mind. Lyons adds that “Readers of Montaigne have long been aware of the structural and quantitative importance of examples in the *Essais*, but have not generally seen the consistency with which he approaches example from the first to the last of his 107 essays.”¹⁶⁰ In other words, examples have more technical function in the *Essais*, than ethical value. Lyons believes that there is no qualitative value in Montaigne’s examples because of their lack of consistency in them.

Why do we have to identify consistency with quality? If we go back to Montaigne’s definition of similarity, discussed earlier in this chapter, we remember that similarity is dissimilar because there are no criteria to use in order to decide if something has similar features to something else or not. When we compare two objects or phenomena, we always come to conclusion they are dissimilar, because despite obvious similar features, they would always manifest many differences. Consistency or similarity are categories that cannot be measured because among the millions of examples we might use, we will always find opposite examples. In the end, we will come to nullity. At the same time, inconsistency is the major representation of natural order that is in constant movement. If it is the natural, predetermined condition for

¹⁶⁰ Lyons, p. 119.
everything, including human life, then how it can be of low-quality? It is the divine project to put everything in constant movement without ever reaching finalized forms.

Lyons concludes his introduction to the chapter on Montaigne by saying: “The insistence on rarity, on the atypical rather than the typical, is a direct attack on the unexamined conception of example as the norm, as a selection of the usual or the representative.” The first part of this citation is focused on rarity, but rarity as we saw early with its power to fascinate and shock the reader. In the second part, Lyons argues that Montaigne wants to overtone the representative function of example and show that, contrary to common belief, example as a concept that cannot be used as a norm. Indeed, we cannot draw any examples from Montaigne’s *Essais* to use as models for our behavior and understanding of our surrounding world because there are no such examples in Montaigne. Therefore, going back to our original question of how Montaigne uses his exemplary material, we can say his choice of unsystematic examples is an illustration of his general vision of the natural order of things.

**The Question of Language**

To sum up Montaigne’s unambiguous reasoning in favor of non-human animals over men – we have to remember that his vision is constructed on three major propositions. First of all, he believes that men are very similar to other animals and do not stand out among other species. Consequently, there is no question of men’s superiority over animals. Secondly, Montaigne goes even further than simply suggesting that men are very similar to animals. He believes that animal life is more organized and more logical than human one, based on the fact that animals neither kill during war nor enslave the representatives of their own species. Thirdly, language as a manifestation of reason should not be taken as a criterion for measuring the position of a species because this category is very ambiguous and cannot properly be defined.

Knowing well that deficiency of language among animals is the trump card of believers in their inferiority, Montaigne’s strategy is to dismiss this argument by introducing the discussion about language early in his discourse in defense of animals in *Apologie de Raimond de Sebonde*. First of all, and in order to defeat Aristotelian adherents and prove the groundlessness of their views, Montaigne wants to demonstrate that animals might have language; or, to be precise, that there is no evidence that animals do not have language as traditionally suggested. In order to do that, Montaigne needs to reinvent or reinterpret the definition of language.

As Hassan Melehy illustrates in the essay “Silencing the Animals: Montaigne, Descartes, and the Hyperbole of Reason,” which aims at arguing “the juxtaposition of Montaigne and Descartes as inaugural of modernity” and at inviting the reader to examine the antagonistic points of views of two thinkers on the question of human reason, Montaigne was not really interested in discovering if animals have language as a way to prove their intelligence; rather, Montaigne simply presented the phenomena of the possibility of animal reasoning.  

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161 Lyons, p. 120.
Montaigne starts by saying that man is not in a position to give a proper definition of language, since he is only familiar with one kind of language: human. However, even among human languages, there are some that man often does not understand. For example, French people do not understand the Basques or the Troglodytes. Therefore, Montaigne’s legitimate question is if man cannot even understand some human languages, then how would it be expected that he understands the languages of other species? There are many languages or combinations of sounds in the world about which man has absolutely no idea. Montaigne poses several valid questions. What makes man think that animals cannot speak? Why not to suppose that man simply cannot understand what animals are saying to each other? Why should this lack of understanding be attributed to animals and not to man? Why if man has some idea of what animals’ emotions, desires, or intentions are (for example, anger or fear are expressed in certain dogs’ barks), why if this can be communicated from one species to another, why not then suppose that there is a higher level of communication between animals that is inaccessible and incomprehensible to man?

This myriad of unanswered questions leads Montaigne to ponder on what language is or what can be considered as a language. For example, should sounds have a certain structure to be considered a language? And if that structure is necessary, then what is the definition of this structure? What are its requirements? Should a collection of sounds be confined within certain limits or take a certain shape? Why do other forms of communication (for example, animal sounds rejected by men), not have equal value, and therefore, not be considered as language? By consequence, if the irrefutable definition of language does not exist or cannot be formed, how can something that escapes the proper definition then be used an argument against animals?

Perhaps, an adjustment needs to be made to the logic of those who argue for animals’ lack of language. They are right to say that animals indeed do not have and do not use human language. But to use animals’ lack of human language as an argument for their inferiority is nonsensical. Certainly, non-human animals do not talk human language because they do not belong to the human species. But man would need to be blind and deaf not to see and not to hear that animals have many forms and ways of communication with each other—and with man as well.

Montaigne illustrates his vision by briefly discussing the hypothetical experiment of placing a child into a remote area, deprived of any human companion, and in complete solitude. Montaigne believes that such an abandoned child would still have some sort of speech to express his ideas. This child would be very close in his language capacity to other animals. Montaigne says:

...et n’est pas croyable, que nature nous ait refusé ce moyen qu’elle a donné à plusieurs autres animaux : Car qu’est-ce autre chose que parler, ceste faculté, que nous leur voyons de se plaindre, de se resjouyr, de s’entr’appeller au secours, se convier à l’amour, comme ils font par l’usage de leur voix ? Comment ne parleroient elles entr’elles ? elles parlent bien à nous, et nous à elles. En combien de sortes parlons nous à nos chiens, et ils nous répondent ? D’autre langage,
In this citation, Montaigne insists on the impossibility of producing one strict definition of language because language comes in many different forms. Correspondingly, human language, by definition, cannot and does not represent the whole palette of possibilities that language creates. The ability or inability to talk a human language does not determine the general ability for language. It simply indicates belonging to the human species, a fact which does not prove any special status diminishing all others as belonging to different species.

Breaking from the traditional view on this question, Montaigne comes to the conclusion that language – regardless of its definition or form – has nothing to do with intelligence or reason. Since many different species produce different sounds and are able to communicate within their own species, and even with other species, then language is simply a convenient tool given by nature and not a privilege. For Montaigne, the idea that language is a sign of elitism in the natural hierarchy of species is illogical. Even men themselves praise and use silence as a powerful tool in communication, and often achieve better results by silence rather than by talking. Montaigne calls this a method of effective communication by eloquent and thoroughly intelligible silence. To illustrate his point of view, Montaigne retells the story of a King Agis of Sparta. When an ambassador from the city of Abdera asked what he was to say his citizens on his return, the king responded that the ambassador could say whatever he wanted and as much as he wanted without ever saying a word.164

Montaigne continues to develop his idea with the example of mutes who can communicate perfectly well by signs without the need for talk. Montaigne discusses different parts of the human body that allow men to communicate and be understood, and describes the endless possibilities that they present:

*Quoy des mains? Nous requerons, nous promettons, appellons, congédions, menaçons, prions, supplions, nions, refusons, interrogeons, admirons, nombrons, confessons, repentons, craignons, vergoignons, doutons, instruisons, commandons, incitons, encourageons, jurons, tesmoignons, accusons, condamnons, absolvons, injurions, mesprisons, deffions, despittons, flattons, applaudissons, benissons, humilions, moquons, reconcilions, recommandons, exaltons, festoyons, resjouissons, complaignons, attristons, desconfortons, desesperons, estonnonns, escroions, taisons : et quoy non ? d’une variation et multiplication à l’envy de la langue.*  

This discussion of effective silence and replacement of language by signs is precisely related to the notorious episode in Rabelais’ second book *Pantagruel*, in which Panurge defeats the English scholar Thaumaste who choose to argue by signs. Before the public dispute, which took place in the college of Navarre, Thaumaste explains his choice of signs over words in the following way: 

*… voicy la maniere comment j’entens que nous disputerons. Je ne veulx disputer pro et contra, comme font ces sozt sophistes de ceste ville et de ailleurs.*

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163 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 480.
164 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 476.
165 Montaigne, Gallimard, pp. 475-476.
Semblablement, je ne veulx disputer en la manière des Academicques, par declamation, ny aussi par nombres comme faisoit Pythagoras et comme voulut faire Picus Mirandula à Romme. Mais je veulx disputer par signes seulement, sans parler, car les matieres sont tant ardues que les parolles humaines ne seroyent suffisantes à les expliquer à mon plaisir.  

