

SELFISH ANIMALS IN CHARLES DICKENS'S *MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT*

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ABSTRACT	RESUMO
<p><i>Martin Chuzzlewit</i> is a novel which marks the beginning of a new phase in Charles Dickens's career. A period when he already dealt with the fame acquired with novels like <i>The Pickwick Papers</i> and <i>Oliver Twist</i> but felt that he had to change the course of his writing and achieve a more sophisticated style to become the qualified and respected author he aimed to be. This essay discusses how Dickens developed his use of imagery and symbolism in this phase of his career to add depth to his characters and magic to the world where they live. The main focus is the animal imagery in <i>Martin Chuzzlewit</i>, of 1846, but it also considers the two following novels, <i>Dombey and Son</i> and <i>David Copperfield</i>, which belong to the same period. There are loyal dogs like Florence Dombey's Diogenes and stubborn donkeys invading Betsy Trotwood's green. Some of those animals possess human-like characteristics, which is not exactly a surprise in a world like Dickens's, where umbrellas and wooden legs have their own minds and wishes. But an even more curious situation than anthropomorphising animals is when the opposite occurs and we also have humans acting like animals, with Mr Pecksniff lacking only the feathers to become a bird, or Uriah Heep's finger leaving tracks along the page like a snail. Those comparisons allow Dickens to leave the civilized culture aside and expose people being led by the most basic instincts of natural competition and survival.</p>	<p>O romance <i>Martin Chuzzlewit</i> marca o início de uma nova fase na carreira de Charles Dickens. Em um período em que ele já lidava com a fama adquirida através de romances como <i>The Pickwick Papers</i> e <i>Oliver Twist</i>, mas sentia que precisava sofisticar seu estilo se quisesse se tornar o qualificado e respeitado escritor que ele pretendia ser. Este ensaio é sobre como Dickens desenvolveu seu uso de figuras de linguagem e simbolismo nesta fase de sua carreira para acrescentar profundidade aos seus personagens e mágica ao mundo onde eles vivem. O foco principal aqui é o uso imagético de animais em <i>Martin Chuzzlewit</i>, de 1846, mas também são considerados os dois romances que se seguiram a ele, <i>Dombey and Son</i> e <i>David Copperfield</i>. Temos cães fieis como Diogenes de Florence Dombey, e burros teimosos invadindo a grama de Betsy Trotwood. Alguns desses animais demonstram características humanas, o que não é surpresa em um mundo como o de Charles Dickens onde guarda-chuvas e pernas de pau têm vontades próprias. Mas ainda mais curioso do que animais antropomórficos é ver o oposto acontecendo e humanos agindo como animais, com o Sr. Pecksniff faltando-lhe unicamente as penas para ser um pássaro, ou o dedo de Uriah Heep deixando rastros na página com uma lesma. Esses tipos de comparações permitem a Dickens deixar o mundo civilizado de lado e expor pessoas sendo levadas pelos mais básicos instintos de competição e sobrevivência.</p>

KEY-WORDS	PALAVRAS-CHAVE
Charles Dickens; <i>Martin Chuzzlewit</i> ; Victorian literature; Animals in literature.	<i>Charles Dickens</i> ; <i>Martin Chuzzlewit</i> ; <i>Literatura Vitoriana</i> ; <i>Animais na literatura</i> .

James Carker's parrot pulled at the wires of its cage, and shook, and bit, and rattled at the bars, as if it knew its master was in danger and wanted to warn him. At the same time, old Martin Chuzzlewit's relatives are vermin, blood-suckers, wolves and vultures. In Dickens's fiction, humans and animals can borrow one another's characteristics, making animal seem more human and human seem more animal. The results can be funny, grotesque or they can simply present one's perspective through the eyes of the other. In this essay I analyse the most frequent uses of animals in Dickens's novels *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Dombey and Son* and *David Copperfield*, discuss on how humans and animals sometimes get confused in their personalities, and especially on how the use of animal imagery helps Dickens to develop his characters and themes.

