

Juvenile Literature and the Human-Colonial:Reading Close with Syd

Hoff's Picture-Books

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Abstract

Picture Books has been quite an integral part of juvenile literature for a time-being, and almost from the very beginning when children's literature was shaping itself up into a separate genre. These books are important part of this very genre, especially as the very first step in the world of learning for little nursery kids. But, even nursery-books carry certain seeds of regressive attitude and blatant anthropocentric celebrations being one of them, and we can find them under the happy, fun and colourful façade of picture-books as well. Syd Hoff (1912- 2004), is an famous American illustrator and cartoonist with a fair share of nursery picture-books among his compositions, and yet underexplored from a critical purview. In this paper it has been attempted to address the problematic 'speciesism' in nursery picture-books with a number of Hoff's compositions for a close reading to progress with.

Keywords: Syd Hoff, Nursery Literature, Picture-Books, Speciesism, Human-Colonialism

Introduction

Illustrations and animal-figures, these have always been a part of literature in its juvenility, and juvenile literature too, from the very beginning, and that too in most of the languages or most of the cultures. Animal figures and specially anthropomorphized animal-figures have been evident in Aesop's Fables or Vishnu Sharma's Panchatantra to cater moral-morsels, of course to its adult readers as there was hardly any idea of specially carved juvenile literature for the children. And if we are to refer to illustrations of animals we can look and find them as far as in prehistoric era's cave-paintings as in the 'Bull' figure in Lascaux, France or 'Bison' figure of Altamira in Spain, the Animal figures in Bhimbetka, the 'Dappled-Horses' of Pech Merle in France, the animal figures in Hieroglyphs in Egypt or the animal-figurines of Harappa or the Yogi-figure found to be surrounded by a variety of animals like a rhino, a buffalo, an elephant, a tiger and two deer also boldly hint back to the association human beings used to share with animals, not only for their daily utilities but in their art as well.

The magic of illustrations accompanying texts, meant especially with children as target readers, started almost from the very beginning. Children's Literature, as a different genre got its official launch in the second half of the 18th century, before it was much of as Clifton Fadiman frames "in an embryonic stage". Prior to that texts catered to children didn't have that special tag, content or purpose to entertain children, and most of the books had 'moral-instructions' as their basic framework, and the target readers were still the adults as well. "OrbisSensualiumPictus" or "Visible World in Picture" by Czech educator John Amos Comenius appeared much earlier in 1658 and is considered by many as the pioneer in this genre. It was a textbook of solely educational purpose, divided into 150 chapters covering a wide range of subjects such as botany, zoology, human history and activities, religion etc. This book was originally published in Latin and German but quickly achieved a wide spread reputation and was translated into other languages too. In 1659 it was first translated into English. Illustrated by copperplate prints, this book was the precursor in application of visual-mediums and lexical-approach for children's education. Nathaniel Crouch's Winter-Evenings Entertainments (1687) stands as an example of this type, which contains pictures, riddles and other anecdotes but clearly mentions at the very beginning that it 'excellently accommodated to the fancies of old or young'. The "A Little Book for Little Children" (c.1712) or "A Description

of *Three Hundred Animals* (1730), cut a difference with their involvement in choosing the juvenile crowd as the primary target readers. These books were also accompanied with various illustrations, and specially illustrations of various animals. Pocket-sized stitched and folded books called chapbooks also used to cater nursery-rhymes or small anecdotes accompanied with pictures. Mary Cooper's "Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book" (1744) falls in this category. It was mostly a compilation of rhymes already existing in oral forms (though it carried the name of one Nurse Lovechild as the author) and also contained accompanied pictures. The interesting part is, this certain book contained some of the most famous nursery rhymes still in circulation and quite popular among kids too such as 'Bah, bah, a black sheep', 'Hickory dickory dock', 'London Bridge is falling down' etc. "A Little Pretty Pocket-Book Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly" (c.1744) published by John Newberry brings in the new era of children's literature that is of considering the juvenile crowd as the target consumer and he was commercially successful too, thus garnering the title of 'the father of children's literature'. This genre of illustrated books meant for children has continued and evolved itself and we can see classic and famous examples in Edward Lear's "The Book of Nonsense" or John Tenniel's works in Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" (1865) where illustrations are quite the life of the texts.

