

**THE HUMAN ANIMAL:
POSTHUMANISM IN JOHN STEINBECK'S *CANNERY ROW***

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The Human Animal: Posthumanism in John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*

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ABSTRACT

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In this paper, I examine John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* on the basis of the posthuman vision that courses through it, as it does through many of Steinbeck's works. I propose that Steinbeck presents human and animal worlds that intermingle, mimic, and sustain one another; what Steinbeck described as non-teleological may justifiably be considered posthuman. In *Cannery Row*, people of various social positionings and mental capacities are presented plainly and matter-of-factly, without even a hint at causation or judgment of their character, abilities, behaviors, morals, or actions. The novel is grounded in a vision of close inter-species connections in which humans are not any better than any other animate species, and animals are not inferior to humans; we are alike more than we are not.

Three ideas, developed in three separate chapters of this paper, are central to demonstrating the posthumanism of *Cannery Row* with its clear affinities to the posthumanism delineated by Cary Wolfe in *What Is Posthumanism?* These include interspecies connectedness, the shared bond of suffering, and pet-"owner" relationships.

Cannery Row, as well as *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, also by Steinbeck, exemplifies the interconnectedness, similarities, and interdependencies between species, including humans who sense animals' unspoken pain and act to alleviate it, animals and humans who experience alienation and ostracism and suffer from it, and a dog who lives with as much independence and autonomy as her human housemates, to reveal a world that

is not anthropocentric but rather posthuman. Human beings in the novel are placed side by side with non-human characters who are similarly presented, and there is a sense of equality and inclusiveness between biological species observed being themselves. The bond of suffering is shared by humans and nonhumans, who acknowledge and respond to suffering in other species. Relationships between humans and pets showcase distinctions between *Cannery Row*'s humanist and posthuman characters.

The clear conclusion is that *Cannery Row* embraces posthumanism.

DEDICATION

For

EKATERINI KARAPETSA

who should know why, and does

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I examine *Cannery Row* on the basis of the posthuman vision that courses through it, as it does through many of Steinbeck's works. It is a vision that denies humanity the unique agency accorded by the Judeo-Christian tradition, as well as the status of pinnacle species in the evolutionary schema that grew out of that tradition and views humans as but one species among many in the ecosystem. I propose that in this novel Steinbeck presents human and animal worlds that intermingle, mimic and sustain one another: what Steinbeck described as non-teleological may justifiably be considered posthuman. For the purpose of this paper, I will utilize Cary Wolfe's definition: standing in opposition to "the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism," posthumanism rejects "the various anthropological, political, and scientific dogmas of the human" and invokes a new way of thinking altogether (Wolfe xv-xvi). This reconsideration of humans and the rest of the world and of the relationships between them, Wolfe writes, brings about posthumanist thought, which calls for humans, one of the newest species in this universe, to acknowledge and embrace "an increase in the vigilance, responsibility, and humility that accompany living in a world so newly, and differently, inhabited" (47). This concept of posthumanism invites a new and objective examination of existing biological beings as opposed to entities that have been artificially created and incorporate human and mechanical components. While *Cannery Row*, a novel that places the biological world of the tide pool at its center, does offer examples of human-like machine beings, these are beyond the scope of my current study.

There are several threads of posthumanism, with transhumanism one of them: the

redesign of the human condition to allow “for personal growth beyond the current biological limitations” (Miller 61). While Donna Haraway’s posthumanism centers on cross-species interactions, and N. Katherine Hayles’s focuses on human/machine entities, Wolfe’s more closely represents *Cannery Row*’s community of naturally occurring human and animal characters. Steinbeck’s intricately interconnected environment reveals the similarities and codependence of all the species represented and the significance of each member of each species. There is no momentous, earth-shaking plot in the text, no perfect characters; there is simply life: everyday life of everyday beings. This speaks to the value of everyday life of everyday beings, which is a basic component of posthumanism, a concept as true and relevant today as it was in 1945, when the novel was published. The understanding of the connections between humanity and the beings around us, of the impact we have on each other, and of the responsibility to one another that we must acknowledge and assume, add perspective and meaning and truth to our lives. This is what posthumanism offers, what Steinbeck offers in *Cannery Row*.

In *Cannery Row*, people of various social positionings and mental capacities are presented plainly and matter-of-factly, without even a hint at causation or judgment of their character, abilities, behaviors, morals, or actions. We are given no reasons, no excuses, no telos, simply snapshots of the community in the here and now, the implication being that anything else is irrelevant and, therefore, inconsequential: any suggestion of a grand design or purpose would be immaterial. The human beings in the novel are placed side by side with non-human characters who are similarly presented on a leveled ecological playing field with no sense of an existence of a hierarchal value system based on the degree of intelligence,

respect, or significance granted to either. There is in this text a spirit of equality and inclusiveness between biological species that are observed being themselves.

Biologist Ed Ricketts certainly helped Steinbeck to see the world in scientific terms, look for the big picture, try to understand and, as Ricketts termed it, “break through” (Astro xix). As a result, Steinbeck’s writing consistently unites humans and animals and blurs the boundaries between them to the extent that “many of his most memorable characters are animal-like in thought and action” (Astro xix). In *Cannery Row*, a lot of animal characters are similarly human-like. That the animals are endowed with traits and thought processes customarily considered to be intrinsic to humans does invite notions of anthropomorphism. However, the objectivity of the presentation of all animals, human and nonhuman, and the kind acceptance of their being, regardless of who or what they are, negates anthropocentrism and thus demonstrates posthumanism.

In *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck constructs a leisurely plot about life in the Cannery Row section of Monterey, California. Fishing and canning are the main industries in the area, though central characters Mack and the boys, vagrants in their twenties, thirties and forties, are not at all industrious and prefer to live together simply and unambitiously, enjoying the simple pleasures of relaxation, camaraderie, a bit of food and a lot of drink, the latter two acquired by means both lawful and unlawful. The leading character in the novel, “a fictional edition of Ed Ricketts” (Astro 110), is Doc, who owns Western Biological Laboratory and collects marine specimens, prepares them for study, and sends them out to his customers. A college graduate and scientist, he is the community’s doctor, big brother, confidant, and advisor. He is so admired by Mack and his friends that they decide to give him a surprise

party to show him how much they appreciate him. As usual, they have no money so to finance the party they collect frogs and sell them to Lee Chong, the Row's grocer, with the understanding that he can in turn sell them to Doc to fill a specimen order. Their frog hunt takes them to the property of a retired Captain, who, to thank Mack for healing his pointer, gives him one of her puppies. Mack names her *Darling*, and she immediately becomes the Darling of her new all-male family. Doc's party begins in his home/lab while he is away collecting marine specimens, but by the time he returns home, the party is over, the frogs have gotten loose and run off, and his place is trashed. The Row holds Mack and the boys responsible for the disaster, and Mack asks Dora Flood, the local madam, for advice on how to make up for it. She suggests that they give Doc another party, one that they make sure he attends. Everyone in the Row comes together for this affair, which is a great success and much enjoyed by all.

In a sense, the novel revolves around the paradox that is Doc, the idealized hero and a mass of contradictions. He has the sharp, clear mind of a scientist and a heartfelt appreciation for art, classical music and poetry both Western and Eastern (27-8). There is no clear separation between his home and his laboratory, resulting in a posthuman coexistence with the animals he keeps (26-7). He calls Mack and the boys "true philosophers," who "just know the nature of things too well to be caught in that wanting," and there is a touch of envy in his voice when he says that "they can do what they want. They can satisfy their appetites without calling them something else" (141-42). Doc accepts and appreciates everyone and everything around him indiscriminately and thus sees the big picture, a humanist world that he has come to believe is, in fact, posthuman and should be posthuman, and he lives in both,

a bridge between the two; this makes him “a lonely and a set-apart man” (100). Without trying to become so, he is the superior human of the Row’s humanist hierarchy and finds that it is indeed lonely at the top, particularly when, as a human cognizant of posthumanism, he knows that there actually is no top and that there should be no hierarchy.