Here, Thaumaste promotes the same idea as Montaigne, by saying that words cannot express what signs can because signs are more powerful. These observations devalue the so-praised quality of human language.

Montaigne wants to argue that language, in the same manner as reason, cannot be employed as a measurement for the superiorit or inferiority of one species over another due to the impossibility of describing or unifying so many different forms of language in the one form. In other words, language cannot be defined and, by consequence, cannot be used to determine anything. Language and reason do not stand out among many other qualities and characteristics distinctive to different species. Rather, they have neutral representation and equal importance among many other attributes. According to Montaigne, there is no evidence supporting the idea that language in a human form really manifests as superior reason in men. It would be enough to remember that Montaigne uses man’s inability to comprehend animals’ language as an illustration of the weakness or limitation of man’s reason. He also gives multiple examples of how, in certain areas, particular species of animals are more intelligent than man.

It is not important for Montaigne to establish if man or any other species are more intelligent than others. Reason or language is, for him, one among many other characteristics existing in nature. As we discussed earlier, Montaigne believes that reason is given to humans as a substitute for lacking many other skills and knowledge that other species have. Reason is necessary for human survival and the continuation of their species. Once again, Montaigne insists on man’s equality with other species when he says the following: “J’ay dict tout cecy, pour maintenir ceste resemblance, qu’il y a aux choses humaines: et pour nous ramener et joindre à la presse. Nous ne sommes ny au dessus, ny au dessous du reste: tout ce qui est sous le Ciel, dit le sage, court une loy et fortune pareille.”  

To pacify the passionate believers in the existence of the powerful tool of reason among men, Montaigne states at the very beginning of his speech in defense of animals in Apologie de Raimond de Sebond:


167 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 481.
168 English translation of the Latin part of the citation is “For whom then shall a man say that the world was made? Naturally, for those souls who have the use of reason. These are gods and men, to whom certainly nothing is superior.” [Cicero, quoting Balbus]. Montaigne, Complete Works, p. 471.
In other words, Montaigne believes that if we use intelligence as an indication of superiority in the hierarchy of species, then very few humans would stand this trial successfully. Montaigne keeps finding a great number of disparities as well as unexplained, discrepant problems arguing for human superiority based on the ability to speak. If it is established by Aristotle, and supported by his followers, that language as a manifestation of reason is an indication of that superiority and a necessary attribute of men, then, when we go back to Montaigne’s examples of mutes and a child raised alone in complete solitude, does it mean that those individuals do not belong to the human species? How would the great believers in a magic power of language respond to this question? Or would they be seeking to reinvent the definition of who is considered to be a human? This discovery of evident contradiction in the argument of Aristotelian adherents causes Montaigne himself to ponder on the following questions: What does it mean to be human? And who can actually be considered a human? And what are the criteria for that? If men are superior to all other species by nature, then how is it possible that some representatives of humankind are treated much worse than animals? Men believe in their advantage over animals but they also accept that some men have advantages over other men. According to Montaigne, many free men abandon their existence to the power of others and are treated worse than some lucky animals loved by their powerful owners:

Les hommes qui nous servent, le font à meilleur marché, et pour un traitement moins curieux et moins favorable, que celuy que nous faisons aux oyseaux, aux chevaux, et aux chiens. A quel soucy ne nous demettons nous pour leur commodité? Il ne me semble point, que les plus abjects seviteurs facent volontiers pour leurs maistres, ce que les Princes s’honorent de faire pour ces bestes.169

If free men are subjugated to the power of others, then what can be said about the condition of slaves? According to Montaigne, slavery has a quality of being a unique attribute of the human species. Just as in war, men are the only species living on earth who enslave each other. You would never see a lion enslaving another lion, or a horse enslaving another horse. Animals hunt other animals but never the representatives of their own species.

Another category of men who have an ambiguous position within the human species, are those brought from other countries and considered to be barbarians by the inhabitants of their new country. Montaigne says the following about the perception of these men brought from across the sea to France:

J’ay veu autrefois parmy nous, des hommes amenez par mer de loingtain pays, desquels par ce que nous n’entendions aucunement le langage, et que leur façon au demeurant et leur contenance, et leurs vestements, estoient du tout esloignez des nostres, qui de nous ne les estimoit et sauvages et brutes ? qui n’attribuoit à stupidité et à bestise, de les voir muets, ignorants la langue Françoise, ignorans nos baise-mains, et nos inclinations serpentées ; nostre port et nostre maintien, sur lequel sans faillir, doit prendre son patron la nature humaine?170

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169 Montaigne, Gallimard, pp. 483-484.
170 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 490.
The apprehension of these people arriving from other parts of the world is certainly comparable to animals. They are perceived to be stupid due to their lack of French language and French manners.

The different groups of men – some of whom are often treated worse than animals by other men, and some of whom seem so foreign and incomprehensible to other men because they are either sick or come from foreign lands—the existence of these groups challenges a definition of who should be contemplated as men. Many characteristics traditionally considered to be human shamelessly fail because they do not apply to all humankind. As Montaigne remarked earlier, neither reason nor language touches all humankind (for example, some humans do not talk due to their physical disability or to their age). Then, the question is how was this superiority of men established in the first place when it was never clear whom to include in the category of men? Besides, the living conditions of many men subjugated by others demonstrate their inferior status to animals rather than superior. The real question is what man really gains by this hypothetically superior status to animals? Why do so many men argue so furiously seeking to prove their superior status when it is quite dubious that this status provides any advantages? It seems that this status doubles men’s sufferings by exposing them to harsh treatment from the representatives of their own species in the form of war or slavery.

If the problem of defining who should be included in men and who should be excluded, based on the existence of certain men who do not talk, cannot be solved, if the treatment of some representatives of so-called superior species is often worse within their own species than of the ones who, by definition, are considered to be animals, then the discussion of employment of language as a criterium for a superior position in hierarchy of species cancels itself in Montaigne’s argument. Disinterested to explore the fruitless subject of the special value of language, Montaigne really aims at challenging the category that responsible for language, which is reason.

**Contra Rationem**

Montaigne is eager to remove human reason – carefully put together over the centuries by different philosophers, starting from Aristotle and then supported by Christian fathers of the church—from its pedestal. He poses two important questions regarding reason. Where is the proof that men are really more intelligent than non-human animals, especially considering that direct observation of both men and non-human animals very often proves otherwise? And most importantly, why should reason, and not other characteristics distinctive of creatures living on earth, be taken as a criterion for the hierarchy of species?