But a 'picture-book' stands different from illustrated books in its characteristic of being a medium where the pictures or illustrations are the primary texts and the words acting as subtitles or mere descriptions or occasionally framing a few dialogues, which is quite unlike an illustrated book where pictures are for emphasis or added attraction to the text. Heinrich Hoffmann's "Der Struwwelpeter" (1845), which translates into 'shaggy Peter' or 'shock-headed Peter' a German language children's book is considered to be the earliest composition in this format. This book consists of ten stories in rhymes and are cautionary tales for children, and though they are not bland and prude, there's no curtain specially cut for the children and refers to morbid gruesome events as well like a child abandoning food and dying of starvation, a roving tailor cutting off a boy's thumbs who had a habit of sucking those or a girl playing with matches gets burned to death by accident. Later on many researchers and scientists have tried pointing out that there are certain characteristics in Hoffmann's portrayal of these children which actually refers to different mental-health conditions, and the cruel and morbid references would not be judged best to cater good behavioral instructions to children. French illustrator Benjamin Rabier's "TintinLutin" (1898) which tells the story of a young 'lutin' or 'imp' is another of the early composition in this genre. Rabier's works later inspired Herge, the creator of Tintin.

Kristin Masters refers to the statistical fact of picture-books finding an upsurge during and after the 1920's. She quotes in her "A Brief History of Children's Literature":

It was in 1920's that books could be mass produced in color, and literacy became sufficiently wide-spread to make children's picture books a true industry unto its own.

Certainly in America the surge was brought in by Wanda Gag's "Millions of Cats" (1928), "The Funny Thing" (1929), "The ABC Bunny" (1933) and many other works. But this genre got its big-break in England almost three decades earlier with Beatrix Potter. Potter was also an author and an illustrator like Wanda, and an avid enthusiast naturalist and conservationist of scientific acumen. Her characters, especially the character of 'Peter Rabbit', who first appeared in "The Tale of Peter Rabbit" in 1901, has achieved the status of a classic and is still now popular, relevant and portrayed and adapted in different medias in regular intervals. Potter had also portrayed a variety of other animals in her books such as "The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin" (1903), "The Tale of Tom Kitten" (1907), "The Tale of Benjamin Bunny" (1904) etc. The character of Peter Rabbit actually the ideal any young kid can relate to, the thrill in his disobedience and adventures and final narrow escapes,- basically an anthropomorphized animal personification of an average young boy. There's certainly a subtle tone of instructions and morals or a behavioral guideline is there, they comes really subtle and the prime scape is of attraction, adventure and fun. While discussing about picture-books, mention must be made of French author and illustrator Jean de Brunhoff as well who was the creator of another classic picture-book series with an anthropomorphized animal in the lead. Brunhoff's 'Babur', an elephant first appeared in 1931 in "The Story of Bbur, The Little Elephant", and has been translated widely and adapted into different other mediums. Certain narratives in this story of the various this elephant has also courted controversy as being a story acting as an apologist for colonialism. Theodor Seuss Geisel or much popular by his pen-name Dr. Seuss who was an American political cartoonist as well, was a prolific contributor in this sub-genre of picture books for children. Some of his noted titles include "If I ran the Zoo" (1950), "On Beyond Zebra" (1955), "The Cat in the Hat" (1957), "Green Eggs and Ham" (1960), "Fox in the

Socks”(1965) etc. Dr. Seuss has recently courted controversy too and a few of his books cancelled duly in America as well as they carried too strong racial undertones.

With Syd Hoff, who was also an American cartoonist and children's author and illustrator, there has yet not been any such controversies associated with such severe accusations, rather with Hoff it's quite a tricky business with his portrayal of the animal-figures and more about the relation he portrayed between the animal and the child or the society at large. Its described as tricky as its not totally negative or cruel or authoritarian rather his books, which primarily has the nursery kids as its readers certainly carry the charm to attract and captivate children and be comfortable with animals and the idea of befriending animals, and yet they also carry quite a clear narrative of anthropocentric attitude underneath, and at times it's too strong. And the paper will try to address this dichotomy in his otherwise simple and charming picture-books.

Born in 1912 in Bronx, New York, in a Jewish family Hoff got trained from the National Academy of Design in New York. He worked as cartoonist and sold a total of 571 Cartoons to 'The New Yorker' from 1931 to 1975. He was also the creator of two long running comic strips called "Tuffy" (1939-1949) and "Laugh It Off" (1958-1978). And he contributed in over 60 volumes for Harper Collins 'I Can Read' series of picture books, which he both wrote and illustrated. And for our current discussion we have chosen a few among these to read deep into Hoff's menagerie and his portrayal of the relation between the human and the non-human.