A plethora of other characters and story lines are interwoven in the novel: Frankie, a mentally disabled child, is befriended and practically adopted by Doc; a gopher tries to build a home and a family; men are caught in feelings of despair and failure and commit suicide; little boys play and taunt and tease one another. There are soldiers and prostitutes at work and play, and laboratory reptiles and marine animals living and fighting and killing each other and being captured and killed themselves. There is a woman who holds tea parties for the neighborhood cats, and there are frogs with clear philosophies on ethically proper means of warfare between themselves and humans. The consistent objectivity of presentation of all, animal and human alike, speaks to the theme of posthumanism coursing through the novel.

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAME

Posthumanism counters traditional Christian (Western) ideas of religion and philosophy and can be a difficult and uncomfortable concept to accept or even to consider. It calls for a 180-degree reversal from the point of view that our society has maintained for centuries. As Noel Castree and Catherine Nash write in “Posthuman Geographies,” posthumanism “names a contemporary context in which new scientific developments trouble the foundational figure of the human subject as distinct from other animal forms of life” (501). When that distinction is taken away, when the focus is placed on our similarities with other animal species, our sense of uniqueness as humans is shattered. That, in turn, serves to diminish, if not detract altogether from the sense of superiority we have espoused as a result of that supposed uniqueness, and, if that were not disturbing enough, it questions the religious foundation on which that belief in uniqueness and superiority is based. The Judeo-Christian tradition says that God created human beings in His image and gave them “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (*King James Bible*, Gen. 1:26). Taking this to heart, Westerners have appropriated for themselves a sense of a status superior to every other living being, as well as the conviction of an inherent right of ownership of every “thing” that exists in the world.

But the very characteristic that humans believe set them apart from the animals, the ability to think, is what has brought about their questioning of their cosmic positioning. This questioning is certainly due to a reasoning mind’s curiosity and consideration of self, but it is also a by-product of the recognition and toppling of oppressive hierarchies: where there is

an order to being, there will be distinctions and separations; there will be those who are, and those who are Other, those who dominate and those who are dominated. Racism and sexism are examples of these types of hierarchies, and their acknowledgment has brought about movements such as multiculturalism and posthumanism, which point to hierarchical systems of opposites (man/animal; white/non-white; man/woman; abled/disabled, etc). Recognizing that dualisms go hand-in-hand with domination of one by its opposite, these movements call for disassembling such systems in order that every being and every condition be accepted simply and totally, with no judgment and no oppression.

The result of the deconstruction of the animal/human binary is posthumanism, the conversion of a humanistic and anthropocentric world into a world whose members coexist in harmony and synergy and share equal significance and mutual respect and compassion. Cary Wolfe writes that though the term *posthumanism* “seems to have worked its way into contemporary critical discourse in the humanities and social sciences during the mid-1990s” (xii), posthumanism itself “may be traced to the Macy conferences on cybernetics from 1946 to 1953 (xii). The theoretical models that emerged from these discussions, “removed the human and *Homo sapiens* from any particularly privileged position in relation to matters of meaning, information, and cognition” (xii). Posthumanism implores us to accept the necessity of rethinking our relationship to animals as well as other humans, to step outside our sphere of exceptionalism, and to consider our place in the world in light of an honest understanding of the ways in which we are like our non-human brethren.

Among the three principal theorists of posthumanism, Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles and Cary Wolfe, it is the latter who offers ideas that yield the greatest insight into

Steinbeck. Haraway sees the value and necessity in companionship between human and non-human species but maintains that we are “significantly other to each other” (16). Hayles’s posthumanism is primarily a study of humans and machines, both as separate and comparable entities and as individuals conjoined by humans into new hybrid beings. Wolfe’s identification of the fundamental similarities among living beings, including the consideration of all on an even plane and the interconnectedness and responsibilities of one type of being for another, suggest the concept of posthumanism that is found in *Cannery Row*, a novel which calls for just that consideration and which embodies just that interconnectedness and responsibility, a novel in which “each organism fits into a special place in the ecosystem and ensures the health of the whole” (Rogers 3).

The sense of basic equality among species in *Cannery Row* forces us to rethink our taken-for-granted modes of human experience, including the normal perceptual modes and affective states of *Homo sapiens* itself, by recontextualizing them in terms of the entire sensorium of other living beings and their own autopoietic ways of “bringing forth a world” – ways that are, since we ourselves are human *animals*, part of the evolutionary history and behavioral and psychological repertoire of the human itself (Wolfe xxv).

Wolfe’s concept of posthumanism thus forms the basis of this discussion of *Cannery Row*, and, by extension, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (hereafter *The Log*), as the former cannot really be considered without the latter. *Cannery Row* is an accounting of people and animals, mostly of the common, everyday variety, intertwined in a diverse and haphazard world much like the tide pool that is prevalent in the text. *The Log* is about life, non-human

and human, which Steinbeck and Ricketts studied during the Sea of Cortez expedition, focusing on the common rather than rare forms and the connections between them all, and speculating about science, philosophy, and the meaning of life. The theoretical discussion which is the core of *The Log* is translated into real-life characters and events in *Cannery Row*; in *The Log*, Steinbeck speaks, but in *Cannery Row*, he shows.

In what has come to be called his “Easter Sermon” in *The Log* (Levy 9), Steinbeck defines non-teleological thinking as concerning itself “primarily not with what should be, or could be, or might be, but rather with what actually ‘is’—attempting at most to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions *what* or *how*, instead of *why*” (112). He adds that looking at things non-teleologically, there can be no answers, that the only significant understanding that is possible is to say, “It’s so because it’s so” (113), and “the truest reason for anything’s being so is that it *is*” (123). I propose that posthumanism logically and naturally follows non-teleology: once cause and effect are rendered obsolete, along with design and purpose, once there is comprehension that being is a cause and an end in itself, then what a life form is and how it got to be so is simply a historical point in its biology; it is a step in the process through which beings evolve and become and fight to exist. Therefore all beings are tied together, and there is no significance in the differences between one being and another or one group of like beings and the next. The differences, then, that the human species considered set it at a higher level than the rest can no longer be seen as anything beyond biological and evolutionary markers, nothing more and nothing less, and we humans can finally see the big picture as it truly is, with ourselves merely one among many species, evolving, becoming, and fighting to exist, a breath breathed by one of us being of no greater

or lesser value than a breath breathed by someone or something else. In *The Log*, John Steinbeck states simply: “We are no better than the animals; in fact in a lot of ways we aren’t as good” (58).

Indeed, writing of the expedition’s members collecting of marine specimens for study, Steinbeck says that “our fingers turned over the stones and we saw life that was like our life” (223). One conclusion Steinbeck and Ricketts reached was that being is what matters most: “there would seem to be only one commandment for living things: Survive!” (199). The rest is immaterial, including any differences between the living things since “all things are one thing and that one thing is all things” (178-79). In considering the relationships between animals, the expedition’s main interest, it seemed to them apparent that

species are only commas in a sentence, that each species is at once the point and the base of a pyramid, that all life is relational to the point where an Einsteinian relativity seems to emerge. And then not only the meaning but the feeling about species grows misty. One merges into another, groups melt into ecological groups until the time when what we know as life meets and enters what we think of as non-life. (178)

It is only a small step from this thinking to posthumanism and perhaps even transhumanism, the redesign of the human body to incorporate machine components in order to enhance its capabilities and performance. The simple fact that we want the human condition redesigned is proof positive that we realize we humans have limitations, too; acceptance of that must logically be followed by the cognition that we are like every other species in the course of evolution that we have considered inferior to us. Our intelligence

and the wisdom we assumed when we called ourselves *Homo sapiens* are what we told ourselves make us better than the rest of the animal kingdom. Through posthumanism, that same intelligence and wisdom tell us that it is not so: “It is no longer relevant to demarcate ourselves from the other animals and identify ourselves with those attributes such as analytical intelligence which are now much more effectively performed by machines” (Peters 230). In a posthuman world, we realize “that we are animals ourselves, and ... that other animals have many qualities that we must not only admire but envy” (Corbett 237). In a posthuman world such as that of *The Log* and *Cannery Row*, we are all simply commas in a sentence.