Montaigne’s description of reason, chosen as an epigraph for this chapter, is borrowed from his essay entitled *De L’Experience*. Here, Montaigne does not talk specifically about animals or their relationship with men. However, his reflections on reason are very relevant to his discussion of animals. According to Montaigne, reason is deceiving; it appears to be clear and logical but it fails man all the time, simply because it is not true to its appearance. Experience is also extremely unreliable but fails to a lesser degree. Man always attempts to form conclusions based on the resemblance of events, but this is impossible because the results are always
different. The only response to a great number of examples is to accept the variety of situations that exist in the world.

Since antiquity, reason has been employed as a criterion for dividing living species into different categories and subjugating one to another. But for Montaigne, the essential question is: how can reason be a criterion while it is itself uncertain, and presents itself in so many different forms? If there is no one universally accepted form of reason, then choosing one manifestation of reason over others is just random choice. It has very little value for finding truth about any subject matter by which it is measured. One random choice does not prove or deny anything. The impossibility of confining reason to one particular form almost completely diminishes its value and its relevance to many discussions in which reason is the core of the argument. By consequence, according to Montaigne, reason should not be taken into consideration when men attempt to comprehend animals, or to assign animals specific roles in the hierarchy of species on earth.

By shaking the steadfast value of reason, Montaigne clearly sets himself as a harsh opponent of the Aristotelian argument for human ascendancy from animals, which is exclusively based on the belief that reason is an excellent standard for categorizing different species as superior or inferior. Montaigne does not say it directly, but he alludes to the idea that belief in the exceptional value of reason exists solely in Western civilization, where the dominant religion is Christianity. In other cultures or nations, removed geographically and/or historically, the worship of reason and belief in men’s superiority is not shared or even known.

It is not only in other cultures or nations that animals are not subjugated to men based on their lack of reason. Sometimes, they are even considered to be superior to men, related to gods, or even gods themselves. In De la Cruauté, Montaigne illustrates the possibility of treating animals from a different perspective by two sets of diverse examples: (1) the ancient religion of Gauls, in which animals were worshipped; and (2) the treatment of animals by different nations described by classical authors.

According to Montaigne, in ancient Gallic religion, human souls never died but were in constant movement. Souls could migrate from a human body to the body of an animal, and back and forth. The choice of an animal for a soul was based on qualities that the man possessed when he was alive. For example, the soul of a brave person would migrate into the body of a lion, and the soul of a coward would move into the body of a hare. The Gauls believed that, according to God’s project, the extent of excellence in a human’s life is either rewarded after their death, or is punished by placing their soul into the body of a defective animal. Indeed, we have today a great deal of evidence suggesting that animals were not only esteemed but even deified in Gallic society. Paul-Marie Duval gives us an idea about Gauls’ society: “Avec l’Egypte, dont les divinités zoomorphes étonnaient les Grecs, les pays celtiques, sont les seuls du monde antique qui aient fait aux bêtes une telle place dans leur dévotion. Pour les Gaulois, c’étaient à n’en point douter, des frères supérieurs, et même davantage.”171 There are Gallic coins with images of different birds, a horse, and a boar. Individual and tribal names very often included animals. Moreover, animals were often considered to be men’s ancestors in Gallic society.172 By choosing

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172 Duval, Paul-Marie, p. 16.
to include the example of the Gauls, who obviously had not read the writings of Aristotle or the Fathers of Christian Church, Montaigne opens the possibility of creating a new way of thinking about animals.

In his essay *De la Cruauté*, Montaigne further elaborates on the idea that in many different cultures and nations animals are held to be equal to humans – sometimes higher and more honorable. He cites different classical authors which describe the examples of favorable, and often glorifying, attitudes towards animals in antiquity. First was Cicero, who said: “… Belluae à barbaris propter beneficium consecratae.” Cicero’s citation is followed by a fragment from Juvenal that summarizes the worship of different animals in diverse cultures. This myriad of examples is completed by Plutarch’s explanation of the Egyptian custom of worshipping certain honorable qualities expressed in one or another kind of animal; for example, patience and usefulness in an ox, liveliness in a cat. Montaigne finds a contemporary example for his time confirming the worship of certain animals among Burgundians. Finally, Montaigne makes another interesting observation regarding different institutions or rituals that exist to acknowledge or honor animals’ existence, such as hospitals created by the Turks, or the magnificent burials produced by the Argentines and the Egyptians for animals who were dear to them. Mostly taken from the classical sources, the various literary and historical examples that Montaigne read and discussed in *De la Cruauté* made him realize that Western vision on the relationship between men and animals is very subjective, and is conditional on everyone believing in the exceptional value of reason. If reason no longer equates to universal truth, then the whole argument about human superiority falls apart.

In the same historical period in other non-christian civilizations, the attitude towards animals was quiet different. Once again we address the question of relationship between animals and men and the general position of men in nature in Chinese culture of the late sixteenth century. Carla Nappy tells us, that in the Early Modern period in China, man’s qualities were understood as material objects in the universe. It was a time when, as Nappy suggests, Chinese scholars asked the questions: “Were people things? Were they beasts? In either case, how ought one understand and draw the boundaries of humanity.” Responses to these questions were very different in Chinese culture than in Western civilization. The boundaries between man and animals were washed away. Man was considered a part of nature, with a slight consideration of his social status which could make him more or less human. The acceptance of eating human flesh in 16th century China proves that the notion of human was understood in different terms.

The idea of extolling animals to the level of gods and worshipping them is perhaps foreign to Montaigne and slightly astonishes him, but his goal in *De la Cruauté* is not to entertain his reader by sharing shocking examples of barbaric customs. By contrasting attitudes towards animals in Western civilization to other cultures, Montaigne wonders why, in Western civilization, reason became so important in the process of subjugating animals to men. He is

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173 “Les bêtes ont été sanctifiées par les barbares pour les bienfaits qu’ils en espéraient.” Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 456 (note D.)
174 We already briefly mentioned it in the previous chapter.
interested in the broader question of why—among numerous interpretations of relationships between humans and animals that exist and are practiced in different cultures or societies—preference should be given to any of these interpretations without any proof that it is more correct or better. Why should so much weight be given to reason, when what really reason is, and how it can be measured, evaluated or applied to each particular situation, is a complete mystery to man? If it is so obscure and indefinable, how can it be used to measure something else?

If the notion of reason escapes its definition and cannot be really evaluated, and by consequence, does not represent a sign of preference among species on earth, if it is one of many other features that is equally distributed to different species, then reason either has no value or has a negative value for man. Montaigne goes further, he is seeking to establish reason as a source of human sufferings. He is interested in explaining why human life, contrary to animal life, is so chaotic, incongruous, and arduous; why, besides the suffering inflicted on men by natural calamities, men have to suffer from other men; and, how this absurd reality of man’s life as a species can be rationalized or perhaps changed. Montaigne states that the reason is that men are victims of artificiality or culture, while animals represent nature. However, this artificiality is not inflicted on men by nature but chosen by them. Being no different to other animals, no above, no below, man, nevertheless, is in constant movement to change his natural predisposition to carry out certain function of his specie and to make himself different for his own harm. It is so-called and so-praised culture that makes man on surface different, but in reality distances him from nature and makes human life more doleful.

