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"The identical horse of knowledge" – Mapping and *Meaning for the Reader* in Animal Autobiographies around 1800

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Abstract: In this paper, we propose an analysis of how the subjective interpretation of a fictional text is brought about on the basis of combining the formal approach to the pragmatics of fiction with literary analysis. Our corpus is the anonymously published horse autobiography *Memoirs of Dick, the Little Poney* from 1799/1800. In the autodiegetic narrative, Dick the pony speaks as a hurt animal, critically observes human behaviour with satiric intent, and inscribes himself into an abolitionist discourse. We will show how the co-existence of several possibilities to read and understand the text or, more formally, how *Meanings for the Reader* (MfR) is foregrounded by the genre of animal autobiography and aims at the (self-)recognition on the part of the reader.

1. Introduction and Context

1.1 The Emergence of Animal (Auto)Biographies in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century and the Tradition of the Animal Fable

Speaking animals have a long tradition in English literature that goes back to translations of Aesop's fables ranging from the fifteenth century (in 1484 by Caxton) well into the eighteenth century (e.g. Samuel Croxall in 1722, Samuel Richardson in 1740, John Newbery in 1757, Robert Dodsley in 1761; see Carpenter and Pritchard 1999: 8–9), as well as to fairy tales made popular around that time. In the course of the eighteenth century, however, animals become narrators and focalizers in British fiction as well: between 1751 and 1800 more than 50 texts with animals as central characters or autobiographical narrators were published (see Blackwell 2006), a development that coincides with the emergence of fictional autobiographies. The genre of animal (auto)biography has recently been brought into the focus of literary and particularly cultural studies with the emergence of (human-)animal studies.[1] While (human-)animal studies generally foreground the relationships and interaction between human beings and animals, aiming to bring animals to the centre of attention, we would like to argue that things are more complicated than

[1] See, among others, Colombat, Copeland, De Melo, Derrida and Wolfe.

that and that the genre of animal (auto)biography was recognized by contemporary writers to embed a variety of discourses, mainly to didactic ends.

The first animal biography to appear in 1751 was Francis Coventry’s *The History of Pompey the Little* (see Haas and Kirchhoff 2019; Zirker 2018). Coventry’s animal biography of a lapdog that moves, at least most of the time, in well-situated circles of society established a few characteristics of the genre: a heterodiegetic narrator, satire which is based on the dog’s outside perspective onto human beings, entertainment of the reader and, hence, a combination of teaching and delight. As the genre developed, autodiegetic narrators became more common, but mainly with cats, mice, lice, fleas, and dogs at their centre.[2] Autobiographies of horses are much rarer, and frequently Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty*, first published in 1877, is regarded as the original and prime example of equine autobiographies (see Lutts 2007: 1073; Copeland 2013: 180). It may be the still most popular one, but the *Memoirs of Dick, the Little Poney: Supposed to be Written by Himself; and Published for the Instruction and Amusement of Good Boys and Girls* precedes it by 78 years. It first appeared in 12 monthly instalments in the *Young Gentleman’s and Lady’s Magazine* and thus made for family reading; in 1800 the book publication by Newbery followed.

In the Preface to Dick’s *Memoirs*, the aim to teach and delight is foregrounded; at the same time, divergences from the genre of animal biography as established at that point in time are referred to, the first and foremost being the autodiegetic voice of Dick himself rather than the narrative transmission by an extradiegetic and heterodiegetic narrator. The fact that it is the pony himself who is narrating his story – instead of a human narrator who transfers the pony’s thoughts and feelings through focalization – has implications for the degree of immediacy of the events narrated. The narration here diverges from the norm established by the time and makes evident the didactic stance of the narrative overall.[3]

(1) **Without pretending to be the identical horse of knowledge**, which some years ago **instructed or amused** so many of the human race, I trust the following Memoirs of my checquered [sic] life will prove that I am not wholly uncultivated, or have been an inattentive observer of human manners. And if my strictures tend to procure more uniform **favour to my kind**, or to soften one obdurate heart among the lords of creation, I shall not regret that I have written, nor will my history be read without **improvement**. Dick, the Little Poney. (Preface v; emphases added)

Dick begins the preface to his narrative by alluding to “the identical horse of knowledge,” Marocco, the “the thinking horse” or “horse of knowledge” (see *Brewer’s Dictionary* 2007: 102), that lived in London from ca. 1586 to 1606 (in

[2] In his volume on “Animals,” Blackwell lists (2: v), for example, *The Life and Adventures of a Cat* (1760), “The Adventures of a cat” (1774), *History of a French Louse* (1779), *The Life and Perambulation of a Mouse* (c. 1785), *Memoirs and Adventures of a Flea* (1785), “Memoirs of Amourette, a Lap-Dog” (1791).
[3] A prominent example is Francis Coventry’s *The History of Pompey the Little*: the animal’s thoughts and feelings transmitted through his human voice was the most common form of animal biography, as also later examples such as Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty* and even Virginia Woolf’s *Flush* show.

between it went to tour the continent). It became famous when it climbed the steeple of St Paul’s Cathedral but had already reached a certain notoriety at that point as it was able to stand on two or three legs, feign its death and to distinguish between various colours as well as to count (his owner collected coins from the audience, and Marocco was able to identify the owner of each coin as well as count how many coins came from each audience member). Its abilities were even summarized in verse.[4] Marocco was still known in the 18th century as Banks’s horse, after his owner (William Banks, who was also called Richard in some sources, which is typically abbreviated to “Dick”).[5] In the narrative of the *Memoirs*, Dick notes that he is not the identical horse – but by means of this disclaimer, he creates the association and inscribes himself into a tradition of intelligent equines.