Hoff's popular series of "Danny and the Dinosaur" first appeared in 1958. This story describes a little boy named Danny's encounter with a living breathing dinosaur at a museum and his day off with him full of different fun activities. The story which adopts a wish fulfilling mode of presentation can claim to be an all perfect juvenile text until one notices the quite blatant anthropocentric indoctrination seeded within. The story portrays the Dinosaur happily giving Danny a ride through the town which extends to other people opting for a free ride on the Dino's tail as well. Not only that, the giant animal is also portrayed as happily serving as a flyover bridge for people and vehicles. And instead of letting him have his desired green-grass, the Dinosaur is offered ice-cream. The appropriating ordeal continues to the point of being weirdly ironic when the author makes him visit the zoo with his little human guide, and accompanied illustration of other caged non-human animals such as lions, elephants and monkeys make this anomaly more prominent. And he is also seen as a merry go round for the children riding him and also urge him to move faster:

‘Around and around the
Block ran the dinosaur,
Faster and faster and faster.’

‘This is better than a merry-go round’
the children said . (pg. 42-43)

The children also taught him tricks such as shaking hands rolling over back as are taught to pet animals, specially dogs, and mostly as a way to negotiate obedience and ofcourse for human entertainment. Finally when the day-long fun-strolling activities come to an end with a game of hide and seek, and where Danny and the Dinosaur part to go back to their respective abodes, Danny’s primary request to his new giant friend to come with him falls futile. But we find him at the end not regretting much and rather reasoning out that accommodating a pet of such giant stature would have really been troublesome. Perhaps his earlier interest in getting him home was partially driven by a desire to have in possession a unique and very serviceful pet. The friendship was less of a camaraderie and more of a friendly and obedient service-providing pet. The authoritarian attitude is quite clear throughout the portrayal and from the very beginning too. In the opening-scene where Danny enters the museum and sees Red-Indians, Bears and Eskimos, it is mentioned in that order, and accompanied accordingly with an illustration too of the little boy viewing specimens of a Red-Indian Man, An Eskimo, and a bear between them, A curious juxtaposition which equates the under-privileged, colonized, non-mainstream human communities with the non-humans and ofcourse the vibe is certainly not of a positive inter-species uniformity, rather a discriminatory attitude towards the said human-communities. The colonial voice vibes in authoritarian attitude against the colonized human beings and certainly colonized non-human population. And ironical is the author’s framing of words where he equates the desire for possessing or having ownership over or to extract services and utilities from an animal to ‘loving’ it. As the story goes like:

Danny loved Dinosaurs.

He wished he had one. (pg.-9)

To wish to 'have' is certainly a wish to possess, much like a white-colonizer might wish he 'had' a colonized slave to serve his utilities.

With "Julius" the story gets weirdly colonial- where Davy and his father went to Africa to search for a Gorilla for their circus-party. The illustrations depict them as dressed in Khakis and shorts and equipped with guns (very much like hunters and invaders). They are followed by an entourage of native Africans whose servile attitude reflects their colonized situation, carrying goods on their heads for the white 'colonizers'. Animals also come to them and flocked to seek a chance of employment in their circus- as if it being an amazing opportunity, - and when refused, some of them, like the Giraffe, the Elephant or the Lion are portrayed as reacting disappointed:

'Some animals have

All the luck,'

Said the lion, giraffe , and elephant. (pg.-12)

Julius, the gorilla is taken along with them- and his job in the circus is not to perform tricks, rather he himself inside a cage is the 'show'. And when the crowd thinks he is trying to get out of his cage, they panicked and ran away. Weirdly enough , the author portrays Julius to be 'happily' incarcerated and watched by many as curious freak-show. His selling usp was that he was strong and big gorilla. The advertisement announcing-

See Julius

the greatest

Gorilla in the world !

People enjoying a sneak-peak of this strong and big 'other' by putting him in a cage does not show love or empathy certainly, rather a doubtful curiosity:

' He looks so strong

I hope he can't

Get out of the cage'

Said the people.

' Nobody could

Get out of there' said someone.

' Why should I get out?

Said Julius.