Nature Versus Culture

In *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*, Montaigne says:

...il n’y a point d’apparence d’estimer, que les bestes facent par inclination naturelle et forcée, les mesmes choses que nous faisons par nostre choix et industrie. Nous devons conclure de pareils effects, pareilles facultez, et de plus riches effects des facultez plus riches; et confesser par consequent, que ce mesme discours, cette mesme voye, que nous tenons à oeuvrer, aussi la tiennent les animaux, ou quelque autre meilleure. Pourquoi imaginons nous en eux cette contrainte naturelle, nous qui n’en esprouvons aucun pareil effect? Joint qu’il est plus honorable d’estre acheminé et obligé à réglement agir par naturelle et inevitable condition, et plus approchant de la divinité, que d’agir réglément par liberté temeraire et fortuite; et plus seur de laisser à nature qu’à nous les resnes de nostre conduitte... Il n’est pas en nostre puissance d’acquerir une plus belle recommendation que d’estre favorisé de Dieu et de nature.176

In this citation, Montaigne suggests that it is illogical to believe that animals act by instinct while humans do things by choice and cleverness since they are both governed by the same force: nature. Montaigne asks how can animals feel such a strong call of nature in them while humans feel nothing? Humans believe that they demonstrate their superior status over other animals by insisting on the absence of instincts in themselves and by praising their freedom of choice. But

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176 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 482.
Montaigne believes that this assertion is totally false. Following an instinct means acting according to nature, which is totally honorable, and which brings one closer to God. Humans emphasize their ability to choose, erroneously believing that it makes them superior, when in reality, it causes them to act contrary to nature and distance themselves from God. Instead, Montaigne suggests that we should accept humankind’s similarity to other species and our closeness to nature. Clearly, by accepting this similarity, humans automatically give up their pretension for superior status over other species.

Some scholars make a complex argument claiming that on one hand, nature abandoned humans and left them incapable of doing anything without apprenticeship, which makes humans inferior to other, more lucky or preferred species, which are given many natural skills. On the other hand, Montaigne’s opponents seek to use this natural scarcity to humankind’s advantage: by being abandoned by nature and using only the one quality given to them – reason – humans achieve much more than other species. In other words, humans are superior to other species because they have much less than others by nature but achieve much more by reason. Montaigne rejects both claims. First of all, as we discussed earlier in this chapter, he believes that reason is just one of the many other equally important qualities that nature generously gives to its children without any preference for one specie over another. Secondly, in his vision, nature is fair to all its children; humankind is supplied with an abundance of qualities necessary for the survival and continuation of the species. Montaigne gives examples of skills, such as eating or crying, that are given to humans by nature and do not require any learning.

Where then is the basis for the argument about the lack of natural qualities, given to humans? In Montaigne’s opinion, the problem is that humans have an excessive appetite. They are always in search of different things to complicate their lives and are never satisfied by their own inventions. That is why, in an imaginary artificial world of self-inflicted necessity, humans indeed believe that they are given little by nature compared to other species and that they have to work hard to succeed in life. However, this hard work is nothing more than a useless struggle to create an artifice that has nothing to do with nature’s project, according to which humans – together with other non-human animals – should live a simple life and only do what is necessary for the survival and continuation of the species. Humans have strayed from the path assigned to them by nature, and they have thrown themselves into a snare of misleading opinions while ignoring the good.

This artifice, which humans inflicted on themselves, is custom for Montaigne. It is the collection of views, values, and opinions formed and restricted by a certain geographical or historical reality. All humans are brought up within a specific culture and thus they have a certain vision of the world that is shaped by their culture and these beliefs most likely cannot be changed.177 From this it follows that humans always see all their surrounding objects and phenomena, from the basic principals of a human society to the small aspects of everyday life,.

177 Descartes will later say on this subject: “...the same man, with the same mind, if brought up from infancy among the French or Germans, develops otherwise than he would if he had always lived among the Chinese or cannibals; and how, even in our fashions of dress, the very thing that pleased us ten years ago, and will perhaps please us again ten years hence, now strikes us as extravagant and ridiculous. Thus it is custom and example that persuade us, rather than any certain knowledge.” Descartes, Selected Philosophical Writings (Cambridge, University Press, 1998), p. 28.
through the lens of the knowledge that they received from their culture. The question of animals and the attitude toward them in Western civilization is a good illustration of this cultural approach. As we already indicated repeatedly, the perception of animals in Western culture was shaped first by Aristotle and later adopted by the fathers of the Christian church. Hence, humankind’s attitude toward animals in the Western world is certainly predetermined by cultural beliefs. However, this limited and evidently dangerous approach is not confined to the subject of animals but certainly envelops all aspects of human life and all phenomena which humans encounter. Montaigne warns us against this “cultural”, restrained approach, to any phenomena in life. The ocular illustration of the danger of this “prejudiced knowledge” is demonstrated by Montaigne in several of his essays, in which he talks about unexplained phenomena, unusual monsters, and human perception of them.

Montaigne’s interest in this topic is a reflection of a general interest of Renaissance scholars, writers, philosophers, and even naturalists in the descriptions of mysterious creatures, in the reasons of their existence, and in the question of how these creatures should be explained and perceived by Western civilization. Renaissance authors want to know if monsters are against nature or, if they are part of the general system of the universe, creations of God, who is in control of everything that takes place on the earth. The general direction of this interest is to provide detailed depictions of different kinds of monsters, reconcile their existence with the Christian doctrine, and suggest the best way to deal with this enormous army of terrifying creatures and events that provoke disgust and fear among the rest of so-called normal humans. Montaigne’s take on this topic is different. He is not interested in finding new stories of abnormal events and inhuman beings and imposing their descriptions on a reader to provoke unhealthy excitement. On the contrary, Montaigne very much doubts the verisimilitude of many of the stories and confesses that he, for the most part, does not believe in miracles at all. His representation of portents appears much more satisfying, especially for those who are surprised by Renaissance writers insisting on the existence of so many fantastic species and at the same time pleading for “the importance of direct observation.” What is really important for Montaigne when he chooses to talk about monsters and portents in his essays is the praise of doubt and the refusal to form a definite judgment about anything - especially about matters that, by their mystery, surpass the capacity of the human mind. It is useful to look at some of these topics Montaigne explores in this regard.

Montaigne warns his readers not to form a solid judgment on the example of the imperfect child the encounter with whom he retells in his essay *D’un enfant monstreux*. In this

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178 See other Renaissance works on monsters in the first chapter of this dissertation.
179 Hoffmann, George, *Monsters and Modal Logic among French Naturalists of the Renaissance*, South Central Review, Vol.10, No. 2, Reason, Reasoning, and Literature in the Renaissance (Summer, 1993), pp. 32-48 (published by The John Hopkins University Press on behalf of the South Central Modern Language Association), p.42. Here Hoffmann tries to explain that paradox why Renaissance naturalists presented many totally fantastic description with certainty of their existence form one part and they suggested the direct observation as an important factor to determine things. Hoffman provides a rather curious example of Belon who wrote *L’histoire de la nature des oyseaux*. Belon described many real species of birds whom he personally saw, however this insistence on the personal experience with any creatures did not prevent him from talking later about the appearance of the phoenix.
very short essay, Montaigne invites us to examine the problem of existence of physical deformity as a reflection of the imperfection of the human esprit. The child in Montaigne’s essay has one head and two bodies. His nanny collects payment for showing the abnormality of the child. It is immediately noticeable that Montaigne tries to postpone his own judgment on this egregious case where he says at the very beginning that he would “laisse aux medecins d’en discourir.” The perception of this monstrous child exists in relation to the norms of the society in which he lives, the standards that are created by an imperfect human mind. This child is not born as a monster, but he is condemned by public opinion to play the role of an abnormal creature in a society of humans who all look the same. Unfortunately for the child, he was created differently from others; his physical form is in conflict with the appearance accepted in his community. However, one might suggest that Montaigne invites his reader to imagine that perhaps in a different part of the world where all people look like the monstrous child, the “normal” people would represent abnormality. Montaigne indicates here that judgment about all kinds of phenomena of life is relative. He insists that people do need to possess superior wisdom to be able to perceive “arrangement and relationship” created by God. The essay D’un enfant monstrueux allows to Montaigne to focus on the imperfection of the human mind and its incapacity to formulate a veracious opinion on any subject in the human existence. For Montaigne, a human is not in the position to say anything with certainty about creatures which are enigmatic to him; for that reason, he cannot condemn or destroy any form of existence that he cannot understand. Montaigne exclaims in the last lines of the essay: “Que cette raison universelle et naturelle, chasse de nous l’erreur et l’estonnement que la nouvellete nous apporte.”