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several of the most prominent Steinbeck scholars have discussed *Cannery Row* in terms of its scientific focus, the significance of the animal life forms in the novel, and how the human characters are similar to non-human ones. Such discussions emphasize the fact that human and non-human species are ultimately alike in that they are all members of interconnected ecosystems, and that the animal world is as relevant in the text as its human counterpart: such discussions point to posthumanism.

In order to recognize the posthuman character of *Cannery Row*, an overview of the concepts of the primary theorists of posthumanism, N. Katherine Hayles, Donna Haraway and Cary Wolfe, is necessary. In *How We Became Posthuman*, N. Katherine Hayles focuses substantially on human/machine beings. She writes that in posthumanism the “informational pattern [is privileged] over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life” (2). She believes that in the posthuman, “there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (3). Though Hayles’ posthumanism calls for “new ways of thinking about what being human means” (285), it is still very human-centered in that these “new ways of thinking” are about what it means to be human.

Donna Haraway’s *When Species Meet*, “strives to build attachment sites and tie sticky knots to bind together intra-acting critters, including people, in the kinds of response and regard that change the subject—and the object” (287). Haraway discusses the connections between species, the entanglement and coshaping of humans and other “critters” (5), noting

that “species of all kinds, living and not, are consequent on a subject- and object-shaping dance of encounters” (4). The recognition of the abundance of similarities between one species and the next, particularly between pet and pet owner, prompts Haraway to write, “I am not a posthumanist; I am who I become with companion species, who and which make a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind” (19). It is humans who need to acknowledge the connections between species, their own included, Haraway says, who need to respond to the “meetings” among species: “meetings make us who and what we are in the avid contact zones that are the world. Once ‘we’ have met, we can never be ‘the same’ again ... once we know, we cannot not know. If we know well, searching with fingery eyes, we care. That is how responsibility grows” (287). Haraway’s focus is primarily the direct interactions between humans and other species.

Published in 2010, Wolfe’s *What Is Posthumanism?* is considered a landmark work in the field. Wolfe’s concept of posthumanism is not simply about “the decentering of the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates” (xvi). For Wolfe, posthumanism confronts “directly the problem of anthropocentrism and speciesism and how practices of thinking and reading must change in light of their critique” (xix). To illustrate his point, he proposes that humanism’s normative subjectivity results in “discrimination against nonhuman animals and the disabled,” whereas posthumanism does not (xvi-xvii). Wolfe’s discussion includes the sharing between humans and animals of both vulnerability and the ability to suffer; this bond opens the door to the field of animal studies and disability studies, which both champion the rights of and compassion for those beings who cannot speak for themselves in a customary human language (xxviii-xxix).

Wolfe's sense of animal/human interconnectedness is already apparent in Louis Owens' discussion of *Cannery Row* in *John Steinbeck's Re-Vision of America*, where he zeroes in on the biological nature of the text, stating that from the very beginning of the novel, "we view [t]he Row as a 'whole,' an organism with multiple interrelated parts like the tide pool Steinbeck later describes" (178-79). Owens notes that like the gopher who has to leave the Row and the security and beauty of the home he built there because he senses that no mate will come (188), all people in Cannery Row are acutely aware of their unconscious: Mack and the boys "rely heavily on instinct in their daily lives" (187), and Doc is so connected to the sea that "he could feel a tide change in his sleep" (*Row* 108). Instinct, which people have come to consider an animalistic trait that they have long left behind, is alive and well and thriving in *Cannery Row's* humankind, tying the human and the animal together as fundamentally similar beings.

Perhaps unintentionally, Joseph Fontenrose identifies one of the components of posthumanism: the equal acceptance of beings as they are. Writing about *The Log* in "Sea of Cortez," he states that Steinbeck's nonteleological thinking is "the foundation of his social Darwinism, organismic theory, and chain of being," which he calls "uneasy bedfellows," because "social Darwinism favors aggression, go-getting, business success, heaping up of riches; whereas the organismic and panpsychic ideas look toward cooperation, harmony, and the family virtues" (132). As a result, he continues, "Steinbeck finds an ethical paradox, to which he recurs in *Cannery Row*," where he discusses and shows "the conflict of moralities in our civilization," giving us characters who survive living lives contrary to what social Darwinism would call successful and characters who fail to do so though they pursue that

very type of success (132). The fact that Steinbeck presents both ways of living objectively and equally, I believe, points to posthumanism: it does not matter how one lives as long as one lives, and that renders any notion of success or failure irrelevant.

The connection between non-teleological thinking and posthumanism is strengthened by Ranji Chadha; in *Social Realism in the Novels of John Steinbeck* he explains that “[n]on-teleological thinking requires complete objectivity and detachment like that of a scientist and regards mankind and society as subject to the same laws of nature that govern other living organisms” (14). Chadha also discusses *The Log*, saying that though it is not fiction, “for a comprehensive understanding of Steinbeck’s fiction, a close reading of this work is required,” because it explains many of the concepts and patterns in his fiction, such as “the biological view of man” and “non-teleological thinking” (114). Chadha identifies the animal/human similarities Steinbeck stresses in his fiction and concludes that Steinbeck did not only study human beings, which explains “the abundant use of animal imagery in his novels,” but that “[h]e looked upon humanity as an inseparable part of the whole cosmos ... He could never forget, it appears, while describing certain characters in his novels that they were no more than mere animals” (233-34).

Stanley Alexander calls *Cannery Row* “Steinbeck’s Pastoral Poem” in an essay by that name and explains that “by means of a tone that might be called ‘mock-cosmic,’ Steinbeck achieves a sense of inclusiveness,” with “the vast and imponderable cosmos” on the one end and “the ecological demi-world of small animals” on the other (138). Thus a world is created that is “cosmically ‘right’” and “the naturalistic value of survival is affirmed” (138). This naturalism, Alexander explains, connects humans with “the lower

forms of life” and also supports “a cluster of pastoral ideas about the relation of man the knower to the nature that is known,” a knowledge that only Doc has in *Cannery Row*, by virtue of his training and work as a scientist (144). When Doc works in the tide pool, there comes “a suggestion of analogy between the world of men and that of the lower organisms” (145). This connection also serves to point to posthumanism and to my earlier assertion that Doc is a connection between a humanistic and a posthumanistic world.

The criticism of Western (traditionally humanist) ideas in *Cannery Row* is addressed by Michael Meyer in his discussion of the novel in “Steinbeck’s *Cannery Row* (1945).” Meyer considers the *Tao Teh Ching* of Lao Tze one of the influences in the writing of *Cannery Row* and notes that the tide pool in *Cannery Row*, representative of the human community, does not appear to contain order and direction as defined by Western society and that the novel’s characters do not conform to that society’s concept of success. Speaking of *Cannery Row*’s tide pool, an animal ecosystem, Meyer likens it to human society: both are complex, and neither can be “condemned nor oversentimentalized” (57). Meyer calls even closer attention to the human/animal similarities: he writes that the tide pool creatures’ relationships to one another are both parasitic and commensal, “...mirroring the fact that humans occasionally prey on other humans and at other times long to live in mutual benevolence, understanding, and acceptance” (57). In the tide pool, the result is “a stable ecological balance [which] demonstrates the importance of a biological organism that follows its own inner dynamics” (57).