In the course of his story, Dick wishes to achieve “favour” to his “kind” and some improvement on the part of human beings and their behaviour towards animals. Accordingly, the horse becomes a being that potentially may serve to overcome borders between animals and human beings like no other as both species do not only interact with each other closely, both through work but also sport,[6] but that the horse – or, in this particular case, the pony enables readers to notice similarities between its fate and their own lives and, more generally, to relate its fate to what happens to human beings. We would like to emphasize at this point that the Memoirs of Dick have to be viewed in an abolitionist discourse that emerged around 1800 and resulted in, first, the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807 and, in a second step, the Abolition of Slavery in Britain in 1833. While we are aware that the analogies drawn in this context are hard to accept and inadequate from our contemporary point of view, we cannot do justice to the text without investigating it from this angle as well.

In the narrative itself, one major textual strategy is satire, which can be linked with our framework of *Meaning for the Reader* (MfR) that we will present in the next subsection. The notion of “improvement” and the representation of human

[4] *Bankes* hath an horse of wondrous qualitie,
For he can fight, and pisse, and daunce, and lie.
And finde your purse, and tell what coyne ye haue.
But *Bankes*, who taught your horse to smel a knaue?
(Epigr. 17. “Of Bankes horse.” *Chrestoleros: Seuen bookes of Epigrames* written by T. B. [i.e. Thomas Bastard]). See also Book 8, ch. 5 of Markham’s *Cavelarice* (“How a horse may bee taught to doe any tricke doone by Bankes his Horse”).
[5] “A horse called Marocco, belonging to one Banks about the end of Queen Elizabeth I’s reign, and trained to do all manner of tricks. One of its exploits is said to have been the ascent of St Paul’s steeple. […] The horse is mentioned by Sir Walter Raleigh, […] Ben Jonson and others” (Brewer’s 2007: 102). There is even reference to it in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* when Moth says: “the dancing horse will tell you” (1.2.53). It also became part of Francis Grose’s 1788 *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*: “Banks’s Horse. A horse famous for playing tricks, the property of one Banks. It is mentioned in Sir Walter Raleigh’s Hist. of the World, p. 178; also by Sir Kenelm Digby and Ben Jonson.” See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bankes%27s_Horse.
[6] “Vertraute Tiere der alltäglichen Umgebung befördern ‘ästhetische Lust’ [nach Nicolai Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, Berlin 1953]; dem Menschen nahestehende Tiere des häuslichen Zusammenlebens kommen am ehesten für die ‘vitale Lust’ [vgl. Hartmann] in Frage; fremdartige, scheue Tiere der Wildnis und des Waldes sorgen in ihrem Auftreten für das Überraschungsmoment, das oft ausschlaggebend für die hymnische, hingebungsvolle Grundhaltung ist; und wilde Raubtiere, ‘häßliche’ Tiere im Sinne Herders, exotische Bestien, sowie Fabelungeheuer der Mythologie bewirken Schauder und Angst, aber auch zugleich Bewunderung und Verherrlichung aus intellektueller Sicht.” (Stilz 1968: 3)

folly in the narrative as well as of human cruelty are meant to hold a mirror to the reader in order to involve her or him and make her or him change (as in “improve”) her or his behaviour. Ridicule and warning of particular kinds of behaviour are possible through the representation of the pony’s experiences: the choice of perspective, from the point of view of a lower being, proves to be particularly effective when it comes to revealing the inadequacies of human conduct.

1.2 Our framework

Our goal is to analyse Dick’s story in the framework of Bauer and Beck (2014, 2021); their aim is to understand how a reader arrives at the subjective interpretation of a fictional text. Subjective interpretation means: what does the text mean for me, the reader? This question does not vaguely refer to the importance a text might have for one’s life but can be rephrased as: How does the situation described in the text relate to my own actual situation? We call this the *Meaning for a Reader*, MfR (following Bauer et al. (submitted)). The MfR is both a pragmatic concept (i.e. the meaning of linguistic material in context, for example its message) and an object of investigation of literary scholarship. With the concept of MfR, Bauer and Beck link linguistics and literary studies. They show that linguistic analysis offers helpful guidelines for the starting point of literary analysis.