The idea that it is impossible to comprehend a great deal of phenomena of nature and human behavior because of the imperfection of people’s minds is also expressed in another essay Des Boyteux, where Montaigne tells the stories of witches and impostors—monsters—whom society very willingly condemns for their irregularity. The mysterious title of the essay poses several questions: “les boyteux” do not appear in the essay until almost the very end of the essay. And even when Montaigne finally talks about lame people, he tells the legend about their special sexual power compared with “normal” people. The question that arises immediately is why Montaigne chooses such an ambiguous way to talk about the main subject of the essay. Some scholars suggest that Montaigne wants to hide his real discourse about witches behind the title of “les boyteux.” At the same time, it is possible that Montaigne used the notion of halting in a figurative sense as an allegory for the human spirit, which always stumbles because it is not capable of walking straight. If we accept this image of the uncertain and imperfect human mind, then we can imagine that Montaigne suggests not falling prey to any extremes because any phenomenon should be doubted.

To illustrate his vision of judgment in general, Montaigne provides different examples of innovations and unlikely phenomena of his time, such as the Gregorian calendar, the miraculous curing of people who were seriously ill, witchcraft, and the stories of impostors that seem to be

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180 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 748.
181 Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 749.
182 Hugo Friedrich, Montaigne (Gallimard, 1949), p.150.
quite probable to reality. At the beginning of *Des Boyteux*, Montaigne reflects on the reform of the calendar, according to which Thursday, October, 4, 1582, was followed immediately by Friday, October, 15. It is quite obvious that such a change in the calendar would have a visible impact on the human civilization. However, Montaigne mentions in his essay that for his contemporaries, this new count of the days did not change anything; it did not affect the people’s lives. He further explains that, previously, people were not capable of catching this mistake in the Julian calendar and, as a result, they could not recognize the correction of the previous error in the Gregorian calendar. Montaigne uses the example of people’s perception of the calendar to illustrate the uncertainty of the human mind in general.

In the second version of the essay, Montaigne adds that people believe willingly in everything their imagination is able to invent. Montaigne is surprised that people used to ask: “Comment est-ce que cela se faict?”\(^{183}\) instead of being interested in whether this or that phenomena really took place. As soon as people believe that the event has several explanations or several witnesses, it becomes truth to them. It is important to mention here that the same idea is present in the essay discussed earlier *D’un enfant monstrueux*, the idea about a divine power knowing and determining everything. Montaigne invites us again to look at the idea that people can have little certainty about the human existence because superior intelligence is not accessible to them. As a result, Montaigne believes that “quasi par tout qu’il faudroit dire: il n’en est rien.”\(^{184}\) He adds immediately that people might consider abstaining from judgment of some people as “une deffaiyte produicte de foibless d’esprit et d’ignorance.”\(^{185}\)

What becomes really astonishing for Montaigne is the capacity of people to believe in all sorts of the things they have never seen themselves but about which they have heard from other people who represent authority. That is how people really become victims of delusion and fraud. Montaigne tells that “la vérité et le mensonge ont leurs visages conformes, le port, le goust et les aleurs pareilles: nous les regardons de mesme œil.”\(^{186}\) In the third version of *Des Boyteux*, Montaigne adds the same idea expressed by Cicero: “Ita finitima sunt falsa veris, ut in proecipitem locum non debeat se sapiens committere.”\(^{187}\) Montaigne remarks that it is in human nature not only to be deceived easily, but also to desire to be trapped in falsification. Miracles are for the most part based on the ability of people to believe in anything they hear. Montaigne attacks those people who spread incredible stories, which perhaps never took place in reality but are often supplemented by false testimony. Montaigne believes it begins when somebody’s personal mystification becomes public falsehood, which later attracts many new chimerical details added by every person who retells the story. As a result, very often the person who was furthest distance from the event has much more knowledge about it than the one who was the witness or even the participant. Montaigne confesses that he is not an exception to this rule, that he himself often has a tendency to exaggerate his own stories. However, he wants to make a distinction between himself and other narrators: Montaigne will tell the whole truth without any exaggerations to the first person who demands the truthful story from him. Montaigne

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\(^{183}\) Montaigne, *Essais*, p.1072.

\(^{184}\) Montaigne, p. 1072.

\(^{185}\) Montaigne, p. 1072.

\(^{186}\) Montaigne, p. 1073.

\(^{187}\) Montaigne, p. 1073.
generalizes that it is very common for people to want to propagate their views at any cost. People in authority may use all possible means, such as physical force, to compel others to share their opinions. The best way to prove something, in Montaigne’s theory, is for as many people to believe the story as possible. Montaigne is aware that in such conditions it becomes especially difficult to keep one’s own opinion when it is not shared by others; in other words, the isolated judgment has very few chances to survive and to overpower public opinion. Therefore, the nature of all miraculous stories about monsters or extraordinary events is always based, according to Montaigne, on two main factors: human ignorance and credulity from one side and the eloquence or the power of language from another side.

In *Des boyteux*, Montaigne tells other stories of extraordinary events that demonstrate the common foolishness of people who believe in them. Montaigne tells the story of three people who pretended to be spirits and prophesied in churches at night. Their deception was discovered and they were put in prison. In this story, Montaigne is interested in the manifestation of public stupidity for which only three people will be paying. The judge will vent his own foolishness on those three people by choosing the punishment they deserve. Montaigne thinks that all kinds of abuse, including that in the legal system, occur because of a fear to appear ignorant. A judge will condemn people without thinking, even in very obscure cases, because he wants to appear as a confident person. Instead of such an erroneous approach to justice, Montaigne suggests to declare that ignorance is always the more honorable and daring action. The absence of doubt seems to be dangerous because many people can suffer and even lose their lives as the result of such inflexibility. Here, Montaigne obviously has in mind many prosecutions of women who were accused of being witches and executed in that epoch. It does not seem that Montaigne shares a belief common in his time: that witches were taken by devil and that they represented a danger to Christian people. Montaigne himself spoke to the group of people accused in witchcraft and he found they needed medication to cure them of their madness, instead of being condemned to die. Here, Montaigne seems to support the idea of Jean Bodin, who made that distinction between witches and mad women. Bodin also suggested an idea to consider insanity as a possible legal defense in court. However, for the question “What is the difference between a witch and a mad lady?” he gave that famous answer often cited in works of Renaissance scholars: “Witches are women capable of traversing great distance upon a broomstick.” In Montaigne’s vision about justice in general, people should not be executed on the basis of an ambiguous judgment of which no one can have a clear understanding. The life of an individual is of real value to Montaigne. Even if it is too extreme to suggest in Montaigne’s statement any objection against capital punishment in general, he certainly stands up for the careful consideration of every legal case. He does not think that people should pay by their lives for unnatural and fictitious stories.

At the end of *Des Boyteux*, Montaigne finally approaches the subject of lame people, and tells the stories he heard about the special sexual power of lame people. As it was stated earlier,

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188 This Bodin’s view on witches and mad women and how to differentiate them in legal process is taken from the article by George Hoffmann, *Monsters and Modal Logic among French Naturalists of the Renaissance*, South Central Review, Vol.10, No. 2, Reason, Reasoning, and Literature in the Renaissance (Summer, 1993), pp. 32-44 (published by The John Hopkins University Press on behalf of the South Central Modern Language Association).
Montaigne perhaps uses lame people as some sort of allegory for a weak mind that can never be sure of anything. Perhaps, another reason not to speak about the lame people until the end is to use this ridiculous assumption about the sexual ability of lame people to show human gullibility. Montaigne explains himself that the stories of lame people prove his point of view, which he stated at the beginning: that our reasons overpowers the event and seeks for such an explanation, even it is in foolishness and nonexistence. In the conclusion of the essay, Montaigne reflects on two extreme positions of philosophical schools: extreme ignorance and excessive knowledge. Some philosophers believe that human mind is totally weak, whereas others praise the human mind and its striking capacity to comprehend all phenomena in the universe. These two concepts are two extreme and unacceptable positions for Montaigne; he finishes his essay saying that no one should argue that people in general are unreasonable and that they only stop when they feel too weak to go further.