I like it here.' (pg.-43)

Julius's identity or as he has been portrayed here really puzzles us- and what more, we do not have to tear beneath much layers as well. The 'non-human' gorilla ,- a species having a significant share of role in the history of human evolution appears reflecting a colonized human-being- who tries to learn and adapt to the colonizer's culture and manners- but ends up not as an equal – but rather an entertaining mimic piece in a cage. In the first introduction with Davy , Julius is seen as a 'strange-person'- and he answers that he is a gorilla and not a person:

'You are a strange-looking person' said Davy.

'I am not a person,

Said the voice.

I am a gorilla.

My name is Julius.' (pg.-20-21)

The anthropomorphized gorilla more or less appears to get merge occasionally with the colonized figure. He is said to have good table-manners- a hint at one such colonized native who has adapted to the colonizer's manner-

Julius had good table manners.

He knew which

Fork and spoon to use.

He made no noise

When he ate his soup (pg.-29)

Julius and Mr. Smith's conversation is very much formal- where an employer is happy to receive a request from an applicant he was expecting- but Julius goes along with them, though yet not quite 'along' with them as though being civil and polite he is carried away in a cage. And of course again he is presented as 'happy' within the cage in the author's efforts to make things look all nice and pretty and innocent. The colonized native Africans and the colonized non-human again gets almost merged in the parallel pictures of the natives carrying the gorilla in a cage is followed by an illustration of the gorilla carrying them in the same cage and the natives grinning happily. Of course it has been suggested that Julius carried his own human-carriers to provide them with some rest, but still Mr. Smith and his son Davy is never portrayed to adopt such convenient mode of being carried away in a cage. On the ship also Julius is seen to be happily helping to wash and clean the ship along with his share of enjoyment of having his meals on a table or relaxing on a deck-chair. The climax shows how Julius accidentally scares his audience(!) off as a result of his misadventures with an interfere g fly and also put full effort to win them back, and he succeeds finally becoming the 'show' once again. Of course his being friendly , harmless and nice does not help much and people only flocks to see him and 'love' him when he is in a cage. And of course the author goes on presenting the animal happy in any exploiting or demeaning situations and rather wishing for it. A colonizing voice would have made happy and innocent narratives out of the misfortunes of colonized victims of 'human-zoos' like Saartije Baartman or Oto Benga as well.

"Sammy the Seal" (1959) is the story of a seal in a zoo, who (much like Alex, the lion in the Madagascar movie-series) tries to go out and have a look. Of course, he does not sneak out and rather gets permission from the authority to have a look around,- his day-out being a reward for being a good seal. Sammy's tour around the town consists of a curious look around and a bit of silly misadventures. He feels hot, and enters a bathtub only to be grumpily shoved away by the human owner. He also seeks entry into a school and had his share of fun,- but again like Julius used to like it in the cage, Sammy also prefers to go back to the zoo and refers to it as his home.

A bell rang. School was over.

'Will you be here tomorrow?'

Said the children.

'No', said Sammy,

'School is fun,

But I belong in the zoo

I just wanted to know

What it is like outside.

Now I have to go back.' (pg.-60)

The problem lies in with this illusory depiction of the zoo as an animal utopia- the 'home'. But a zoo is certainly not a 'home' for a seal or any other animals, nor is the 'zoo' a place where they do belong.

In "Oliver" (1960) we see an extra elephant in a group meant for a circus party is abandoned and thus follows his ordeal to fit in and find a serving position in the human society. He tried to get a place in the zoo, to be a pet to somebody and even pretending or rather roleplaying as a dog to convince a lady to take him in, and even tried to serve as a horse but failed. Finally, he enjoyed himself with some little children in a park, made them happy with his antics and the author makes his protagonist share his ambition of being a dancing elephant for the circus. The story ends on a 'happy' note when Oliver's crowd-pooling demonstration is noticed by the circus-part he was earlier refused by, and he gets accepted by them. If we take it as a metaphor to motivate children not to lose hope at the earliest rejection and carry on with the search to achieve what they want, it seems an innocent beast-fable. But again, the anthropocentric note sounds so strong in Hoff's portrayal of animals where their only ambition and happiness ever come from being in servitude to human-beings that his writings start appearing more like an attempt to normalize and build a white-washed narrative of the colonial-history.