The analysis starts with the curious behaviour of horses at Anthony's funeral in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. In an event that has everything money can buy, Tacker, Mr Mould's chief mourner, says the horses are prouder and fresher than ever, tossing their heads as if they knew how much their plumes cost. The narrator, more sarcastically, sees their actions in a different light:

The four hearse-horses especially reared and pranced, and showed their highest action, as if they knew a man was dead, and triumphed in it. "They break us, drive us, ride us; ill-treat, abuse, and maim us for their pleasure – but they die; Hurrah, they die!" (DICKENS, 2012c, p. 316).

Instead of being happy for their expensive feathers, the hearse-horses would be actually celebrating the fact that there is one less human in the world to hurt them. Both interpretations of the horses' actions reflect humanized minds behind them. Tacker, as organizer of the spectacle, believes horses would be proud of the money spent to adorn them. The narrator, seeing the scene from outside, regards horses more closely for what they really are: working animals, that are often ill-treated by their owners and that, if conscious of what was happening, would have reasons enough to be happy about the death of a man. In the end, the mystery of what actually goes on in the horses' minds remains a secret to everybody, including the readers, since nobody has actual access to their minds; they are only said to act "as if they knew". The inaccessibility of the horses' minds reflects the same secretiveness of the humans in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. As J. H. Miller (1969) says, the novel is full of characters that are enclosed in themselves, secret and intent on reflexive ends which are altogether mysterious to those around them. The air of selfishness and distrust that surrounds the humans end up reflecting back on the poor horses, that whether in Tacker's or the narrator's opinion, are selfishly thinking about their own interests.

The attribution of human feelings to animals is not an exclusivity of Victorian

times, but the period is interesting in this aspect because of some changes in the way animals were regarded. More than ever animals were considered able to respond to human feelings and even to reproduce some traces of human personality. Although Charles Darwin's revolutionary work, *On the Origin of Species*, was only published in 1859, subsequent to the three novels here analysed, questions involving animal proximity to humans were raised long before that (MORSE; DANAHAY, 2007). Animals' capacity to express love and loyalty, and to feel fear and pain were extensively debated in nineteenth-century books, magazines, and medical studies, which virtually helped reducing the gap between humans and animals. Those debates encouraged movements for animals' rights and especially against vivisection and other kinds of violence animals suffered. People also became confused with this proximity and the idea of sharing characteristics with animals, as well as with the extension of human traces that were to be expected from them (MANGUN, 2007). Dickens had an ambiguous attitude towards evolutionary theories, especially when they threatened the religious status quo. However, as suggested by his essays on Darwinian theories later in the 1860s, he also encouraged scientific discussions - however carefully in order to avoid offending the sensibilities of his readers (SANDERS, 2009). His undeniable love and respect for animals, as well as his curiosity about them, influenced or not by new theories, can be seen in the ways he depicts them through his narrators or characters' views.

Horses, for example, are believed to replicate human characteristics: David's horse seems to prefer its stable to a ride to Canterbury at late hours; and Barkis' horse is slow like him. Pecksniff's horse presents a fanciful resemblance to his master. Not in his outward person, but in his moral character, as, like his owner, "he full of promise, but of no performance" (DICKENS, 2012c, p. 77). But when Martin calls it "a brute of a horse" (DICKENS, 2012c, p. 212), or later when he asks "whether that horse of Pecksniff is alive still" (DICKENS, 2012c, p. 626), he is obviously referring to the architect himself. Horses can also increase their masters' attractiveness to women: Mr Murdstone uses his horse to impress David's mother; David too, shows himself to Dora while riding a gallant grey; James Steerforth, Jack Maldon and James Carker are skilled horseman with clear female targets - Little Emily, Annie Strong and Edith Dombey. Horses are interesting figures in Victorian iconography, standing both as sexual and social symbols of power. As domestic animals they represent dominion over the natural world, valued simultaneously for their docility and aggression. They are intimately connected to masculinity and the rider's capacity to dominate them. In the social context horses conferred signs of breeding to both the traditional aristocracy and the growing newly enriched commercial class (MICHIE, 2007). To Edith Dombey though, the market value attributed to horses only reminds her how she cruelly feels like a commodity herself. She cries: "There is no slave



in the market: there is no horse in a fair: so shown and offered and examined and paraded, Mother, as I have been, for ten shameful years" (DICKENS, 2012b, p. 411).