In all these stories, Montaigne is not looking to establish the truth. He does not care at all whether the monstrous child exists according to or against nature or how people should perceive him. He is not troubled at all if the fraud of someone’s identity is discovered and that person is punished for the sake of others or if miracles really took place. But, he is very much concerned if people choose to believe certain things and totally reject other things while basing their judgment on the opinions of others, without any real evidence or direct observation. Montaigne finds this approach to be extremely dangerous because it leads to disastrous consequences, such as the religious wars in his time. Thus, for Montaigne, the subject of monsters and portents serves as an illustration of his vision of the human mind and judgment.

The subject of animals is no different to Montaigne. Together with monsters, unusual inexplicable events, withes, etc., animals belong to the areas which humans cannot comprehend because it is beyond the capacity of human reason. Human attempts to comprehend and explain all these things issue from human experience or “cultural knowledge” which is always subjective. Montaigne’s conclusion is that all these things together with thousands of others make up the human perception of the natural world, and that it is useless to form judgements about the natural world, because they will always be erroneous. The general idea here is that, in any particular situation a human always has a certain set of permanent beliefs which are always specific and never objective. Therefore, the perception of any object or phenomena consequently falls into the category of introspective opinions that have no value for others. In this interpretation, humans are never able to find any objective truth. This dilemma will be more clearly defined and explained during the German Enlightenment, first by Immanuel Kant, later by his student Johann Gottfried Herder, and finally, by Wilhelm von Humboldt.

**In Quest of the Definition of Knowledge**

Kant suggested that knowledge or perception of all phenomena is divided into two categories: *a priori* and *a posteriori*. Knowledge *a posteriori* is synonymous with empirical knowledge which comes from experience. Knowledge *a priori* is independent “absolutely of all experience”. However, this last kind of knowledge is not accessible to the human mind, which
instead forms the universal perceptions in accordance with the concepts of time and space existing a priori. We read at the beginning of Kant’s *The Critique of Pure Reason*:

> The effect of an object upon the faculty of representation, so far as we are affected by the said object, is sensation. That sort of intuition which relates to an object by means of sensation is called an empirical intuition. The undetermined object of an empirical intuition is called phenomenon. That which in the phenomenon corresponds to the sensation, I term its matter; but that which effects that the content of the phenomenon can be arranged under certain form, I call its form. But that in which our sensations are merely arranged, and by which they are susceptible of assuming a certain form, cannot be itself sensation. It is, then, the matter of all phenomena that is given to us a posteriori; the form must lie ready a priori for them in the mind, and consequently can be regarded separately from all sensation.¹⁸⁹

Hence, a priori knowledge is a pure form of contemplation of objects which has nothing to do with personal experience nor consequently, the subjective perception of objects. Isn’t “that form ready a priori in the mind”, which has nothing to do with an impression or any subjective experience a human could bring to it, what Montaigne was looking to employ as a vehicle for explaining all phenomena objectively, including the non-human species, all while claiming as Kant did later, that the human mind is incapable of this pure form of observation? During the German Enlightenment, Kant’s idea about universal structures will be replaced with the notion of cultural knowledge that determines all kinds of human knowledge.¹⁹⁰ But, again, is this not what Montaigne already suggested?

The idea of cultural knowledge as a determinator of all kinds of human perception will find its final expression in the principle of ethnocentrism, which was suggested by American sociologist William Graham Sumner, who showed the negative influence of culture limiting human perception and favoring one’s own cultural vision as the center of everything. We read in Sumner the following definition of ethnocentrism:

> Ethnocentrism is the technical name for this view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. Folkways correspond to it to cover both the inner and the outer relation. Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders. Each group thinks its own folkways the only rights ones, and it observes that other groups have other folkways, these excite its scorn... ethnocentrism leads people to exaggerate and intensify everything in their own folkways which is peculiar and which differentiates them from others.¹⁹¹


¹⁹⁰ These ideas will be developed and modified first by Kant’s student Johann Gottfried Herder and then Wilhelm von Humboldt.

The modern definition of this phenomena is formulated by Tim Ignold in his article *Hunting and Gathering as Ways of Perceiving the Environment*, in which he describes the commonly accepted vision of social and cultural anthropology:

Of all species of animals, humans are unique in that they occupy what Richard Shweder calls “intentional worlds.” For the inhabitants of such a world, things do not exist “in themselves,” as indifferent objects but only as they are given form or meaning within systems of mental representations. Thus, to individuals who belong to different intentional worlds, the same objects in the same physical surroundings may mean quite different things. And people act toward these objects, or with them in mind, their actions respond to the ways they are already appropriated, categorized, or valorized in terms of particular, preexistent design. That design, transmitted across the generations in the form of received conceptual schemata, and manifested physically in the artificial products of their implementation, is what is “commonly” known as culture.¹⁹²

The key word in this citation is of course the word “intentional”. Montaigne would perhaps call it “imaginative”, the world that exists beyond the natural world, the world that adds different meaning to things, objects, and all phenomena, the world restricted by the rules and ideas of one group to another.

Montaigne’s own notion of knowledge is illustrated by the story of the philosopher Pyrrho, who, while in a perilous storm at sea, threatening an inevitable wreck to everyone, suggested to his companions to follow the example of a confident pig, unaware of the forthcoming danger. In the essay entitled *Que le goust des biens et des maux despend en bonne partie de l’opinion que nous en avons*, we read:

Pyrrho le Philosophe se trouvant un jour de grande tourmente dans un bateau, montroit à ceux qu’il voyoit les plus effrayez autour de luy, et les encourageoit par l’exemple d’un pourceau, qui y estoit, nullement soucieux de cet orage. Oserons nous donc dire que cet advantage de la raison, dequoy nous faisons tant de feste, et pour le respect duquel nous nous tenons maistres et Empereurs du reste des creatures, ait esté mis en nous, pour nostre tourment ? A quoy faire la cognoissance des choses, si nous en devenons plus lasches ? si nous en perdons le repos et la tranquilité, où nous serions sans cela ? et si elle nous rend de pire condition que le pourceau de Pyrrho ? L’intelligence qui nous a esté donnée pour nostre plus grand bien, l’employerons nous à nostre ruine ; combatans le dessein de nature, et l’universal ordre des choses, qui porte que chacun use de ses utils et moyens pour sa commodité ?¹⁹³

In this citation, the pejorative image of the ignorant pig, placidly enjoying its existence in the middle of general chaos among panic-stricken men, is employed to question the value of knowledge associated with a man’s possession of reason. Its intent is to challenge, by consequence, the idea of the unquestionable superiority of man over other species. According to Montaigne, the men on the ship are at an obvious disadvantage. They are in despair, waiting for

¹⁹² *Animals and the Human Imagination*, p. 32.
their death, while natural ignorance allows the pig to spend the last moments of its life in calm happiness. This fragment not only diminishes the value of reason – which, according to many classical teachings, is the supreme faculty strictly reserved for mankind – but it also makes reason responsible for human miseries, including the fear of death.