Bauer and Beck argue that readers interpret fictional texts by way of inference.[7] This is stated informally in the conditional in (2a) and in terms of possible world semantics (e.g. Lewis 1986) in (2b). The idea is that the fictional text T describes a set of situations or possible worlds. Since we are talking about fictional texts, there is no claim that the actual world @ (the actual situation of the reader) is a member of this set. But still, readers will relate the text to themselves and their situation. They do so by way of the inference described in (2).

(2) a. If everything the text T says is the case, then this relates to me via relation R

b. For all w such that T(w)=1, R(w)(@)

The MfR derived by (2) represents the subjective or pragmatic interpretation of the fictional text. The inference drawn by way of the conditional is a relation between the text worlds w and the actual world @, R in (2). The text does not include the relation R to the actual world of the reader. The operation (2) does not specify a particular relation R. Rather, the relation is inferred by the reader

[7] The term “inference” is used here with reference to the conditional in (2). In a conditional, the consequent *follows from* the antecedent in a sense that semantic theory has made precise (see e.g. Kratzer (1991)). For our purposes, it has to be borne in mind that the conditional in (2) is itself the result of the pragmatic interpretation of the fictional text according to Bauer and Beck’s theory. In the terminology of Chierchia & McGonnell-Ginet (1990) and Kadmon (2000), the conditional is an *implication* (their neutral term for non-truth-conditional meaning components of diverse kinds, including implicatures, presuppositions etc.) which arises from the pragmatics (i.e. from a reader’s interpretation of the text as a piece of fiction - see below).

for the particular text. It is based on a mapping between elements of the text worlds and elements of the actual world.

For example, upon reading the fable in (3), a reader may and often will draw an inference that concerns her own situation.

(3) from: *Aesop’s Fables* (trans. George Fyler Townsend)

> The Crow and the Pitcher
> A Crow perishing with thirst saw a pitcher, and hoping to find water, flew to it with delight. When he reached it, he discovered to his grief that it contained so little water that he could not possibly get at it. He tried everything he could think of to reach the water, but all his efforts were in vain. At last he collected as many stones as he could carry and dropped them one by one with his beak into the pitcher, until he brought the water within his reach and thus saved his life. – Necessity is the mother of invention.

An intuitive inference is given in (4) (see Bauer & Beck (2014).

(4) intuitive pragmatic interpretation of (3):

If everything the text says is true, then I should be inventive and persistent.

This inference is based on the reader relating elements of the text worlds to elements of the actual world. Informally, the relevant mapping is given in (5) (see Bauer & Beck (2021)).

(5) mapping function f:

crow → reader

thirst → problem

pitcher → complication

...

The relation R is based on this mapping in the sense that the elements on the left are part of the text worlds, and the elements on the right are part of the reader’s actual world. The mapping in (5) feeds into the subjective interpretation in (4) rephrased in (4'). (4), (4') is what we call the MfR.

(4') If what the fable says is the case, then I should be like the crow and my behaviour should be like its actions in the story, i.e. I should be inventive and persistent.

In instructional texts, a particular relation R and mapping f are intended, and the mapping is fairly straightforward (as in Aesop’s fables; see Bauer and Beck 2014). The more interesting texts are the ones in which the inferences a reader

is guided towards by properties of the text are less obvious. But even here, the text is the foundation of the inferences drawn: Plausible pragmatic interpretations supported by the text are the ones in which the mapping is isomorphic. This means that the structures from the text worlds (entities and their properties and relations between them) are preserved in the mapping. In a mapping represented as in (3), if there are two entities on the left and a relation holds between them, then the counterpart relation holds between the counterpart entities on the right (Bauer and Beck 2021).

In the next section, we will show how the application of Bauer and Beck’s theory of pragmatic interpretation opens up a number of readings of the story of Dick, the pony: it is, in particular, the notion of “improvement” as introduced by Dick that suggests reader involvement in the sense of creating links and mapping elements of the text worlds to elements of the actual world. What makes the story of Dick particularly intriguing against this background lies in the fact that it addresses different groups of readers that arrive at correct decodings on different levels: while the child reader most likely recognizes the pony he or she knows from their everyday surroundings, the educated adult reader is aware of a meta-literary dimension and the text’s similarity to the genre of the fable. The theory of MfR introduced above helps us disentangle these various levels of signification of the text and describe what the various MfRs entail and how they come about.

2. Analysis

In our reading of the text, we arrive at three MfRs directly supported by the text, i.e. the text makes three structure-preserving mappings plausible. In the first reading (reading A), the reader feels with and for the pony to the extent that he or she identifies with it and the feelings as well as reactions related to the experiences the pony undergoes.[8] The second reading, reading B, relates the pony to the reader by way of the reader’s teacher. In a third reading, the pony stands for human (instead of animal) slaves, and in a second step again for the human reader (reading C). In terms of Bauer and Beck’s mapping function f, we can capture the three readings concisely as in (6).

(6)	a.	f(Dick) = reader	reading A
	b.	f(Dick) = reader's critical observer	reading B
	c.	f(Dick) = slave (=reader)	reading C

In the next three subsections, we examine these three readings of the text in detail, before we turn to the relationship of the readings to each other in section 3.