These inner dynamics, or instincts, in *Cannery Row* are also addressed by Howard Levant in *The Novels of John Steinbeck: A Critical Study*, where he discusses the story line

of the gopher who constructs “a perfect home” but “in vain” because, with no females around, “his reproductive urge is frustrated;” “in sexual desperation” he moves to a garden a couple of blocks away even though he knows there are traps set there every night, preferring to risk his life rather than live without a mate (180). Levant considers the gopher’s plight analogous to the human condition, with the difference that “the gopher’s need is limited to a sexual urge [whereas] human affection is broader and more extensive, ranging from the accommodations of friendship to the simplicities of lust” (180-81). In this way, Levant says, “animal need and human need are similarly imperative” (181). Furthermore, he adds, the “humanized” gopher “suffers the despair of thwarted desire, as humanized animals always have” (182). This may help us understand the gopher, but, Levant writes, we “cannot comprehend the tide pool” (182). Given that the tide pool has been said to represent the human community, the implication is that we can understand neither ourselves nor our life.

CHAPTER 4. CROSS-SPECIES UNDERSTANDING AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS

Comprehending life is a large component of *The Log* and *Cannery Row*. If such comprehension includes the similarities, relationships, and interconnectedness between species, as I propose it does in these texts, it brings about the posthumanism Cary Wolfe speaks of, the “sense of the mortality and vulnerability that we share with [animals]” (74). Comprehending life through the study of marine organisms was one of the reasons Steinbeck and Ricketts embarked on the Sea of Cortez expedition, and they recognized that in the process of trying to learn about one form of life they also learned about others, including their own. When asked what they searched for, Steinbeck and his fellow collectors realize that, “we search for something that will seem like truth to us; we search for understanding; we search for that principle which keys us deeply into the pattern of all life; we search for the relations of things, one to another” (92). This recognition of the ties and connections between “things,” between one species and another, between animal and human tendencies, needs, and behaviors, is the first step into posthumanism.

One connection uniting human and nonhuman animals is their shared behaviors. We see in *Cannery Row* that the understanding of an animal life form and its behavior can at times only come in relationship to an understanding of its human counterpart: we can relate to the animals we study if we recognize that the way they behave is how we believe we humans would behave under similar circumstances. This particular effort at understanding animals is based on the cognition that the similarities between them and humans are such that like behaviors will certainly occur, “since we ourselves are human *animals*” (Wolfe

xxv). As Steinbeck writes in *The Log*, “We tried always to understand that the reality we observed was partly us” (219). *Cannery Row*’s Doc and Hazel, one of Mack’s housemates, are collecting specimens in the tide pool, and they see hundreds of black stink bugs, many of which stick their tails up in the air. When Hazel asks Doc why he thinks they do that, he is shocked when Doc replies that he thinks they are praying: “The remarkable thing ... isn’t that they put their tails up in the air—the really remarkable thing is that we find it remarkable. We can only use ourselves as yardsticks. If we did something as inexplicable and strange we’d probably be praying—so maybe they’re praying” (38). Fully cognizant of posthuman reality, Doc considers it natural that a behavior can be shared by humans and insects and finds nothing surprising or odd about that concept. Hazel’s shock is due to his (humanist) lack of such understanding. The simple fact that we try to understand animal behavior by comparison with human behavior suggests that Doc exercises posthuman thought in recognizing that we share behaviors similar to animals’, even animals we have placed well below us in the hierarchy we developed.

In *The Tending Instinct*, Shelley Taylor writes,

At first glance, a crowd of cladocerans, a type of microscopic aquatic zooplankton, would seem to have little in common with human beings. But like many species, including our own, the cladocerans have discovered that traveling in a pack is the best way to confuse and evade a natural predator, in their case the bladderwort plant ... Human beings are much the same. (10-11)

In *Cannery Row* we see humans sharing this behavior with cladocerans: Mack and the boys have formed a pack of their own, living and traveling together, in their own safety net. The

same kind of safety net has been utilized by the animal kingdom since time immemorial. In *The Log*, Steinbeck writes of fish that live in schools, whereby “the school would impose a discipline of speed and uniformity, and those individuals which would not or could not meet the schools’ requirements would be killed or lost or left behind” (176). Obviously the safety net only operates for those who conform to the group’s expectations, but that is not as relevant here as the fact that Steinbeck identifies the function of the pack/safety net across species, which invokes posthumanism. He, in fact, likens the safety net concept to standards developed by human schools, using as an example “a Harvard Man, a Yale man, a Stanford man” who are each “as easily recognized as a tuna,” each conforming to a standard “until it is impossible, from speech, clothing, haircuts, posture, or state of mind, to tell one of these units of his school from another” (176).

Uniformity and discipline are followed by Mack and the boys, too: when they move into the Palace Flophouse, “a long bare room,” Mack realizes the need for “some kind of organization,” so he takes a piece of chalk and draws five rectangular shapes on the floor, each representing a bed, and within each he writes the name of the man to whom it belongs, the understanding being that each “bed” belongs solely, unquestionably, and completely to the man whose name it features, and the rest of the room is to be shared by them all (39-40). Just as there is a leader of an animal pack, so is Mack the leader of his human pack, his roommates’ immediate assent to his plan sign that his leadership is accepted, as is that of the queen bee of a hive. There is an intra-species hierarchy here, too, and Mack is at the top of it. Mack’s plan for the right of each man to occupy a space of his own, identical to the space of every man in the pack, points to posthumanism: all are equally worthy of literal and

figurative space in their ecosystem, and that is true of both animals and humans.

It may be that by identifying similar behaviors such as the safety net of a pack we are able to understand other species and understand ourselves and, perhaps, even recognize how we are alike in certain ways and question whether we have any right to think we humans are superior to those particular species. It may also be that the similarities we find are comforting in that they create in us a feeling of belonging, of community, of being part of a whole, of not being alone. It may be that posthumanism is a result of a human need to not feel so far removed from the creatures we once looked down upon. And yet, in *The Log*, Steinbeck warns against making such a comparison:

It is difficult, when watching the little beasts, not to trace human parallels. The greatest danger to a speculative biologist is analogy. It is a pitfall to be avoided – the industry of the bee, the economics of the ant, the villainy of the snake, all in human terms have given us profound misconceptions of the animals. (79)

But perhaps the very fact that we humans are able to conduct such comparisons and speculations is indication that we realize, or at least suspect, that we are similar to the species we watch and study in that we, too, are still—and surely, perennially—in the process of changing, of evolving; Steinbeck continues in *The Log*,

Man might be described fairly adequately, if simply, as a two-legged paradox. He has never become accustomed to the tragic miracle of consciousness. Perhaps, as has been suggested, his species is not set, has not jelled, but is still in a state of becoming, bound by his physical memories to a past of struggle and survival, limited in his futures by the uneasiness of thought and consciousness. (80)

Once we reach the level of understanding that our species may not yet be “set” or “jelled,” it is a very small step to also understand the temporariness of our nature, and to accept the posthuman conviction that “‘the human’ no longer is—if it ever was—a coherent and stable ontological category” (Hollinger 269). Identity is not only fluid and inconstant, it is also not tied to the type of being one is, whether a black stink bug or a human, regardless if the latter is a brilliant scientist or of below-average mentality.