Betsy Trotwood tolerates horses, but not the donkeys that are always in her mind, provoking cold shivers from head to foot. She is actually one of the characters that most confuses human and animal. She repeatedly curses the donkeys that insist on trespassing on her green, while the ones to blame are clearly the boys who pull the donkeys. The problem about humanising animals is that once they are believed to reason like people, they can be charged not only with desirable, but also with undesirable human characteristics. So if we believe that dogs woke up earlier to say goodbye to Mark Tapley because they like him, or that Diogenes loves Florence because it understands she is Paul's sister, then we can also believe that donkeys invade the green deliberately and the parrot is an accomplice in Carker's schemes. And if they are conscious, they can be punished for their behaviour (MANGUN, 2007). For example, Dora's dog, Jip, is just as spoiled as its mistress, but when Dora considers that Jip misbehaves, she allows herself to beat it. The confusion happens because, in her mind, if Jip is treated like a child, it must be conscious and respond like one, otherwise it is ungrateful.

Mr Murdstone does not believe in equality between species. He beats his dogs and horses to subjugate them and does the same with David, as if the boy were an obstinate animal that does not understand anything except brutal force. David responds by biting his stepfather like a dog, and later when he goes to school, he is forced to have a placard on his back written "Take care of him. He bites." (DICKENS, 2012a, p. 81).

Animals blend with people in Martin's fatidic trip to America too. They illustrate, beyond Martin's view, the poverty and ignorance of the population, as well as the dishonesty of the ruling class. The starving animals he sees are stupid-looking: the bonny dogs and long-legged pigs partake in the same poverty of people who live in Eden, thinking of nothing else but of finding food. The only animals that seem to be enjoying their prospects are the pigs related to Mr Jefferson Brick and Colonel Diver:

The colonel knocked at this house with the air of a man who lived there; and an Irish girl popped her head out of one of the top windows to see who it was. Pending her journey downstairs, the pigs were joined by two or three friends from the next street, in company with whom they lay down sociably in the gutter (DICKENS, 2012c, p. 265).

At the same time that the colonel is waiting for the Irish girl who is in the house, the fact that the pigs are also joining "their friends" shows how the narrator feels about Martin's new acquaintances.

Sometimes the animals are not present in the scene, and appear only in form of

image, in a comparison. When Paul arrives at Doctor Blimber's school, he looks as if he was a little mouse, and the house was a trap. The passage functions to show not only the way the boy feels, but also how fragile his existence is in the plot as a whole. Comparisons to animals like that explore both characters' feelings and the way they are seen by others characters and the narrator, providing a three dimensional understanding of the situation than a simple description would offer.

Ivan Kreilkamp suggests that when Dickens used animal imagery he was trying to avoid the fate of the types and semi-characters from his early sketches, who were vivid enough for a brief moment, but soon departed, leaving no trace in the readers' memory.

Dickens's representation of animals, and his use of figurative language comparing humans to animals, becomes shaped by a concern that individual identity, personality and memory might not be retained: that all one's individuating characteristics might slip away into formlessness and an abyss of forgetfulness or misremembering that would threaten the possibility both of novelistic form and of continuing identity over time (KREILKAMP, 2007, p. 82-83).

The images produced by animal imagery can have their origins in myths, superstitions or simply in the observation of their habits. Since Dickens was always concerned in pleasing his audience, animal imagery appealed to popular and folkloric knowledge, being the animals domestic, wild or exotic.