[8] Our understanding of “identify with” here conforms with our understanding of “mapping” based on MfR: to “identify” means f(Dick)=reader.

2.1 Reading A: Identification and (self-)Pity – Dick as a Reader

The autodiegetic narrator of Dick's *Memoirs* sets out to describe his childhood and youth as a rather carefree time during which he is still somewhat "protect[ed]" from hardships that he will find typical for his "kind":

(7) I felt the ills of cold and scanty fare; but still I enjoyed liberty, and that palliated every inconvenience. I began, however, to dread I should not long possess this inestimable portion. I had seen my kind in numbers yoked to carriages of every sort, or bearing proud masters on their backs; and I concluded that my youth and diminutive size would not long protect me from similar toils and insults. (2.11-12)

His anticipation of a change as he grows up proves to be right: his life changes dramatically when he is stolen by a group of "gypsies"; with this, a series of hardships and suffering ensues, and he describes one such episode as follows:

(8) to prepare me for the fair, they began with cropping my ears, and cutting my tail to a stump. This operation was painful enough, but I was now habituated to suffering: and though it deadened my sense of hearing, and gave flies the power to harass me with impunity, I submitted without complaining; and indeed thought myself happy that custom had not sanctioned more extensive amputations. (4.31)

Dick describes what is being done to him: he was previously stolen, neglected and in fear of "starvation" (27), until his new owners finally decide to sell him and prepare him for "the best bidder" (30), i.e. in the hope of getting as much money for the stolen good as possible. He suffers from the operations done to his ears and tail and elaborates on the unpleasant consequences. Being harassed by flies is disagreeable for human beings, too, and they probably also appreciate their full sense of hearing. The hurt that is being given to Dick by the various "operation[s]" is therefore something that the reader may relate to, which may lead to his or her rejecting such suffering and recognizing it as unnecessary. As readers, we experience the situation through Dick's perspective and are led to identify with him which may result in or even be based on (self-)pity.[9] Hence the first reading, we argue, includes the following mapping:

(9) f(Dick) = reader

f(humans) = reader's acquaintances

f(feel pain) = feel pain

f(cut off ears) = hurt

[9] Mappings as in (6a) are the formal expression of the reader's emotional and cognitive identification with the protagonist and the events described in the narrative. The feeling of pain as mapped in (9) is probably a secondary mapping.

While a contemporary reader may have a hard time to accept the pony’s submission “without complaining”, we argue that, from *our* contemporary point of view, at this point of the story a historical dimension of mapping may come into play that is linked to a particular tradition of evangelical writing in children’s literature prominent at the time. In 1671 and 1672, James Janeway’s *A Token for Children* was published in two parts; it “was subtitled: ‘An Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives, and Joyful Deaths, of several [thirteen, in fact] young Children’” (Avery 1995: 21). Accounts are given of “godly children, most dying young but joyful, [with] ‘several passages taken verbatim from their dying lips’” (Carpenter and Pritchard 1999: 529). This publication “remained in use for more than 200 years. […] in 1799 James Mathews of London published an edition in which he enlarged it with the addition of 15 further death-bed scenes” (Carpenter and Pritchard 1999: 529), that is in the same year that *Dick’s Memoirs* were first published. The submission to one’s fate and pain without complaining, as expressed by Dick, may therefore be linked to the group of addressees “good boys and girls” in the Preface. We will find that this historic dimension of mapping is also relevant for our reading C (see below, section 3.).

In the course of Dick’s narrative, one crime (theft, which means also the forced separation from his mother) is followed by several other cruel actions (cutting of hair, castration etc.). Such an exposure of human ill-treatment of animals was widely spread at the time of publication. John Locke, for example, in his *Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) writes:

(10) One thing I have frequently observed in Children, that when they have got possession of any poor Creature, they are apt to use it ill: They often torment, and treat very roughly young Birds, Butterflies, and such other poor Animals, which fall into their Hands, and that with a seeming kind of Pleasure. This I think should be watched in them, and if they incline to any such Cruelty, they should be taught the contrary Usage. For the custom of tormenting and killing of Beasts will, by degrees, harden their Minds even towards Men. (Locke 1989: §116)[10]

Cruelty towards animals, according to Locke, has an immediate effect on the general moral makeup of a person. The anonymous author of Dick’s story appears to take up the contemporary discourse but also goes beyond it. Whereas Bentham, in his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, first published in 1789, in his chapter “Of the Limits of the Penal Branch of Jurisprudence” (ch. 17) dwells on the ability not to reason but to suffer, the focus in Dick’s *Memoirs* is not so much on this ability to suffer and feel pain but rather on the emotive reactions evoked by suffering and pain, which is something that is typically human: not only does the reader thus identify with the sufferer, s/he also feels pity for them, so that the mapped situation is

[10] See also William Hogarth, *Four Stages of Cruelty*, first published in 1751. Statements against cruelty towards animals can also be seen in light of a changing attitude in the wake of Descartes’ notion of an “automaton” (*Discours de la méthode* 1637, 5è partie) and the general perception that animals had a soul. Another prominent example that warns of cruelty against animals, especially by children, is Sarah Trimmer’s *Fabulous Histories*, whose title was later changed to *History of the Robins* (1786); see Hunt 2001: 187, and Carpenter and Pritchard 1999: 544.

one in which we notice someone suffering. Such a reading is triggered by Dick’s talking of a “favour to my kind” in the Preface to his narrative. The notion that an animal is needed to evoke such responses in a human being may be deemed paradoxical; and this is where a fictional leap comes into the equation, with the relation R from Bauer and Beck’s theory.