In this fragment, the pig’s ignorance is associated with happiness represented by tranquility. The pig is serene and happy on the ship because it does not know its future. It lives in the moment; the truth is hidden from the pig. Pyrrho’s companions, at the same time, are aware of the outcome of the dangerous storm. They have learnt, perhaps from other sailors’ stories, that storms often lead to shipwreck and the death of all crew members. On the surface, indeed, it appears that Montaigne is eager to celebrate the animal’s ignorance and prescribe it to men as a remedy to become happy. However, Montaigne’s predilection for this ignorance seems more intricate than it appears. Indeed, the pig does not have the knowledge that storm leads to destruction and death. In other words, it does not have men’s knowledge, the one that torments men and makes their existence miserable, the knowledge \textit{a posteriori} in Kant’s terms. But it is easy to imagine the pig might have another perception of reality, and a different kind of knowledge that is totally unavailable to men. In that case, the tranquility of the pig can be explained not by an ignorance of the danger of the storm sea, but by the monopoly of the knowledge that allows the pig to see this phenomenon differently.

Montaigne wants to suggest that knowledge does not exist in one form. Differences in knowledge predetermine the perception of phenomena and things, while the objective truth of them does not exist. The perception of things and phenomena changes all the time, depending on who makes the judgment. Montaigne seems to follow the path rediscovered by 16\textsuperscript{th} century Sextus Empiricus, who propagated the Pyrrhonian variety of Scepticism. Sextus’ example of an apple, which cannot ever be understood and described objectively, explicitly exemplifies the idea of changing reality. He tells us it is impossible to know what an apple really is because it might appear very different depending on the senses of the one making the judgment. Someone who has touch, smell, and taste but cannot see or hear anything, would assume that an apple is not something visible and audible; it has only three qualities which perfectly correspond to the one who has these senses. Others, who additionally have vision and hearing, would think that an apple has a certain shape and can even make a sound if you drop it. But does it really mean that they would know what an apple really is? There is always a possibility that someone else has other senses, and who would be able to detect other qualities of an apple.

The same idea of relativity of any knowledge of objects or phenomena can be applied to Montaigne’s pig’s fragment. One might argue that a pig can possess a different kind of knowledge and different senses that allow it to have a different perception of a phenomenon. One might speculate that the pig might be able to detect, for example, that the storm is going to stop and everybody will be saved – or something of the kind. Montaigne argues that men have no means to know what kind of knowledge the pig has, whether it is ignorant or not, or what it sees and what it does not. Montaigne asks:

Comment cognoiost il par l’effort de son intelligence, les branles internes et secrets des animaux? Par quelle comparaison d’eux à nous conclu il la bestise qu’il leur attribue ? Quand je me joue à ma chatte, qui sçait, si elle passe son temps de moy
plus que je ne fay d’elle? Nous nous entretenons de singeries reciproques. Si j’ay mon heure de commencer ou de refuser, aussi a elle la sienne.\textsuperscript{194}

However, long before Sextus Empiricus, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus already stated that everything is in a state of a constant movement, including the category of knowledge. Heraclitus philosophy was known to Renaissance scholars through the editions of works of Aristotle, Plato, Sextus Empiricus, Plutarch, and others. The fragments of Heraclitus’s works were not systematized which made it difficult for Renaissance readers to crystallize Heraclitus’ teaching.\textsuperscript{195} One work that attempted to systematize the pre-Socratic philosophy was entitled \textit{Poesis philosophica} and published in 1573 by H. Estienne. Another good source of Heraclitus vision was Plutarch’s \textit{Moralia}, in which a great deal of Heraclitus’ fragments were included. The reception of Heraclitus’ ideas in the Renaissance was mixed due to their complexity, obscurity, and apparent contradiction. Renaissance scholars further revealed the impossibility of explaining or giving a definition to any phenomena in Heraclitus’ philosophy.

Heraclitus’ teaching consisted of three main ideas: the flux doctrine, the coincidence of opposites, and the fire as the source of all things; these ideas which together constructed his logic of the cosmos. We read in one of his fragments the following: “Into the same rivers we walk and do not walk; we are and are not.”\textsuperscript{196} Here, Heraclitus tells us that it is impossible for anyone to enter the same river twice because no river is ever the same, it is always changing. Every phenomenon has its opposite quality and each quality changes into its contrary. However, these contraries are various in nature. If we look at two of his citations, we can see that contraries, which Heraclitus describes, are not the same. We read in the first citation: “As the same thing there exists in us living and dead and the waking and sleeping and young and old: for these things having changed round are those, and those things having changed around again are these ones.”(88)\textsuperscript{197} Indeed, the qualities “living” and “dead”, “walking” and “sleeping”, and “young” and “old” exist in us, but they exist at different times, because we are never alive and dead, young and old etc. at the same time. In other words, we possess these opposite qualities but each quality is distant from its contrary in time. In his second citation, Heraclitus examines water which possesses a different value for men and for fish. Heraclitus says: “And he says that the polluted and the pure are one and the same thing, and that the drinkable and undrinkable are one and the same thing: Sea, he says, is the most pure and the most polluted water; for fishes it is drinkable and salutary, but for men it is undrinkable and deleterious.”(61)\textsuperscript{198} In contrast to a previous citation, sea water can be pure and polluted at the same time; its state depends on its surroundings and use. It acquires its state by interaction with other forces. Hence, we can conclude that everything is always changing within itself, in the process of interference of one phenomenon with others and depending on space and time. Heraclitus sums up his vision of the cosmos when he says:

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{194} Montaigne, Gallimard, p. 474.
\item \textsuperscript{195} To read more about Heraclitus’ works and his reception in Renaissance, see Joukovsky, Francoise, \textit{Le Feu et le Fleuve, Heraclite et la Renaissance francaise} (Librairie Droz S. A., 11, rue Massor, Geneve, 1991).
\item \textsuperscript{196} Heraclitus: \textit{Homerican Problems}, edited and translated by Donal A. Russell and David Konstan (Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2005), p. 47
\item \textsuperscript{197} Heraclitus, \textit{The Cosmic Fragments} (Cambridge, At the University Press, 1954), p. 135
\item \textsuperscript{198} Heraclitus, \textit{The Cosmic Fragments}, p. 74.
\end{enumerate}
All things come into being by conflict of opposites, and the sum of things flows like a stream. Further, all that is limited and forms one world. And it is alternately born from fire and again resolved into fire in fixed circles to all eternity, and this is determined by destiny. Of the opposites that which tends to birth or creation is called war and strife, and that which tends to destruction by fire is called concord and peace. Change he called a pathway up and down, and this determines the birth of the world.  

If everything is in constant movement and there is no permanent form or condition in the universe, then how can any information or knowledge about anything be collected and how any idea or norm can be adopted and recognized as a right or objective one? Can any wisdom or knowledge be achieved if the definition of these things is constantly changing, if they adopt different forms depending on time and/or their surroundings and constantly turn into their contraries? There are no answers to these questions in the fragments left from Heraclitus’ teaching. He only says that it is possible to achieve wisdom and knowledge, but that they are available to very few men, because the majority of men are incapable of this, because “la plupart des hommes ne reflechissent pas aux choses telles qu’ils rencontrent, pas plus qu’ils ne les connaissent lorsqu’on les leur e enseignées; mais ils se l’imaginent.” He later explains his idea further and says: “Ignorants alors qu’ils ecoutent, ils ressemblent à des sourds; c’est d’eux que témoigne la formule: “présents, ils sont absents.” In other words, instead of collecting information and calling it knowledge, he wants men to reflect upon what they see and feel. Sense perception of information is an important component in building knowledge but it is necessary to decode meaning from the acquired information.

Montaigne most likely read Heraclitus’ in Plutarch’s *Moralia* and shared Heraclitus’ vision of the impossibility of defining what knowledge is and providing objective, stable, and complete knowledge of any phenomenon due to its inconstant nature. Montaigne did not entirely dismiss the possibility of acquiring a limited subjective knowledge about things, which was demonstrated by many examples of Greek philosophers, and like Heraclitus, he insisted on the necessity of digesting knowledge.