The perpetuity of evolution and the interconnectedness of all things are tenets of Ed Ricketts. As Steinbeck writes in “About Ed Ricketts,” the Appendix to *The Log*, “[Ed] never considered anything finished or completed but always continuing, one thing growing on and out of another” (254). This points to a sense of community, of a dependence of sorts of all things upon all other things, which strengthens their positioning in the circle of existence as much as it diminishes any assertion of exceptionalism or superiority of any; it points to posthumanism as “not the triumphal surpassing or unmasking of something but an increase in the vigilance, responsibility, and humility that accompany living in a world so newly, and differently, inhabited” (Wolfe 47).

Posthumanism connects communities of individual species in a synergetic, interdependent larger community whose members are equally important, equally necessary, equally worthy of nurturing by their cross-species kin. Gloria Gaither writes of Steinbeck’s writing that it “grieves the loss of community and pleads once more for the connectedness of us all and the earth that sustains us” (54). She adds that “the firm belief in the connectedness of all things—both human and natural—and the view that community is necessary to survival, recurs throughout Steinbeck’s work” (58). This sense, this need of community is what

Josephine Donovan discusses in “Animal Rights and Feminist Theory.” Here she calls for a new type of relationship, one where the humanist chasm between animal and human, between subject and object, has been bridged by moving past the recognition of “the varieties and differences among the species” to a relationship among them which “does not quantify or rank them hierarchically in a Great Chain of Being” (183). This relationship, this connectedness, “respects the aliveness and spirit (the “thou”) of other creatures and understands that they and we exist in the same unified field continuum;” it “sometimes involves affection, sometimes awe, but always respect,” and it suggests that being alive is more important than being different (Donovan 183). This is precisely what posthumanism is about, precisely what Steinbeck says in *The Log* about survival being the only clear commandment for all species, and precisely what he shows us in *Cannery Row*.

In the introduction to the novel, the author contemplates how it might be possible to bring Cannery Row’s inhabitants to life in the pages of a novel without compromising their truth and reality. He likens the task to that of working, carefully and respectfully, with other species altogether:

When you collect marine animals there are certain flat worms so delicate that they are almost impossible to capture whole, for they break and tatter under the touch.

You must let them ooze and crawl of their own will onto a knife blade and then lift them gently into your bottle of sea water. And perhaps that might be the way to write this book – to open the page and to let the stories crawl in by themselves. (3)

In a clearly posthuman way, Steinbeck places people, which humanists put at the top of The Great Chain of Being, on the same plane as worms, beings relegated to the Chain’s bottom,

with the stories, the lives of each, identically “crawling” onto the pages of the text. This analogy sets the stage for a view of a world in which people exist on the same level as animals: both equally worthy of study and both equally fragile and autonomous. The reader senses that the animal world will be as relevant in this text as its human counterpart, that the two are, to a certain degree, comparable and interchangeable. Indeed, when Mack and the boys are introduced in the second chapter of the book, specific analogies are made between humans and animals and their interconnectedness: “In a world ruled by tigers with ulcers, rutted by strictured bulls, scavenged by blind jackals, Mack and the boys dine delicately with the tigers, fondle the frantic heifers, and wrap up the crumbs to feed the sea gulls of Cannery Row” (15). Lest we miss the point, the author paraphrases the Lord’s Prayer to drive the message home: “Our Father who art in nature, who has given the gift of survival to the coyote, the common brown rat, the English sparrow, the house fly and the moth, must have a great and overwhelming love for no-goods and blots-on-the-town and bums, and Mack and the boys” (15). The words are reminiscent of “all creatures great and small” (C.F. Alexander, 27-8): all living, breathing beings are important, need nurturing, merit concern, require love, never mind that they may be boys or moths, “common” or “no-goods and blots-on-the-town.” In a posthuman world, all are the same.

In addition to biological and evolutionary connections, behavioral similarities such as the sharing of sexual urges and tendencies are vital to cross-species understanding; Steinbeck tells us in *The Log*, “The man best fitted to observe animals, to understand them emotionally as well as intellectually, would be a hungry and libidinous man, for he and the animals would have the same preoccupations” (189). This theory becomes practice in

Cannery Row. Doc, the resident scientist, is both hungry and libidinous. He puts away tremendous quantities of food: “It took Doc longer to go places than other people. He didn’t drive fast and he stopped and ate hamburgers very often” (102-3). And he has a way with the ladies: “It is said that he has helped many a girl out of one trouble and into another” (28). Mack and the boys, themselves almost always hungry and libidinous, know the best way to catch cats for Doc’s laboratory is to use as bait “a lady cat” in the inner of two cages: “Catch every God damn tom cat in the country that way” (54). They once caught fifteen tom cats for him, all having owners who took them back (54), and they do it again for Doc’s second party, to give to Doc as a gift since he “always wanted cats and had some trouble getting them” (168). The lure of the female proves too strong for male cats, and they predictably and consistently fall into the trap, exactly as Mack and his friends know that they will, another example of posthuman cognizance of a behavior shared by both humans and beasts. Mack and the boys are fully aware of the power of sexuality and instinctively realize that it transcends species.

The cognitive process transcends species, as well, further uniting the various members of the animal kingdom: whether human or not, the living creatures in *Cannery Row* are equally endowed with feelings and thought processes, cognizant of history and experience, and possessed of intent. In the description of the frog hunt, we read of the thousands of frogs in the pool who have sung to stars and moon and grasses, who have “bellowed love songs and challenges” (92). Steinbeck writes of how frog hunts have been conducted over time and says that “frogs have every right to expect it will always be done that way” (93). He adds that when a frog does get caught, if the hunt goes according to

traditional customs, the frogs consider it "... fair and in the framework. Frogs don't resent that. But how could they have anticipated Mack's new method?" (93). We see here a posthuman world in which rational, thinking frogs live: frogs with ethics and expectations, frogs who understand and appreciate rules and conventions of life and warfare, frogs very much like humans. Like *some* humans, anyway.

The level of thinking ability attributed to the frogs supercedes that of some of the humans in *Cannery Row*, rendering animals and humans equally likely or not to possess intelligence and critical thinking ability. Hazel is unable to think beyond bare basics. There have been attempts at education, but though he spent four years in elementary school and four years in reform school, he "didn't learn anything in either place" (32). He is incapable of paying attention and his mind is as random and haphazard as a tide pool: "casting about in Hazel's mind was like wandering alone in a deserted museum. Hazel's mind was choked with uncatalogued exhibits ... Everything was thrown together like fishing tackle in the bottom of a rowboat, hooks and sinkers and line and lures and gaffs all snarled up" (34). Nevertheless, Hazel is a member of the pack of the Cannery Row community. The fact that he is unable to think, process, evaluate, or comprehend is irrelevant; he is presented to the reader in posthuman fashion as a person occupying a place in the world like any other person, with no judgment as to his intelligence.

Similar to Hazel, Frankie, a child of eleven, lacks intelligence and coordination but in a posthuman world that does not matter either; Doc befriends him and pays as much attention to him as he does to everyone else around him, human or animal, and Frankie finds comfort and acceptance. His goal becomes to do things to make Doc happy, one of them

being serving beer to Doc's guests at a party. He can handle one glass, which thrills him for the approval by the guest he served and the praise given him by Doc for being such a help, so he wants to help even more. His limited coordination, however, results in a tray of full glasses toppling over a young woman; embarrassed, horrified and heart-broken, Frankie runs to the cellar and curls up and hides in the excelsior box and burrows under the excelsior, whimpering (61). Doc goes after him but says and does nothing and leaves him be, cowering there like a small wounded animal: "there wasn't a thing in the world he could do" (61). Doc knows that some hurts cannot be healed. Frankie is as he is, and that is simply so. Doc relates to and interacts with Frankie and Hazel on their levels, with kindness and respect. Cognizant of the posthuman nature of the world, Doc accepts them as they are, as he accepts all of the Row's humans and animals, and he does not try to change them into something they are not.