In these passages, readers are invited to put themselves into the pony’s shoes. If they do so, then the pragmatic message of the text is in effect for the reader to share the pain felt by Dick, with the aim of “improvement”. Based on the reader’s identification with the pony and resulting (self-)pity, the message is simply to stop behaving cruelly towards animals and even become aware of the suffering they have endured and start resisting. This is summarized in the resulting MfR in (11):

(11) If everything the text says is true, then I am like Dick and I should pity his fate and, consequently, be more sympathetic towards animals.

2.2 Reading B: Satire – Dick as the Reader’s Critical Observer

Dick’s reflections on human folly are often embedded in his inability to understand certain kinds of behaviour as in (12):

(12) The spoil that had tempted this daring man to risk his life, was contained in what mankind call *a purse*. I never could understand why they attached so much importance to so small an object. Never in my life did I see any thing drawn from it which served for food or raiment; it seemed always to contain white, yellow, or brown little pieces of metal, of no more value in my mind than the stones and pebbles which mend the roads; yet I have since learned that more than half of the quarrels which disturb the lords of the creation, more than half the crimes they commit, originate from too eager a desire to possess those apparently useless baubles. […] Men are, no doubt, wiser than horses: a poney must not attempt to account for what they do; yet I must confess, that of all the mysteries which have amused or confounded me, the insatiable desire of what is called *money* to me is the most inexplicable. (2.9–10)

The context of these observations is a robbery that is prevented as the thieves fall over Dick and his mother during their attempt at running away at dusk. Dick’s reflection is based on a certain degree of naivety: he sees a purse but does not appear to be able to understand its purpose as no “food or raiment” can be drawn from it. He continues to assume the intellectual superiority of humans who are “wiser than horses” – but the implication is that they are not: the “desire of what is called *money*” remains, against the background of Dick’s thoughts, “inexplicable”. By satirising this particular human behaviour – the desire for money – the autodiegetic narrator, i.e. the horse, is presented as a better being whose rationality speaks against the commonplace of the ‘wild’ as

well as uncovers human folly.[11] With the use of satire, the narrator thus also aims at presenting a “corrective of human vice and folly” (Abrams & Harpham 353). As this folly – to commit a crime for something that is not even edible and serves no obvious function – is described by a pony, the human greed for money becomes even more ridiculous and is satirized even more harshly, with the aim to eventually improve human behaviour. In a letter to Dr. Swift, Alexander Pope, for instance, notes: “I know nothing that move strongly but satire, and those who are ashamed of nothing else are so afraid of being ridiculous” (Pope 10: 295). The aim of Dick, one may argue on the basis of his observations and reflections, equally is to move the reader and recognize ridiculous human behaviour; the second reading is accordingly prominent in passages in which the reader is invited to laugh at human folly but also recognize one’s own potential to such ridiculousness. Human behaviour is made fun of, and revealed to be nonsensical through satire. This creates the following mapping:

(13) f(Dick) = reader’s critical observer

f(money) = object without intrinsic value

f(observe critically) = observe critically

The critical observation is enhanced by means of Dick’s utter bewilderment as expressed in (12), which creates distance from the behaviour described that is then uncovered as human folly. At some points, this satire is even turned into outspoken reprimand. After describing the suffering imposed on him in (8), Dick goes on to admonish the human reader for the behaviour of his kind:

(14) “If you would listen to the poney, he would tell you that Nature has been equally bountiful to his kind; and that you can deprive them of nothing but what diminishes their comforts, without increasing their utility or advantage to you.” (4.32)

The use of illeism, i.e. the reference to oneself with the third person pronoun instead of the first person: “If you would listen to the poney, *he* would tell you…”, is not only a strategy typical of satire but also particularly conspicuous in this context as it turns the statement into some general truth: “you can deprive him of nothing but what diminishes their comforts”, while still addressing the reader directly. It also provides a more objective counterpoint to the subjective experience that precedes his emotional outburst later in the paragraph: “Ye tasteless sons of men!” (4.31). At the same time, it serves as metalepsis, with the narrator leaving the world of the narrative to teach the reader and expose human thoughtlessness towards animals: Dick here speaks as a critical observer turned human moralist who condemns the ill-treatment of animals.

[11] See also Dick’s comment in ch. 15: “Gentle reader! you will smile at my simplicity in forming such extravagant ideas; but if Dick may be allowed to speak his mind, he has more reason to smile at the egregious folly of man” (137).