Going back to animals, we can see how Montaigne’s belief in the impossibility giving a proper definition of knowledge defines his view on animals and their relationship with humans. In order to judge animals and decide if they are inferior, superior, or equal to humans, humankind needs to have a criterion by which this can be measured. Montaigne insists on the absence of a criterion to assess animals and to therefore conclude where they stand in relationship with humans. He does not believe that humans are able to comprehend the motivations of animal behavior, simply because *a priori* humankind has a very limited knowledge about everything including animals, and even the knowledge they have is not objective, pure knowledge, but rather the knowledge which consists of a set of opinions conditioned by time, place, and culture. Montaigne defines this knowledge as “imaginary knowledge” that makes humans’ lives

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201 Héraclite, p. 257.
miserable by leading them to fear, greed, passions, pride, and many other negative qualities. Montaigne completely dismisses any judgement about animals based on the fact that animals behave differently or that they do not express themselves in a way than humans can comprehend them. His conclusion is that it is impossible for humans to form any opinion about animals.

Besides proving the volatility of the phenomena of knowledge and the impossibility of using it to judge anyone or anything, including animals, Montaigne was also interested in examining the practical value of human knowledge irrespective of anything. Montaigne was convinced that attained knowledge or thorough wisdom has not helped to any of its possessors, including Greek philosophers, to escape any human misery expressed in sicknesses, criminal accusations, and death. According to Montaigne, the lives of knowledgeable humans did not demonstrate any advantages over those who did not possess it, because knowledge is unstable and can disappear in a very short time. Montaigne dismisses the examples of those classical philosophers who endowed humans with a multitude of superior qualities associated with wisdom which, according to these philosophers, allowed their owners to resemble God and be able to choose virtuous lives. Instead, Montaigne provided us with many examples that show how simple, uneducated people were able to lead happy lives.

Montaigne aims to show how insolvent and contradictory the views of different classical philosophical teachings are and how philosophers are not able to teach humankind a way to happiness. He demonstrates that it is impossible for humankind to find the true theory among various theories with pretensions to provide knowledge. Montaigne divides all the philosophical schools into three groups according to how they respond to a problem. The first type of philosophical school affirms that they have found the solution, the second maintains that the solution cannot be found, and the third is still in search of a solution. Among all the philosophical schools, Montaigne admits to favoring Pyrrhonism, because this teaching depicts humans as naked and empty, admitting their own weakness and opened to accepting help from a superior power.
Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was to determine the status of animals in French Renaissance culture. The study demonstrated the significance of animals and their ubiquitous presence in a variety of genres written in this period. While the phenomenon of animals in non-literary and literary texts was not new (animals abound in texts written in the Middle Ages), the major characteristic of the texts examined here is that Renaissance scholars used animals as subject matter, not as vehicles to represent humans, unlike the treatment of animals in texts written in the Middle Ages. In other words, although it was not universal, some Renaissance scholars certainly demonstrated a break with the tradition of employing animals as allegorical figures. These scholars showed not only profound interest in but also admiration for many animal species, as well as genuine concern for their unjustifiably poor treatment by humans. The discoveries of new animals and species and the return to the pro-animal texts written in antiquity seriously challenged the Aristotelian justification of the anthropocentric view of animals. The exploration of the abilities and habits of animals showed their “cleverness,” thereby casting doubt on and even dismissing the superior position of humans in the hierarchy of species, thus calling into account humans for their treatment of animals.

The first chapter of this dissertation examined the position of animals in three different genres of French Renaissance literature: zoological texts, monster literature, and travel journals. This chapter introduced the use of animals as subjects in French Renaissance literature and discussed the texts that were the most influential in the treatment of animals in this period. The main characteristic of the texts explored in the first chapter is the curious position of their authors, who were Renaissance scholars that admired the application of classical knowledge in every discipline, including animal studies and were eager to explore new ideas. They often observed that classical sources contained apparent contradictions and even erroneous information about animals. Consequently, these scholars had the difficult task of rejecting classical authority, which they originally considered unshakable. This contradiction is especially apparent in Belon’s zoological opus, in which, much ahead of Francis Bacon, he advocated direct observation while attempting to reconcile his scientific observations with his inherited classical knowledge and methods. Jean de Léry and Andre Thevet faced similar problems in their travels to a distant land, which forced them to question many established views, including the definition of who should be considered human and non-human. After being confronted by overwhelming differences from the European cultural understanding of human-animal relationships, these travelers realized the impossibility of maintaining their previous assumptions. Finally, Boaistuaau’s and Belon’s texts on monsters explored the absence of boundaries between fantastic and real animals in the period, based on the belief in the existence of all types of animals, regardless of their incredible appearances and/or impossible abilities.

The second chapter of the dissertation refuted the traditional scholarly interpretation of des Périers’ text, Cymbalum Mundi, as an attack on religion and the allegorical employment of animals. Instead, Periers’ text is analyzed as a literary work in which animals were perceived as subject matter. This text also challenged the value of speech as a manifestation of reason, which has been the primary reason for the ill treatment of animals throughout the history of Western
civilization. Des Périers’ text is also a rare attempt to convey an animal’s perspective, in which the characters use human language to talk about their lives. Des Périers uses this narrative technique to undermine the assumption that animals are an inferior species and to change their unfair and cruel treatment by humans.

The third chapter examined human-animal relationships in Montaigne’s *Essais*. It demonstrated Montaigne’s peculiar position with regard to animals, according to which he condemns human cruelty to both humans and non-humans on one hand and completely dismisses the Aristotelian theory of human superiority on the other hand. In this text, Montaigne provides many examples that not only showed animals’ capacity to reason but also their ability to surpass human organization. The text also challenges the privileged position of reason as a deciding factor in the superiority of a species. Montaigne argues that reason is one of many qualities, none of which is more important than the others are, and it cannot be used as a criterion of the superiority of one species over others.

Montaigne also provides rich excursus of other cultures, geographical areas, and even the historical past, when humans not only treated animals differently from his contemporary society but also worshipped them. Finally, his general understanding of how animals should be perceived and treated is rooted in Heraclitus and Sextus Empiricus’ concept of knowledge, according to which humans are never in a position to have complete knowledge about any phenomena, including animals, because it is impossible to know of what the phenomenon of knowledge consists. If it is impossible to produce a definition of knowledge because of its instability, then humans should not suggest that animals are inferior, cannot express their feelings, or do not have the capacity to reason. Hence, humans cannot justify their poor treatment of animals.

This dissertation revealed that modern ideas about animals’ complex abilities and rights were explored by some scholars in the French Renaissance. Therefore, these texts should be given serious consideration because they provide early evidence of the philosophical consideration of human practices in relation to animals, and they advocate taking responsibility for human behavior towards non-humans. We should closely reexamine and perhaps dismiss the commonly shared belief that the world was created for the convenience of humans and that animals are nothing more than delicious food, pleasant company to relieve human boredom, a means of convenient labor, tools for research, and whatever purpose humans want them to serve. The starting point should be to examine Christian thought about non-humans, which according to Nathaniel Wolloch, has played a crucial role in the cultural history of animals.

It may be that at early stages of the development of human culture people felt a relatively large degree of kinship with nature and the animals, and did not regard themselves as separate from them. However, upon the appearance of the Bible a clear hierarchical cosmology emerged, stressing human superiority to the rest of the material creation. Judeo-Christian culture thus viewed the world as composed of God, human beings, and nature, which was meant to serve humanity.202

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The work in this direction has already started. Andrew Linzey has written several books on animal theology,\textsuperscript{203} and a very recent work is David L. Clough’s \textit{Animals}.\textsuperscript{204} However, much remains to be done in the field of animal studies. One direction of this research could explore the status of animals in different religions practiced in past and present societies. Montaigne’s text provides a scheme for this future research.

\textsuperscript{203} See for example, Andrew Linzey, \textit{Animal Theology} (University of Illinois Press: Urbana and Chicago, 1995).

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