Birds are the most frequently mentioned animals in the three novels, in terms of having characters compared to them. Birds are very diverse in nature: they can be simple minded like the pigeon or astute like the partridge; possible to domesticate like the hawk, or not like the Garamantes. Some birds enjoy human company, others do not; some sing beautifully, and others squeak or mimic human speech, some eat only seeds and fruits, and others hunt; some congregate, and others go singly; and so on (WHITE, 1954). Dickens's love of birds is best known by the two ravens he had as pets, which were considered very intelligent animals. In his novels, the characters compared to birds are also very diverse in nature, from the most delicate to the most aggressive. When Mercy Pecksniff and Clara Copperfield are called little birds, or when Paul and Florence Dombey are compared to caged birds, the image highlight their fragility and imprisonment. Dora and David are innocent as birds in their new house, easily cheated by their servants; Dora is frequently compared to a bird, both in terms of beauty and fragility; Mr Peggotty says Emily is as free as a bird (later, she flies away with Steerforth); in his childhood, the bird-like David is hypnotized by the Murdstonian snakes who are preparing to devour him; and in front of Mr Creakle, the tired boy blinks like a young owl.

Bird traits can be deeply rooted in someone's personality: Poll Sweedlepipe has "something of the bird in his nature; not of the hawk or the eagle, but of the sparrow that builds in chimney-stacks, and inclines to human company" (DICKENS. *Martin Chuzzlewit*, 2012, p. 406); or just in the impression they cause: Captain Cuttle, with his usual clothes and as if they were his feathers; Dora's aunts, with their bright round twinkling eyes, sharp, brisk, sudden manner, and spruce way of adjusting themselves like canaries; or Mrs Pipchin, with her sable plumage and hooked beak, looking like a bird of ill-omen.

Mr Pecksniff, the champion of animal association, sees himself very differently from the way others see him. While Mercy is compared to a lamb, meaning she is sacrificed in marrying Jonas, her father, in the sarcastic comment from the narrator, combines "all the mild qualities of a lamb with the touch of a dove" to proclaim himself the messenger of peace (DICKENS, 2012c, p. 68). His name suggests he pecks like a bird but sniffs like a dog; yet, he goes innocently towards Mary only wanting feathers and wings to be a bird. But his innocence is feigned – in the same scene he holds Mary against her will and suffocates the girl like a boa-constrictor. Pecksniff hides behind the purity of birds, but birds in Dickens sometimes mean danger.

Tigg Montague tells Jonas, "we companies are all birds of prey" (DICKENS, 2012C, p. 427); Mr Dombey is also a bird of prey when he hits Florence; and Elijah Pogram, the member of the American congress, "was snapping up great blocks of everything he could get hold of, like a raven" (DICKENS, 2012C, p. 514). The American eagle preys on Martin in the form of Scadder, who sells him the Eden lot. "Two grey eyes lurked deep within this agent's head, but one of them had no sight in it, and stood stock still" (DICKENS, 2012C, p. 346). Each side of his face had a distinct expression, and while the movable side was in action, the paralyzed was kept in the coldest state of watchfulness. Birds of prey have to rely on their good sight and sharp beak to get their food. Legends from bestiaries say that eagles born with bad sight were discarded by the parents, since they could not represent the species (PAYNE, 1990). However, in America Martin becomes such an easy prey that even a half-blind old eagle is able to trick him.

The image of the white-headed bald eagle is the official symbol of The United States since 1784 (EASON, 2008). Here, the eagle preying on the British Lion – represented by Martin – reinforces the competition between America and England in the form of the two kings of animals. The eagle is the king of birds while the lion is not only the king of beasts of tooth and claw, but also of all living things in general, and is a symbol of power, wisdom and justice (WHITE, 1954). Yet, the repetition that Martin is being constantly *lionized* during his stay does not mean any recognition of superiority, but actually the exaggerated attention he is receiving – like a famous literary lion, which he is not – in order to spend the money he brought. Martin suddenly sees himself surrounded and

praised by people he hardly knows and can hardly trust, like the author himself felt in his trip to America in 1842. Among many dinners and parties, Dickens was exalted for his books, but also criticized for his insistence on the establishment of copyrights laws, which shook his relation with America for many years, and affected profoundly his sense of identity both as man and as artist (SLATER, 2011).