These passages in the text invite a mapping from text elements to a reader's reality in which Dick teaches the reader a lesson, that is, the fictional Dick steps into the role of an actual teacher or mentor to the reader. Such a mapping is given in very concrete terms in (13). The subjective or pragmatic interpretation or MfR based on it can be summarized thus:

(15) If everything the text says is true, then Dick is a critical observer who teaches me to reflect on human behaviour and on what is of real value.

2.3 Reading C: Dick and Slavery – Dick’s Plea for Greater Humanity

We have seen that Reading A invites me, the reader, to map Dick onto an animal in my experiential world, which creates a bridge to our Reading C. This third reading is more subtle but revealed by references in the text such as in (16) to slavery, bondage, liberty, freedom, which support a mapping given in very concrete terms below.

(16) My sensations at this moment of my life I cannot describe. I was girded till I could scarcely breathe; I had only a piece of iron to chew; and when my young rider mounted me, he pulled the reins so hard, that I thought he had in contemplation to split my jaws asunder. (6.44)

Here, a connection is established between Dick and human slaves, and, accordingly, humans who claim to own Dick and slave holders etc.

(17) f(Dick) = slave

f(humans) = slave holders

f(bridle) = instrument of torture

f(freedom) = freedom

This reading becomes an instance of historical mapping when intertextually linked to *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa* (1745-1797), an autobiography by a former slave first published in 1789 and still highly popular at the time when Dick’s *Memoirs* were published. These links become obvious from the preface on:

(18) I have only therefore to request the reader’s indulgence and conclude. I am far from the vanity of thinking there is any merit in this narrative: I hope censure will be suspended, when it is considered that it was written by one who was as unwilling as unable to adorn the plainness of truth by the colouring of imagination. My life and fortune have been extremely *chequered*, and my adventures various. […] (*The Interesting Narrative of*

> *the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa* 178 [Preface; emphasis added[12]])

Equiano wishes to achieve "benevolence" of his readers, their "profit" and "promote the interests of humanity" (20), ideas apparently taken up by Dick when refers to his equally "checquered" life and asks of the reader some "favour to my kind".

While such analogies might be considered random, further parallel passages suggest a strategic reference to Equiano's life-narrative by the author of Dick's adventures.

(19) I had seen a black woman slave as I came through the house, who was cooking the dinner, and the poor creature was cruelly loaded with various kinds of iron machines; she had one particularly on her head, which locked her mouth so fast that she could scarcely speak; and could not eat nor drink. I was much astonished and shocked at this contrivance, which I afterwards learned was called the iron muzzle. (*Narrative* 44)

An analogy is here being established with (16) by the fact that both narrators describe how a muzzle is used to constrain them or, rather, a fellow slave. In the case of Dick, this is part of breaking the horse and taming it (see *OED*, "break, *v*." 14.a.); in the case of the slave described by Equiano, the intention is also to discipline, for example, disobedient slaves.

One of the most striking references by Dick to slavery is made a little more than halfway through his adventures, when he is with the family of a girl who take good care of him:

(20) I now felt myself a servant, and not a slave. (*Memoirs* 11.95)

Dick draws a conceptual difference here between being a servant, i.e. an attendant in employment (also see *OED*, "servant, *n*." 1.), and a slave.[13] The explicit reflection on the state of a slave inherent in this statement can be regarded as a reference to yet another text, also published anonymously but "by the Author of Dick the Little Poney" in 1801: *The Dog of Knowledge; Or, Memoirs of Bob, the Spotted Terrier*.[14] Here, the eponymous hero travels to Jamaica and observes slaves, whom he describes as "many apparently human beings, who were doomed to the severest daily toils" (Blackwell 2012, vol. 2: 230). In this case, the link between the treatment of animals and slaves is

[12] The notion is also later brought up by Mary Seacole when she reports her experience of racial discrimination: "our progress through the London streets was sometimes a rather chequered one" (Seacole 2). Wenske (and others) have pointed out that Seacole evokes the tradition of slave narratives, even though she reports a success story.
[13] One might even regard this as a linguistic commentary of sorts, as "in the North American colonies in the 17-18th c., and subsequently in the United States, servant was the usual designation for a slave" (*OED*, "servant, *n*." 3.b.).
[14] See here: https://books.google.de/books/about/The_Dog_of_Knowledge_Or_Memoirs_of_Bob_t.html?id=gj5WAAAAcAAJ&redir_esc=y.

explicitly commented on[15]: "The bewildered Bob concludes that though they look like human beings, African slaves must be a different species, 'a particular, though singular kind of animals, that are born to subjection, the same as dogs or horses'" (Blackwell 2012, vol. 2: xv).[16] Bob is indeed a "dog of knowledge" as he can see analogies between the treatment of animals and slaves (see Ellis 108); he thus creates consciousness in his narrative in a way similar to Dick in his *Memoirs*.[17]

Readers who get the mapping in (17), based on clues such as the ones listed above, are accordingly guided towards the message that living creatures abhor bondage and deserve freedom. The subjective interpretation of the text that is based on this mapping is, in a nutshell, the inference in (21).