Mack and the boys are animal-like to the extent that they have "no ambitions beyond food, drink, and contentment," and they approach the latter "casually, quietly, and absorb it gently" (9-10). Their needs have been reduced to the basics of survival, much like typical members of the animal kingdom. Though capable of thought and industry, they do not bother with them unless it is necessary, forsaking, in a sense, traits considered so standard in the Western world that we have long thought make us human.

Yet all the human characters in *Cannery Row*, however diminished their intelligence or sense of enterprise, however animal-like their lives and behaviors, are presented kindly and equally to one another and to their non-human counterparts. This is an example of posthumanism, the totally objective view of living beings through which one sees not only

how complex and multidimensional those beings are but also how they cannot be easily or conveniently catalogued much less judged, and how they share traits, behaviors, and tendencies even if at first glance they appear dissimilar. None are only flawed, and none are perfect. Frankie is described as “a nice, good, kind boy” (59), and there is no judgment passed on his mother, who basically neglects him (58). At the same time, there is no doubt of the powerful love of a mother rat in Doc’s laboratory for her babies: “[she] lay over her litter of blind naked children and let them suckle and the mother stared about nervously and fiercely” (128). Doc, leader of the pack that is Cannery Row, is wise and educated and intelligent, but he has his quirks like everyone else: he has a great fear of getting his head wet, so “a drop of rain water on his head makes him panicky” (28). People and animals are simply as they are, to be accepted as they are in the spirit of posthumanism. In *Cannery Row*, it makes no difference what one is, so long as one is: we are all creatures great and small, all mixed up together, and all very like one another in joy and in sorrow, in exuberance, and in suffering.

CHAPTER 5. THE BOND OF SUFFERING

The idea that suffering is not unique to human beings but also exists in other species, is discussed by Peter Singer. In “The Principles of Morals and Legislation,” an essay published in 1973, he asks the uncomfortable question, “If possessing greater intelligence does not entitle one human to exploit another, why should it entitle humans to exploit nonhumans?” and he follows with, “Do animals other than man suffer?” (167-8).

Posthumanism answers “yes,” and so does Steinbeck.

Tiny and Sparky, two crew members in *The Log*, love fishing but will absolutely not fish for porpoises because “they cry so ... when they are hurt, they cry to break your heart,” and Steinbeck concurs that “a porpoise cries like a child in sorrow and pain” (34). This is not his only acknowledgment of nonhuman suffering. Speaking of a side trip to a little ranch during their collecting expedition, he discusses at length one particular horse, “a spindle-legged, small-buttocked little animal with eyes haunted by social inadequacy; one horse in a society of mules, and a gelding at that” (133). The suffering of this horse is not physical, it is emotional. It is the horse’s psyche that is in pain: “surrounded by mules, he sorrowed and his spirit broke and his eyes were sad ... He slunk ashamedly along behind the mules ... so we found ourselves disliking this poor horse; and he knew it and it didn’t help him” (133). In addition to the posthuman recognition of the suffering of a member of another species, there is also here the recognition that the animal in question is fully aware of the cause of his suffering and of how another species, humans, perceives it and responds to it.

There is similar pain and suffering in *Cannery Row*. William, the watchman at Dora’s Bear Flag Restaurant before Alfie came along, faced isolation and ostracism just like

this lone horse, and it broke his spirit too. Hungry for male companionship and eager to join the fun with Mack and the boys, he tried as hard as he could to blend in, but time and time again he would not be received until he got the message loud and clear that he was not wanted, and then “his heart broke. The bums would not receive him socially” (19). Alone and dejected, William gets to feeling that no one loves him and no one cares about him, and he ends up killing himself (19-21).¹

William’s suffering goes unrecognized by his fellow humans, but these same humans have no difficulty recognizing suffering in a member of a different species altogether. When Mack goes to the Captain’s home to minister to the tick bite on the Captain’s dog, the pointer bitch lay on her side, and among her legs her too-big-to-still-be-nursing puppies “nuzzled and bumped for milk and the bitch looked patiently up into Mack’s face saying, ‘You see how it is? I try to tell him but he doesn’t understand’” (89). The mother dog’s suffering may be silent but it is clear, and it is understood by someone who is able to focus on her situation and her needs, as Mack is: he immediately tells the Captain that the pups ought to be weaned (89). Though the pointer cannot speak for herself in the “customary human language” Wolfe speaks of (xxviii-xxix), Mack not only understands her but

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Approaching transhumanism, a piece of equipment, an outboard motor with the model name “Hansen Sea-Cow,” is the cause of suffering in humans in *The Log* and as a result is ostracized, just like the horse:

“Our Hansen Sea-Cow was not only a living thing but a mean, irritable, contemptible, vengeful, mischievous, hateful living thing. In the six weeks of our association we observed it, at first mechanically and then, as its living reactions became more and more apparent, psychologically” (Log 19).

This motor is described in detail as “incredibly lazy,” having “clairvoyant powers” and the ability to read human minds, and we read that “it hated Tex,” the crew’s chief mechanic, and that “it loved no one, trusted no one. It had no friends” (Log 19-20).

champions her rights with the compassion that comes from one being's cognizance of another being's plight and the assumption of the responsibility that ensues. Helping a being in distress is his instinctive response, and the fact that the being in question is of a different species is irrelevant. This is posthumanism.

Perhaps the ultimate in inflicting pain and suffering is the killing of another being, an event that is natural in the predator/prey environment of the animal kingdom and also exists in *Cannery Row's* animal/human community. There is a fundamental difference, however. Though animals kill, they do so for just the amount of food they need, for protection of their young, or for self-defense, whereas humans kill, both other species and their own, for those and a great many other reasons, including monetary gain, hatred, revenge, love. Humans either justify their killing in a variety of creative ways or assume there is no need to justify it at all.

Mack and the boys behave exactly like an animal pack: they never think or plan beyond their next meal and drink. Doc, however, leads a paradoxical posthuman existence. He gains his livelihood through the acquisition of any number of life forms and their preparation for study with the ultimate goal the widespread understanding of these life forms. The desire for such understanding implies a sense of respect for nonhuman beings, an acceptance of their value, which is a tenet of posthuman thought. However, the fact that Doc and others who collect and study specimens appropriate them, remove them from their home environment, forcibly invade their bodies, and often kill them—and feel it is all good since it is for the sake of science and knowledge—is still exploitation, objectification, and an indication that the final step into posthumanism has not yet been taken. Be that as it may,

wanting to know more about other species is indeed an entry into posthumanism, especially when it is accompanied by the consideration of these species on the same level as humans with full acceptance of the connections between them and us.

We read that Doc “can kill anything for need but he could not even hurt a feeling for pleasure” (28). Relevant here is not the fact that he will not kill for pleasure, but that he will kill for need. He may be kind and compassionate, but his business is dependent on killing, and the fact that he goes “collecting” and works with “specimens,” much like the folks on expedition in *The Log*, serves as denial of the reality that killing anything is not done, cannot be done, without inflicting pain and suffering. It can be rationalized in the name of research and science, the quest for knowledge and furthering of education, but it is still killing, so it makes the act a bit easier to stomach if it is discussed in unemotional, cold, scientific terms, in a typically Western manner. For this reason *Cannery Row* and *The Log* have not completely embraced posthumanism: both texts recognize the kinship of humans and animals in the entire spectrum of feeling, thought, and suffering, but they stop there, justified in people’s right to the use, domination, and destruction of animals in the name of science. Patrick Corbett explains this quite bluntly: “Western Man, although he pays lip-service to the respect for life under the names of peace and freedom and conservation, callously turns his back upon it in killing or injuring animals for food, knowledge, pleasure and adornment” (235).