Published in 1961, "Chester" follows as almost the same story that of 'Oliver', only instead of an elephant, here it is a wild horse who desperately tries to abandon his freedom and seek solace and achievement in servitude towards human-beings. Though Hoff presents this as his wish to be 'loved and cared for' and his final picture of being roped and stabled up is what the author takes efforts to prove as the final utopia for an animal. This is of course a case of deliberate illusory propaganda where human colonialism is propagated as human care. Chester in his attempts to fit in within the human requirements even directly approaches them to take him along as a pet:

One day men came with ropes. They were looking for wild horses.

'I am glad to see you,' said Chester.

'Please put a rope on me.' (pg.-6-7)

And though the humans searching for wild horses rejected Chester as he couldn't run, they took all the other horses with them, without their consent of course, rather very much against their consent. As the other horses were perfectly enjoying their freedom in the world and was in no mood like Chester to seek out 'love' or 'care' under human domination:

'You are silly',

Said the other horses.

'It is fun to be wild'

As the story follows we see Chester is made to realize that neither he can come to human utility by laying eggs like hens or by giving milk like cows, nor can he run as quick as a 250 horse-power car, or neither can he serve as a statue or a rocking toy-horse for children, only finding success finally in posing as a merry-go-round and is ultimately taken in by the human captors. What is certainly ridiculous is the portrayal of an animal eagerly craving to be captivated and controlled by human beings. The story ends with;

They took him to a bright, clean stable. All the other horses were there.

‘ You were right Chester’ said the horses. ‘ It is fun here. It is nice to be loved and cared for. (pg.-62-63)

But nowhere does Hoff even slightly refer to the exploitations horses are inflicted with, as did Anna Sewell much earlier in her “Black Beauty” (1877). We can also look into Mary Tourtel’s (who was an illustrator and writer like Hoff) “A Horse Book”(1901) in reference to compare. Tourtel’s is also a picture-book meant for children and she describes different nature, activities and even quirks of horses in different settings. She mentions the torture horses had to bear too, but ofcourse her depiction is purposed to ignite a sense of compassion in her little readers and in no way she attempts to portray a picture that horses do like and love to bear with such exploitations or to create an illusion where they enjoy a perfect and comfortable life serving humans.

In “Grizzwold” (1963) we see a slight change in the narrating tone of the author, and here he shades some his strong anthropocentric assertion. “Grizzwold” is about a huge bear who loses his habitat forest due to human callousness of chopping down all the trees for timbers for the paper mill. Gizzwold, the bear searches for a new forest to reside in but in vain. He finally reaches the city and goes through a series of misadventures where people even try to use him as a living breathing bear-skin rug. He is ousted from a masked-dance party, chased away by a dog and when he went to the zoo and saw other bears begging for peanuts and started imitating them, he was requested by the other bears to leave as they were not ready to share. He was advised by his encaged friends to try at the circus. (The illustration accompanying this episode is equally disastrous as the story-trial, depicting large bears caged up and begging for peanuts). He tried his luck at the circus but soon found that only trained bears can succeed in doing the tricks. Finally he reaches a nice forest, but is encountered by some hunters with guns who took aim at him, only to be timely saved by a ranger who confirms that being a national park no ‘shooting’ of animals is allowed there, except for pictures. And the story ends with Grizzwold happily residing there and happily posing for pictures for the tourists and visitors. The ending might remind us of how different animals from gorillas to dolphins etc are still

trained in certain captive-sanctuaries or entertainment businesses to make profit of them, and certainly this composition of Hoff does not stand as example of a portrayal of a balanced human-non-human relationship. But still here we get to see a shift in the tone towards a compassionate outlook to address the problems concerning the non-human animal world, here being aggressive human encroachment of animal habitat and indiscriminate hunting.

This shift in the authorial tone can be traced in the later compositions by Hoff. As in "Santa's Moose" (1979) we get a nice story with the backdrop of Christmas where Milton the moose attempt to join and contribute in Santa's entourage along with the reindeers. The story shows how he messes up at the beginning but is never dismissed or demotivated by Santa or the other reindeers and later with their encouragement and his desire to make things right he learns how to softly land on the roof or how to wait outside and not leap into the chimney. Finally we see him taking responsibility to draw the carriage for the rest of the tour as the rest of the carriers got tired. The story with its anthropomorphized moose teaches almost nothing about moose or reindeers and works as an instructive tool to reach the message of perseverance, camaraderie, helping others etc, but its not blunt with its human-supremacy vibes as well as were many of his earlier compositions.