(21) If everything the text says is true, then slavery should be abolished.

The text thus guides the reader towards several inferences concerning reality that all, in a pragmatic step of interpretation, can be mapped to his or her own world. But the different interpretations are not merely juxtaposed in Dick's *Memoirs*; they also interact with and add to each other. In the next section, we examine the relationship of the three readings to each other.

3. Linking A, B and C: A Reading on the Meta-Level

As this animal autobiography addresses a variety of situations and problems that relate to animals as well as to different groups of human beings, it turns out to be a particularly apt example to apply Bauer and Beck's theory of the interpretation of fiction and their notion of MfR. In what follows, we will show that links exist between the individual MfRs which result in a meta-level reading of the text as a whole. Let us consider the links between readings A and C as well as between B and C to begin with.

Reading C is clearly related to reading A: living beings with feelings, desires etc. should not be subjected to bondage. A person able to identify with and feel pity for the pony should oppose both cruelty to animals (and perhaps more generally the keeping of domestic animals) and slavery. In reading C, we can detect a further mapping: the reader is led towards identifying with the individual

[15] See also Cosslett on the "connection between animals and slaves" (Cosslett 2006: 78-79). Dickens would take up similar imagery in his novel *Dombey and Son*, when Edith says: "'There is no slave in a market: there is no horse in a fair: so shown and offered and examined and paraded, Mother, as I have been, for ten shameful years,' cried Edith […] 'Is it not so? Have I been made the bye-word of all kinds of men? Have fools, have profligates, have boys, have dotards, dangled after me, and one by one rejected me, and fallen off, because you were too plain with all your cunnings: yes, and too true […]'" (462).

[16] "Slaves are treated like animals, but they are not animals: the difference is essential here" (Cosslett 2006: 79). Cosslett goes on to remark about *Black Beauty*: "This difference causes some difficulties when Sewell reverses the metaphor, to show us animals being treated like slaves" (2006: 79).

[17] "The figure of the slave haunts many of these texts, centred as they are on the lives of sentient things or on forms of living property, and it links the it-narrative generically to the slave-narrative. In Bob's journey to Jamaica, this figure comes to the surface" (Blackwell 2012, vol. 2: xv). Another example is John Oswald's *The Cry of Nature* in 1791, who equally created a link between slavery and cruelty against animals (see Ellis 2007: 107).

subjected to bondage, so f(Dick) = slave = reader, clearly linking readings A and C. The feeling *for* other living beings is hence already a combination of mappings.

This link is substantiated if we look once more at two passages from Dick’s *Memoirs* and Olaudah Equiano’s *Narrative*, respectively, when each of the narrators dwells on liberty as well as the loss of it. Once his childhood is over, and Dick is sold and moved on from owner to owner, he recognizes how his situation has changed:

(22) I had, till now, lived something in a state of nature, and enjoyed a great degree of liberty: I now felt the rigour of restraint, and commenced an artificial existence, of which the race of men, with whom I was now connected, set me an example. (*Memoirs* 6.43)[18]

Olaudah Equiano uses very similar imagery to describe his “artificial existence”, namely not as a liberated man but living under the constant “horror” of not being free:

(23) I thought now of nothing but being freed, and working for myself, and thereby getting money to enable me to get a good education […]. At the sight of this land of bondage, a fresh horror ran through all my frame, and chilled me to the heart. My former slavery now rose in dreadful review to my mind, and displayed nothing but misery, stripes [flogging], and chains. (*Narrative* 67; 73)

But there is also a connection between readings B and C in that Dick, the one subjected to slavery, teaches the reader what this really means. The true master is not the slave holder but the one that unveils the true nature of the situation to the reader. So f(Dick) = slave = reader’s teacher and f(humans) = slave holders = the group containing the reader, under this interpretation.

A reading of Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*, first published in 1785, shows a similar stance as Dick’s in both his inferior role as slave and his superior position as the reader’s teacher. When Jefferson explains to his readers the situation of slaves and the moral implications of their behaviour (albeit somewhat qualified by Jefferson himself in the course of his *Notes*), he notes:

(24) There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it; for man is an imitative animal. (Jefferson 1982: 162)

[18] The notion of “liberty” is introduced from chapter one onwards, as we can see in our examples (6), (8), (12); in the course of the text, it is linked to “independence” as well: 2.11, 6.43, 6.48, 11.93, 12.105.

Here, too, the human moralist is speaking and voices a warning, and he does so with a twist: while Dick, throughout his narrative, strives to foreground the humanity of animals – his being able to suffer and feel pain, to reflect on his circumstances, etc. – Jefferson stresses how man is but “an […] animal”.