Science, it seems, can forgive and explain anything that is done to animals: when the Captain asks Mack why they are collecting frogs “for some scientists,” Mack lies. Mack tells him, “[T]hey give cancer to the frogs and then they study and experiment and they got it

nearly licked if they can just get some frogs” (83). His claim that the frogs will be used to help cure cancer in humans makes his case: what human in the Judeo-Christian world would argue against using animals to help cure people? Again, benefit to humans overrides harm to animals. Or, as Mike Bekoff puts it, “Excuses justifying animal exploitation such as ‘Well, it’s okay, I’m doing this in the name of science’ or in the name of this or that usually mean ‘in the name of humans.’ We are a very arrogant and self-centered lot” (775).

However, in the case of the frogs, Steinbeck concludes with the assertion of posthumanism: the frogs are the winners in a battle of peers, with one species initially outwitting the other—Mack and the boys use an unorthodox and innovative way to catch the frogs—but with the second species outlasting the first—the frogs patiently bide their time in captivity until an opportunity arises for escape. The frogs may have gotten captured, bagged, hauled back to The Row, and used as legal tender for groceries, liquor, and other merchandise at Lee Chong’s (116-19), but in the end, in the chaotic aftermath of the drunken party at Doc’s, in the midst of all the destruction the revelers have wrecked, the packing crate housing the frogs breaks on one end, and one by one the frogs hop free (126-27). In this frog hunt, humans have the upper hand only temporarily; by being careless and thoughtless they create a situation of which the frogs take advantage and escape. In this battle between animals and humans the winners are the frogs: they live to croak another day.

The reason for the killing of animals that is common both to *Cannery Row* and *The Log* is so that men can eat. In *Cannery Row*, Eddie, driving the Model T, hits an old red rooster “without running too far off the road,” and the subsequent plucking, dismemberment, and cooking of the bird is recounted with not a hint of emotion (75-6), whereas *The Log*’s

Sparky, who had the job of killing the chickens, “hated it. But finally he cut their heads off and was sick” (99). It is a lot easier to read about Eddie and the rooster than about Sparky and the chickens, because the first distances us from personal involvement and thus an implied responsibility. In her discussion of animal liberation, Lori Gruen sums it up this way: “much of the problem with the attitudes many people have toward animals stems from our removal from the animals themselves. Our responsibility for our own actions has been mediated. Who are these animals who suffer and die so that I can eat pot roast?” (79)

The posthuman sense of responsibility to alleviate suffering in another being is also present in *Cannery Row*, though it is accompanied by the sentimental denial of the true nature of an animal. Mary Talbot, a woman who invites the neighborhood cats to tea parties, is horrified by the sight of one of them, Mrs. Casini, savagely torturing a mouse she has caught; she pats it gently and the mouse squirms “horribly away dragging its paralyzed hind legs behind it,” only to be caught and “daintily” stabbed “with tense delight” (154-55). Mary cannot bear the suffering of the mouse, and she calls to her husband, who comes running, kills the mouse to end its suffering and then throws a rock at Mrs. Casini, hitting her in the stomach and knocking her off the fence (155). Surely Mary knows that life is so, that cats will kill mice, and not kindly, either, but she has trouble accepting it when she is brought face-to-face with it: “‘I can’t blame Kitty Casini,’ said Mary. ‘I know how cats are. It isn’t her fault. But—Oh, Tom! I’m going to have trouble inviting her again. I’m just not going to like her for a while no matter how much I want to’” (155).

It is somewhat ironic that the retaliation for an animal inflicting pain on another, is to inflict pain on the former. This pain is both physical—Tom hitting Mrs. Casini and knocking

her off the fence—and emotional/social—Mary shutting her out of subsequent social engagements, leaving her as ostracized as William and the horse. Both Tom and Mary sympathize and perhaps identify with the animal most vulnerable at the time, the mouse, and they punish the aggressor, the cat. The implication here is that it is not acceptable for the strong to inflict pain on the weak, an implication that suggests posthumanism. The ultimate animal aggressors, however, are humans, and there is more than a little irony and a little less posthumanism in the fact that Tom and Mary have no problem inflicting pain and administering their brand of justice on a species more vulnerable than their own.

When Doc finds the body of a girl drowned in the tide pool, likely a victim of foul play, he is shaken, stricken, and saddened (109-11). He cannot bring himself to accept the reward for recovering her body, the only being taken from the tide pool that he does not profit from. Doc surely knows that humans kill other humans, but he is as upset at the sight of the dead girl as Mary is by the sight of a cat killing a mouse and as unwilling to accept the entire nature of a given species. In their sentimentalism and selective empathy, Steinbeck points the current paradoxical state of humanity's relationship with the greater world as well as the significant similarity between two humans who at first glance seem as dissimilar as can be: a brilliant scientist, pillar of the community, leader of the pack, and a delusional woman living in poverty on the fringes of that community. Clearly they are not so different. The clear, posthuman message is that humans are not only fundamentally alike but that we are as vulnerable as animals and as predatory but with a significant difference: the cat will eat the mouse she kills, but the girl is not murdered because her killer saw in her a food source.

Steinbeck's answer, then, to Peter Singer's question of whether animals other than humans suffer, is that indeed they do, and people know it. Steinbeck's fiction, and *Cannery Row* in particular, recognizes this and emphasizes the bond of suffering humans and non-humans share, a bond that places us all on the same level. To the extent that the text still accepts and justifies humans' ability and right to control and bring suffering and death to nonhuman beings, it does not yet completely adopt posthumanism. However, the fact that the human characters are able to recognize and respond to suffering in nonhuman characters, while at times they fail to do so for other humans, keeps the novel primarily posthuman.

CHAPTER 6. HUMANS AND THEIR PETS

In *Cannery Row*, twenty-six year-old Hazel is described as “pleasant, strong, willing, and loyal,” much as one would describe a loved pet dog; we also read that once he knew what Doc wanted of him, Hazel was good at collecting it for him (33). Similar to the retriever Hazel, Frankie forms a relationship with Doc that is also like the worship of a dog for a kind and loving master. Unwanted both at home and at school, Frankie starts hanging around Western Biological, and Doc takes him in as one would a stray puppy with no other place to go. Assuming the vigilance, the responsibility, and the compassion of one being for another that Wolfe identifies as elements of posthumanism. Doc gets Frankie cleaned up and gets his hair cut, as one would do with a stray dog upon adopting it. Frankie tells Doc he loves him and becomes “his slave” (58).

Such parallels between the relationships Doc has with Hazel and Frankie and those between humans and their pets call for a closer look at the latter. Pet ownership is a prime example of people’s control over nonhumans and in a paradoxical display of posthumanism, serves as a window into the need of many humans for a relationship with nonhumans. Through pet ownership, a human assumes a role of responsibility for the care and well-being of the animal he or she adopts but ultimately also assumes control of the animal’s life as well as its environment, including its quality of life and even its duration; the relationship is not called pet *ownership* for no reason. The manner in which humans treat their pets in *Cannery Row* distinguishes between humanism and posthumanism, with Mack and the boys, “the Virtues, the Graces, the Beauties” (15), practicing posthumanism.

Rebekkah Fox writes in “Animal Behaviours, Post-human Lives” that through pet-

human relationships people recognize and value both the similarities and the differences between their animals and humans, thus challenging the humanist binaries of “human” and “animal” and providing “a model for understanding notions of ‘post-humanism’ in the lived reality of everyday life” (525). She adds that pets blur the boundaries between what it means (to humans) to be human and what it means to be animal, and they are considered by their owners as “friends, capable of rational thought and emotion, yet also treated as objects or possessions to be discarded if they do not conform to human expectations and values” (526). She continues that pets are placed in a dual, contradictory existence by their owners, who value them for their “animalness” by imposing upon them “selective breeding, training and neutering,” but also “civilize” them, alter their behaviors, in an effort to “make them more like ‘little humans’” (526).