In "Barney's Horse" (1987) too we get to see a different presentation of a relation between a horse and its human 'owner', and the difference is quite prominent especially when we compare with "Chester" which was published more than two decades earlier. Here Barney the peddler shares a compassionate relationship of dependence with the horse. He uses the horse to carry goods for him but is never at the role of the exploiting master. He takes good care of him and even the illustration depicts the horse's stable beside Barney's bedroom and he is shown to get up off the bed at night to pull the blanket over his horse and bid him good-bye. The Children of the town are also shown to share friendly terms with the horse who petted him and offered him sugar cubes. The author instructs through Barney to the children to 'be kind to animals'. The horse is here has no name though and not an anthropomorphized figure too, but the depiction is real (we see the horse's eyes covered in blinkers all the time except in the illustration showing it resting in the stable) and still sensible with no boastful anthropocentric attitude justified by forced illusive presentation.

Another interesting composition by Hoff is "The Horse in Harry's Room" (1987), a book meant for nursery kids and yet nonchalantly referring to quite a few of intriguing issues. The story handles the delicate issue of a child's imaginary friend along with imparting with quite a just example of how to comfortably handle our relationship with our non-human friends.

“ The Horse in Harry’s Room ” tells the story of a little boy named Harry who has an imaginary friend in his room and this certain companion of course comes in form of a horse. He rides him, plays with him, even jump over the bed while riding him without any inconvenience caused like knocking over furniture or getting hurt. He looks forward to having a forever with his imaginary friend:

‘ Oh, its great to have a horse’,

said Harry.

‘ I hope I will always have him.

I hope he will always stay’. (pg.- 8)

But Hoff portras such a common yet sensitive issue of children having imaginative friend with so much sensibility. Harry’s parents are portrayed as understanding guardians who tries not to stunt the little child’s imaginative flow and moderately interfere in a sensible manner and try to introduce him to real horses and the way they live. Even Harry’s school-teacher is a sensible person who neither scolds nor mocks him after hearing him describe his accounts of secret adventures with his imaginary friend, rather she tries to calm down other children laughing:

‘Sometimes thinking about a thing

is the same as having it.’

said the teacher. (pg.- 20)

when finally Harry gets to meet real horses, credit to his parents, Hoff’s portrayal of this juvenile’s perception of this particular animal is quite real and sensible and an upgraded version from the blatant glorification of exploitative anthropocentrism evident in many of his earlier composition as discussed . Hoff lets his little protagonist and his little readers see the horses as they are found to be in a farm:

Harry saw horses running. Harry saw horses kicking. Harry saw horses nibbling.

(pg.- 25-27)

Hoff makes Harry’s father to quip in :

‘ Horses should always be free

to run and kick and nibble.’

said father.

(pg.- 28)

of course Hoff's presentation of horses here barely stands a chance in comparison to Anna Sewell's "Black Beauty" (), but then that's the point. Hoff's book no way in length, target or purpose stands on the same arena as Sewell's, and the prime purpose of the nursery picture-book of a few words and illustrations is to provide an entertaining reading material to kids as the stepping stone to the world of learning and not to voice a strong piece of advocacy to stop animal exploitation, as was Sewell's primary motivation behind the composition of the masterpiece. And though we cannot see the bare minimum reference to the toils horses need to carry out, and that's the reason they are bred, kept and nurtured in the farm, as we can see in Mary Tourtel's picture book "A Horse Book" (1901), we can still see an upward curve in the sensibility quotient in his presentations of animal figures and the presentation of the bond between a human-juvenile and a non-human animal. Also here, unlike many of his previous portrayals, here Hoff makes his protagonist learn about the freedom an animal needs and deserves and show that Harry does not wish to incarcerate his horse anymore in that small room, even if he is only an imaginary one or even if he will miss his company. His wish to make him free can be interpreted symbolically in many ways like Harry choosing to finally leave and outgrow his imaginary company or even like Harry sanctioning a touch of validation of reality to his imaginary horse by allowing it to live the way real horses live. But, with not much of symbolic interpretation, Harry's willingness to let his horse leave also samples to a child about the importance of making animals live free or at least be in their general habitat:

When they got home Harry ran right to his room. ‘ Horses should always be free to run and kick and nibble.’ Harry said to his horse ‘ If you want to go, you may go.’ (pg.- 29 - 30)