The meta-reading of the text that results from a combination of all three mappings provided so far is to treat all living beings with respect, independent of their outer and inner features. Dick expresses this in the epilogue to his narrative as follows:

(25) Our ideas of what is due to animals, ought in some measure to be taken from what is due to our own kind; else we shall often fail in an essential branch of humanity in what respects them. (182)

The closing words evoke notions of identification – it is their shared humanity that links the story’s British readers to slaves – and moral admonition in their failure to respect this humanity. To use Dick as a tool for both readings A and B prepares the reader to understand and get the mapping required for reading C as well. The seemingly paradoxical notion that an animal can teach human beings what it means to be human and humane through critical observation turns into a mirror of humans’ overall failure to act in accordance with their own kind, which is underscored by their treating even their own as badly as animals. Hence, the connections between the various readings feed into an overall message that is more general than the individual readings.

According to Dick, the message of his narrative therefore is:

(26) If everything the text says is the case, then Dick in the story is the counterpart of sentient beings in general, and what Dick feels can be felt by any of us, and what Dick explains in the story, I can observe if I look at my environment in an unprejudiced way.

This is expressed in the following mapping which underlies this MfR:

(27) mapping:

f(Dick) = S (the sentient-being kind, including horses and other people)

f(hurt) = hurt (a relation in SxS)

f(be explained by Dick) = be revealed by unbiased reflection

...

The notions of MfR and mapping allow us to represent concisely the different inferences suggested by the text and the respective connections between the fictional text and reality.

What can be observed in the course of the narrative as a whole is a constant flip-flopping of roles: the distinction between we (readers) and they (animals, slaves, …) vanishes continuously, an effect that is corroborated by the pony’s external perspective onto human behaviour as different from its own which is frequently foregrounded. What is more, the flip-flopping contributes to the simultaneous existence of readings A, B and C, and the fact that they are interlaced in the narrative supports the view that we are supposed to get, ultimately, the meta-level interpretation.

Again, it is Dick who expresses this thought towards the conclusion of his narrative, after he has been “Presented to a Family of Distinction – transferred from one Brother to another – as a reward for his Services has a Paddock and a Shed for Life – Arguments for Contentment – Conclusion”:

(28) Life, I find, is checquered [sic] with good and ill; mankind are born to calamities as well as horses; and though they often capriciously treat us, our advantages in many respects are greater than theirs, our hearts less susceptible of wrong. (18.178–179)

The ambiguity of “checquered” contributes to the potential for identification, and it does so even as an intertextual reference to Olaudah Equiano’s narrative (see (18)). The adjective is mentioned by Dick in his preface and conclusion and may refer to a diversification in colour (see *OED* “chequered/checkered, *adj*.” 2.a. “Diversified in colour, variegated; marked with alternate light and shade”) – Dick describes himself as “dappled grey” – as well as to character features (*OED* 3. “Diversified in character; full of constant alternation (esp. for the worse). Esp. in phr. chequered career”). The ambiguity points to outer looks as well as to an inner disposition, and the adjective hence lends itself to refer to both horse and human being. The passage is, however, noteworthy for something else, too: Dick here exalts himself, and the horse is described as a higher being, with a heart “less susceptible of wrong”, which can be read as an allusion to Book 4 in Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) – where such a characterization is, in turn, satirized on the extradiegetic level. In Dick’s *Memoirs*, such satire twice removed is more unlikely; rather, the emphasis of the moral superiority is part and parcel of the appeal to treat horses better and, by implication, humans too.

4. Conclusion

We have seen how in *Dick’s Memoirs* the human author speaks through the mask of an animal narrator with a satiric intention. The animal, Dick, the Poney, is representative of his own kind but also of humankind, more precisely, of slaves, and thus inscribes himself into an abolitionist discourse. These three layers – Dick as Reader, as Critical Observer, and as Slave as Reader – aim at the balance between identification and difference of animal and human being: we as readers are to observe the narrated events critically as well as in a sympathetic mood. The continuum of human being and animal as well as the allegorization of animals lend themselves as means for the reader to recognize what is wrong in the treatment of animals and slaves and results in empathy.

The animal thus, in the sense of literary anthropomorphization, becomes a tool for human self-recognition (see Griem 2010) but, simultaneously, remains an animal whose affinity to humankind is being presupposed; otherwise, the allegorical move would be impossible. Ontologically, the animal hence is not radically distinguished from the human, nor is it identical (e.g. because of its ability to suffer which in Bentham’s utilitarianism is understood in merely quantitative terms). To read *Dick’s Memoirs*, a representative of animal (auto)biographies around 1800 in the light of subjective meanings, mapping and MfR not only foregrounds the complexity of this genre and helps overcome simplifying genre attributions but also allows us to describe the strategies employed in a systematic manner: based on the nature of the text, it is impossible to delimit its meanings to one or two readings, and the co-existence of several mappings may even be foregrounded by the genre of animal autobiography. It is therefore the fictional embedding of the life narrative of a pony that allows for a reader’s identification with the pony as much as the recognition of the pony as an animal that should be protected from cruelty and the greater humanity required generally while, concurrently, maintaining the consciousness of difference. Animals and humans are shown to share qualities, a fact that requires us to treat them both with respect. Difference and identity can only be linked in the realm of fiction, and it is this very property of fiction that is cleverly exploited by a seemingly simple narrative.

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