The relationship between pet and human owner is certainly complex, with the pet’s status being that of both a person and a possession (Fox 529), and the owner enjoying power and control over another being, along with love and the assumption of responsibility that come with “a certain degree of guilt, worry and uncertainty about what the animal is thinking or feeling” (Fox 529). Pet owners attribute to their charges “human emotions such as jealousy, anger, disappointment and love” (Fox 531) and impose upon them the unreasonable expectation of being “always present, loving and gratefully reciprocal of human affection” (Fox 530). Particularly regarding dogs, there is “a widely held notion that dogs give us unconditional love and nonjudgmental loyalty” (which is more than adult humans customarily expect of other adult humans), and they “exude unwavering faithfulness, forgiveness, trust, love, and innocence” (Pedersen 26). In fact, Pedersen

continues, pets in general “are implied to be our moral superiors for not stealing money, starting wars, or judging people by their physical appearance. They accept us for who we are, while we come across as scheming, judgmental malcontents who love on condition only” (26). Steinbeck said it in *The Log*: in some ways we are not as good as animals (58).

However, Fox notes that “all animals are not seen as equal in the ‘post-human’ world” (533). In her discussion of less-traditional pets such as reptiles and rodents, she writes that the relationships between owners of these non-furry, non-cuddly animals “may still be seen as odd in today’s society” in light of their obvious differences from humans and the fear they may invoke due to their “subversive image” (533). She concludes that, “although some owners do attempt to engage in subjective relationships with such creatures, they are very aware of and respect their differences from humans, demonstrating the limits of traditional animal rights thinking which values other species simply on the basis of their similarity to humans” (534).

The inclusion in *Cannery Row* of non-furry, non-cuddly creatures is significant as an indication of posthumanism in that the emphasis is not placed on their differences from humans. When Doc removes the starfish he has collected from the wet sacks in which he placed them, they are “twisted and knotted up for a starfish loves to hang onto something and for an hour these had found only each other” (51). We see here creatures seeking physical contact and reassurance, a very furry, cuddly need. Reptiles and rodents also become figuratively cuddly and warm: they are Doc’s only companions at the closing of the text. Alone as usual and melancholy, in the calm after the storm of the party, when everyone has gone home, Doc, a non-traditional being himself, is in the comforting company of white

rats and rattlesnakes (196). Posthumanism recognizes that all creatures, even those we may think of as cold and alien, have needs similar to the furry, cuddly creatures we adopt as pets: they also need to feel connected and they make for companion animals as much as traditional pets like dogs and cats.

But is it possible for a human being to have a relationship with a pet that is truly and completely based on equality and mutual respect? Regardless of how pet owners view their pets, the pet-human relationship suggests posthumanism through the joining of lives, the mutual dependence and coexistence of species. How close to equality the beings in the relationship may get depends on how accepting the human owner is of the selfhood of the pet and his or her responsibilities to it.

Such a distinction is made in *Cannery Row*. When Mack and the boys first meet the Captain, as they are camped out on his land waiting for night so they can hunt for frogs, he is accompanied by his pointer, who remains nameless in the text. Mack immediately notices that the dog is not well, and the Captain tells him she is lame due to a tick on her shoulder (83). Mack looks her over, notes that she just had puppies, knows what should be done to ease her pain, and offers to minister to her himself (83-4). When they get to the Captain's farmhouse, he tends to the pointer in the midst of "the big fat wiener pups [that] nuzzled and bumped for milk" (89). Mack tells the Captain the pups should be weaned and the Captain admits he is aware of that but he has been too busy taking care of his place (89). In essence, the Captain is not fulfilling his responsibility as pet owner. He knowingly neglects his duty to see to the well-being of his dog. Despite his prominent role in human society as a retired Captain, husband to an elected member of the California Legislative Assembly, and part of

the establishment, he fails at taking proper care of his pointer, allowing her to suffer.

Mack, the bum, reveals an entirely different attitude toward pet ownership.

Accepting of the Captain's gift of a puppy in return for curing her mother, Mack names her *Darling* (95) and moves her into the Palace Flophouse, where she becomes the only female in a household of five men (119) and has a totally nontraditional, posthuman life. She is given all of their attention, unconditional love, and free reign. Mack and the boys, living on the fringes of society, offer her an autonomy unparalleled by what her mother, or most pets in traditional households, could imagine.

We never get a sense that Darling is "owned" by Mack and the boys, but they still have expectations of her, chiefly emotional. They use bribes to gain her affection, and she sleeps "on the bed of the man who had given her the last bribe" (119). In the "black gloom" that came over the Palace Flophouse after the flop of a party they tried giving for Doc, "[Darling] spent the day under Mack's bed happily eating up his shoes ... Twice in his black despair, Mack reached under the bed and caught her and put her in bed with him for company but she squirmed out and went back to eating his shoes" (139-40).

Nobody interferes with her development, because "in the group of five men there were five distinct theories of dog training, theories which clashed so that Darling never got any training at all" (119). As a result, she eventually becomes totally spoiled, "and no one thought of housebreaking her" (148). But Darling achieves what Mack and the boys could not: "having a thousand generations of training behind her, [Darling] began to train herself. She got disgusted with wetting on the floor and took to going outside." (157). She has quite possibly learned by example, making herself a real part of the social unit. What is

particularly interesting here is that on her own, Darling is successful in adopting a behavior that humans have imposed on the animals they have domesticated, what is, perhaps, the ultimate in conditioning and control. But it is still Darling's choice to urinate outside like a human in a home without indoor plumbing, as it is her choice to eat shoes and sleep with whom she pleases, and she is equally free to exercise those choices. The end result is a harmonious inter-species household whose members all enjoy respect, love, independence, and autonomy, in the midst of a community whose intertwined, interdependent animal and human members similarly enjoy such respect and acceptance: what we have is posthumanism.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

In *Cannery Row*, we are made to look at the beings in it, from the smallest of tide pool specimens to mammals, in a new light, with a new perspective, and on the same plane. This is a text that embraces equally humans who are intelligent and humans who are not; humans who are socially successful by Western society's standards and humans who are ill-equipped to manage their lives in a Western world; and animals with as much and more sense and intelligence as humans, all of whom form a community which on a cursory glance may appear to be dysfunctional, but which treats and looks after its members indiscriminately, exhibiting posthumanism. All characters in the text, human or not, are presented without judgment, explication, or apology for their worth, personality, sense, sensibility, demeanor, and actions: they are who they are, no less and no more, and no questioning of how they came to be that way is entertained, because it does not matter: posthumanism permits no such questioning.

The reasons that have caused *Cannery Row* to be considered Steinbeck's ultimate non-teleological novel are the same reasons that it can be considered posthuman. Without depicting a posthuman utopia, it reveals a vision of close inter-species connection where humans are not any better than any other animate species, and animals are not inferior to humans; we are alike more than we are not. The novel ends after the successful party, with Doc alone with the animals in his laboratory, remembering the Sanskrit poem he had read to his guests the night before:

As Doc wipes the tears from his eyes, the reader views his lab animals, active yet complacent, confused yet understanding; Steinbeck's design is the recognition that

the human animal has the same dilemma as these specimens – accepting life with all its paradoxes and contradictions. (Meyer 52)

In that sense, Cannery Row's inhabitants, animals and humans alike, are truly mere commas in the same sentence—siblings in a posthuman existence.

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