When we consider the presentation of a child's psyche, especially a child's leanings towards seeking companionship, dependency, or even creative fulfilment with all their imaginative shaping-ups, this certain attribute is quite common and universal and not underrepresented in literature as well. From American cartoonist Bill Watterson's "Calvin and Hobbes" where the classic pair of Calvin and his stuffed toy figure of a tiger Hobbes who comes alive and takes part in all of Calvin's secret rendezvous and mischievous adventures in his own make believe

world to picture-books like Peter Sis's "Madlenka's Dog" (2002) or Caron Lee Cohen's "Martin and the Giant Lions" (2002) or even, though in a twisted way, in Maurice Sendak's "Where the Wild Things Are" (1963) etc. and many more literary representations have portrayed this common but curious child psyche of adopting some imaginary companion. But in Hoff's "The Horse in Harry's Room" the narrator presents this same attribute from a third person's sceptic perception and handles the issue with utmost care by neither opposing Harry's friendship with an imaginary animal nor indulging the same either where it might get hard for the child to maintain balance with reality, specially when growing up. Hoff's "Danny and the Dianosaur" has also banked upon this quotient of fantasy and imaginary friend to an extent, yet there the narrating focus was churning out a fun-story for children and not on other issues, but here in "The Horse in Harry's Room" the illustrator-author paints a picture of a child developing love and respect towards real animals through his friendship with an imaginary one, and that's where this book stands particularly special in his gamut of works.

In this twenty-first century where different issues concerning violation of rights such as human-rights, woman-rights, queer-rights or coloured people's rights etc. have found a strong voice to fight for their case, we can also see advocacy of certain rights for the non-human animals have found a stronger platform too. The different digital social-medias also playing important role to radiate this voice beyond academic literature, seminars or discussions or local movements. The worldwide outrage and attempted restrictions to counter mass sacrifice festivals such as Nepal's 'Gadhimai' or China's Yulin festival or many such examples like these attests the mentioned fact. And yet, there's certainly a long way to go to bring in a complete change of attitude towards non-human animals where our core anthropocentric values no more makes decision about our behavior meted out towards animals. And to try bringing this change of attitude we need to educate our kids accordingly. But, the problem lies in the fact that many of the literary materials catered to children bear these seeds of human-supremacy and human-colonialism, from nursery-rhymes to picture-books or stories. And the solution is not a 'ban-all' cancel culture where literature and the history of literary evolution might get severely compromised. Rather, the trick is to create and cater alternate literature where a less biased and less arrogance of speciesism enriches the educative efforts. Or even kids are catered to with these certain books laden with anthropocentric suggestions in fat blunt lines, then there's a need for an interactive session with feedback and discussions to let them point out where the book suggests wrong towards an animal, or portrays wrong

emotions on behalf of an animal, for example being ecstatic at the opportunity to be imprisoned and serve under human-authority. The purpose of this article is not to vilify the illustrator-author, but to mention and refer to these certain shortcomings where the narrative celebrates the complete utilitarian exploitative attitude of human towards the non-human, and nursery kids are the target readers where the same is presented as the rosier picture of interaction between human beings and animals.

Picture-Books are here to stay as the first window for kids to dive in this world's affairs, and especially in this digital era where we can have access to a vast amount of material presented through the best of graphics, picture-books are still sustaining high among all the animated-stuffs tailor-shaped for kids as well. And the hope lies in a promise to yield entertaining learning for little kids with empathy, sensibility and a compassionate outlook towards the nature, every human beings and non-human lives as well. In the conclusion references may be made to Anushka Ravishankar and Pulak Biswas's brilliant compositions "Tiger on a Tree" (1997) or "Catch that Crocodile" (1999), where we find a quite balanced and considerate perception being catered to children in the form of a picture-book. In both of these books the authors refer to scenarios where human civilization stands in a sudden encounter with a non-human animal, and that too a ferocious one, and yet the books conclude with the human beings ultimately being benign enough to set the tiger free or lead the stuck crocodile to the river, albeit ensuring their own safety first. To cohabit peacefully with respect towards the other non-human lives and the nature or ecology itself is just not an act of benevolence on the part of human-beings, rather its one of the prime requirements of the time to continue surviving longer as a species on this earth too. And thus, it requires our narratives, our literature to contribute with ecological sensibility and ofcourse picture books being an integral part to communicate with the little population of humanity needs to be more sensible towards this ecological need as well.

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BIO-NOTE

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