The propriety Martin buys in America is full of dangerous rattlesnakes, however the most dangerous snakes are still in the old continent. Pecksniff's embrace is like a boa-constrictor's; Steerforth is a spotted snake, and the Murdstones, as mentioned before, hypnotise their prey before attacking (DICKENS, 2012c). Snakes and serpents are most of the time associated with perverse behaviour, result of centuries of negative legends and superstitions about them. In the Christian culture snakes represent the tempter of evil in the story of the Garden of Eden. Because they do not have eyelids, their fixed stare before striking makes their prey feel uncomfortable and then paralyzed; and their forked tongues and poison can be equated with the spiteful and false words of a human (EASON, 2008). Mrs Chick calls Miss Tox a serpent and Mrs Gamp calls Betsy Prigg a "serpian" because of their falsity; Mr Micawber calls Uriah Heep a serpent for his crimes and again, falsity. The image of snakes is not always so bad though. There are more positive myths, based on the admiration they provoke on humans. For example, their capacity to shed their skin and seemingly emerge reborn is identified with regeneration, the act of giving birth and immortality (EASON, 2008). John Sutherland (2012) writes that among all animals, snakes were the ones Dickens least admired, although they hold a fascination on him, especially when feeding. When Major Bagstock and young David are also compared to boa constrictors, it is simply because they seem to eat a large amount of food in one big gulp, like snakes eating living birds or rats.

Dogs were Dickens's favourite animals. He always had dogs, usually big ones and often many at the same time. Yet, in his novels, when somebody is compared to a dog, it hardly ever means a compliment. Like the hungry dogs I mentioned earlier, mistreated or submissive characters can be compared with dogs. Slyme is an unappreciated dog; Murdstone orders David like a dog, and the boy obeys like one; and Cherry leads her parent the life of a dog. Despite the growing efforts for animal rights in Victorian times, and the popularity of pets, violence was still very common both towards domestic animals and the ones which lived in the streets. Dogs were abandoned, tortured, starved to death, and used for experiments or in popular blood sports, like dogfighting. The spread of rabies in the period, allied with the lack of information about the disease, also provoked the extermination of hundreds of dogs (RITVO, 1990) – just like Jonas plans to do with Chuffey after the old clerk fastens himself upon his coat, "like a savage dog" (DICKENS, 2012c, p. 738). Calling someone a dog in Dickens can sometimes mean

kindness (Walter is a young dog), but most of the time expresses anger or despise. The most favourable image happens when Mark Tapley, coming all wet from the rain, shakes himself like a Newfoundland dog, one of Dickens's favourite breeds.

Cats were also great victims of violence for their proximity to humans, with the disadvantage that, differently from dogs, they could not count on a very good reputation (RITVO, 1990). While dogs have their fidelity and love for their master exalted since the old bestiaries, cats possess a highly contradictory image, fruit of the combination of the gentle and the sinister in their appearance.¹ Dickens did not love cats, but respected them, despite cats' native dislike of birds (MURRAY, 2009). The dubious characters of Rosa Dartle and James Carker are connected with cats. Rosa's lynx-like hungry eyes scrutinize David, and she strikes Steerforth with the fury of a wild cat. Rosa has a strange relation of love and hate with Steerforth, which is reflected in her aggressive manners. The way she hints what she wants to say instead of saying it outright, reminds of the subtlety of cats. Also like a cat, she fascinates both David and Steerforth with her beauty, although a "little dilapidated".

James Carker is also linked to cats, but unlike Rosa, his sensuality is not repressed, and he uses it in his relations with Edith and Alice. But Carker is not simply compared to a cat in determined occasions; everything in him, from his appearance to his every move, is cat-like. His most impressive feature is his mouth, full of unbroken shining teeth, that smiles a smile that rarely extends beyond it. His hair and whiskers remind of the coat of a sandy tortoise-shell cat; his nails are long, nicely pared and sharpened, and he has a natural antipathy for any speck of dirt. All these characteristics mingle with his sly personality: "Mr Carker the manager, sly of manner, sharp of tooth, soft of foot, watchful of eye, oily of tongue, cruel of heart, nice of habit, sat with a dainty steadfastness and patience at his work, as if he were waiting at the mouse's hole" (DICKENS, 2012b, p. 314). He is mentioned to be constantly playing a card game (although the narrator informs us that it is not "among the instincts wild or domestic of the cat tribe") (DICKENS, 2012b, p. 314) in order to illustrate how calculated and precise his actions are. Carker is the man who relies on his most basic animalistic instincts, not only to stay alive, but to get what he wants. He expresses "the more dynamic, predatory qualities necessary to a successful business man in a *laissez-faire* society" (WALDER, 2012, p. XI). Carker's affinity with cats as something to throw suspicious over his character and even make him look dangerous demonstrates well enough how much Dickens did not trust those animals. The most interesting thing, however, is that although Carker is the great villain of *Dombey and Son*,

¹ Contradiction about the image of cats is in CHEVALIER and GHEERBRANT, *Dictionary of symbols*. Translated by BUCHANAN-BROWN, p. 162; Dogs and the legends of fidelity and love are in WHITE. *The book of beasts: being a translation from a Latin bestiary of the twelfth century*, p. 50-51.

he is not much more than an astute and dishonest man. Carker does not commit any actual crime during the whole novel, his fault is to manipulate the people who judge to be socially superior to him. He does not even steal Mr Dombey's money in the end, which he could have easily done. His crimes against Alice, Edith and Dombey are actually moral, which accounts for his punishment at the final chapters.

In terms of development of animal imagery, Carker in *Dombey and Son* represents those characters whose personality is strongly influenced by one single animal, which is permanently attached to them, conflicting seriously with their human nature or even taking over it. Also Dora and her aunts are strongly connected with birds, and it is difficult to think of Uriah Heep without remembering a lizard or snake. It is a different stage of symbolism compared to what we have in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, where despite the larger variety of creatures, a single set of animal traces hardly ever take over the human personality so strongly. With the exception of Poll Swiddlepipe, who actually becomes a bird, acquiring all the ways of walking, observing and the mildness of birds.

In the overall, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, characters seem more to borrow animal characteristics for certain moments and then return them back, like Tigg roaring like a lion, only to try to impose respect. The miscellanea support the comic side of the novel and emphasize characters' greed to possess what does not belong to them. For example, Pecksniff is a dog, a bird, a lamb, a dove, a snake and a horse; but is actually none of them. Those images work as devices to expose or hide his true human self, his hypocritical and parasitic behaviour. Pecksniff does not create anything original, but only steals the originality of others – which can be attested by all the proverbs he is often repeating; as well as by the project of a school he steals from Martin (CASTILLO, 2008). In *Dombey and Son*, this manipulative comic borrower of animal characteristics is Major Bagstock, who is a lobster, a bear, an elephant, a boa-constrictor and more, depending on what the narrator wants to say about him, standing as one of the best examples of the early Dickensian character (COCKSHUT, 1965).

Dickens used both his fascination for animals and their place in popular culture to create analogies that were at the same time familiar and easily meaningful. His wish to always keep a friendly relationship with his public was often reason for critics to accuse Dickens of oversimplifying his text and restraining his skills in order not to lose readers. However, the diversity of animal imagery in this phase of his career shows a state of elaboration that was becoming more and more sophisticated, which also shows that he was experimenting new possibilities in applying these images to highlight different aspects of comedy, melodrama, danger, and so on. Patrick J. McCarthy (1980, p. 645) argues that “the presence of animal qualities tends to give edge and distinction, and even force and validation, to a character”, while their absence clearly weakens and palliates

them. On the other hand, it is interesting not to forget, when real animals present human qualities, the situation does not seem so much advantageous for them. Subjugated by a confused society that could neither recognize nor respect them as true others and worthy of respect, animals were permanently between the people who despised them as no more than animate objects and the people who pressed them to express their feelings like humans to be understood. Dickens's humanized animals mimic human behaviour, with all its selfishness and cruelty, parodying, like in the actions of the hearse-horses and the American pigs, our incongruities and overcomplicated rationality.

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DE CHARLES DICKENS**



INVENTARIO