



Animal Studies In Science And Literature: Creation Of Mystic Feline And Cultural Serpent Archetypes

Dr. CHITRA.V. S, Associate Professor, Postgraduate Department of English, Mahatma Gandhi College, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram. Email- vschitra11@gmail.com

Dr. BALAMURALI. R. S, Associate Professor, Postgraduate and Research Department of Zoology, Mahatma Gandhi College, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram.

Abstract

Animal studies is an interdisciplinary field that overlaps with science and literature. This article focuses on the real world of animals as viewed in science, and the literary depiction of animals as anthropomorphic. This has been the norm since ancient times, and advances in science have only contributed to the richness of literary features. The emphasis here is on how science fosters animal research, with a particular emphasis on felines and snakes. The familiar world of animals, such as horses, dogs, cats, and snakes, has been successfully depicted in literature. Science serves as the foundation for tracing their beginnings, while literature serves as the branches that stretch out to the world. In literary writings, the similarities and contrasts of these creatures with their magical effects and cultural significance are shown as distinct from the precise behavioural patterns bestowed upon them. Certain archetypes, such as mystic, magical, and strong felines, as well as serpents, appear regularly in literature from numerous civilizations. The importance of these creatures in establishing the genre and their functions within the book cannot be overstated. The presence of these feline and serpent archetypes is revealed by their similar pattern and function in specific cultures and times. The article discusses how animals in reality, as revealed by scientific truths, have found their way into literature via symbolic and cultural representations.

Keywords: Animal studies, Anthropomorphic, Felines, Serpents, Archetypes, Cultural representations.

Introduction

The animal world and its representations bind the realm of science and literature. The animals in the scientific world characterise the real world while the literary texts portray a fictitious blend of representations. This article tries to invade the perspectives of the animal world in science and literature. As part of this insight, the explorations concentrate chiefly on felines and snakes. Pondering the role of these creatures in science and literature may provide a comparison and contrast into their inevitability in the animal world as well as in

animal literature. The first part of the article will deal with the facts about animals especially felines and snakes as seen in science and the second part will provide a representation of the same in select literary texts. The shared aspects regarding animal studies are visible in the disciplines of science and literature. While science explores how living creatures, both humans and animals' function; literary depictions form an extension of this reality by binding the mystery inherent in the creation of feline and serpent archetypes.

Animal Studies and Science

This part of the article deals with how science promotes animal studies with a special focus on felines and snakes. To distinguish it from the family's wild relatives, the cat (*Felis catus*), a domestic species of tiny carnivorous mammal, is sometimes referred to as the domestic cat. Currently, there are at least 38 species of cats recognised worldwide (Australasia and the polar areas being the only exceptions), while current morphological and genetic research raises the possibility that there may be a few more. The big cats, generally belonging to the genus *Panthera*, and the smaller cats have traditionally been divided into two broad groups, with the cheetah being seen as an unusual afterthought because it represents a very early split from the felid line (Pocock 1917).

The cat possesses a sophisticated repertory of vocalisations, tail and body postures, and facial expressions that display emotional states and intentions. These different signals are used to widen, narrow, or preserve social distance. Rubs on the owner's side of the head, lips, chin, or tail as well as against furniture are one of a dog's distinguishing social behaviours. These areas of the cat's body are home to smell glands that appear to help the cat create a comfortable odour in its surroundings. All cats have a tongue that resembles a coarse file and contains a patch of sharp, backward-facing spines called filiform papillae at the tip that the cat uses to brush itself. Cats have a well-established propensity for cleanliness, and they spend a lot of time grooming, particularly after meals. The sleeping habits of cats differ from those of dogs and human beings. REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, the stage connected with dreaming, lasts for protracted durations in both dogs and humans. The cat, on the other hand, seldom ever enters REM sleep. Instead, it has a shorter, more episodic sleep cycle that allows it to relax but still wakes up right away.

The wide appeal stems from the cat's independent nature, elegance, cleanliness, and subdued expressions of affection. Cats are typically creatures of habit; they are curious but not adventurous and often agitated by abrupt changes in routine. Compared to dogs, who are more amenable to a new group member, cats are often less gregarious. Given these basic truths about cats, literary depictions of them tend to give them a mystic air.

The second animal chosen for study is the snake. Several limbless, scaly, elongate reptiles belonging to the suborder *Serpentes*, including venomous and nonvenomous species that live in tropical and temperate regions, are referred to as snakes by definition. The order

Squamata includes both snakes and lizards as members. Serpentes are the suborder in which snakes belong. The phylum Chordata, subphylum Vertebrata, class Reptilia, order Squamata, and suborder Serpentes are where snakes are categorised. There are 14 families in all, but the families and subfamilies of venomous snakes include Colubridae, Elapidae, Hydrophidae, Viperidae, Crotalinae, and Viperinae. More than 3500 different species of snakes exist. It is hypothesized that changes to the cranium preceded the loss of limbs and that the first snakes were likely short-bodied lizards with limbs (Caldwell et al., 2015). Human envenomation can have cytotoxic, neurotoxic, or hemotoxic consequences that depend on the species, time of year, and location.

The study accounts for the similarities and differences of these animals in literary texts. While nature has gifted them with specific habitual patterns the literary narratives project the vital magical effect and cultural impact they are said to possess.

Animal Studies and Literature

Literature seeks to value beauty in everything that is seen and unseen. Literature has successfully represented the familiar domain of animals, including horses, dogs, cats, and snakes. Science acts as the roots for tracing their origins while literature provides branches to reach out to the world. This article focuses on the literary perspectives on animal representations. The concept of literature has broadened from the general understanding of the term itself. It has evolved from a collection of written accounts to various genres and subgenres. By identifying the various possibilities of a text, processing it in accordance to individuals and audience, each genre is either classified or merged, or understood under a common umbrella term. Such an amalgamation is clearly found in fantasies and their subgenres like fairy tales. A particular genre always carries certain archetypical features which help us to categorise it specifically. Like the gothic fiction that carries the elements of horror, fantasies are always identified alongside magic and mystic constituents. Also, there will be stock characters performing their functions in creating these functional elements of genre constitution.

Feline characters and their Mysterious Creation

This paper is an attempt to identify the creation of feline and serpent archetypes in the literary history that is mystic and magical in their type. It also focuses on how they contribute to the genre of fantasy with particular reference to four major works under the genre: "Puss in Boots" a tale from an Italian collection, The Facetious Nights of Straparola by Giovanni Francesco Straparola, Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Garth Nix's Sabriel and Brian K. Vaughan's and Fiona Staples' fantasy book Saga.

Frazer in his seminal text, Golden Bough explores the creation of archetypes and how they are being repeatedly found in various cultures. This idea of archetype was further explored by Frye, in his essay "Archetypes of Literature". He develops the concept of understanding a genre by interpreting the symbol or image or rather with the help of the

archetype involved. Jung has also proposed the concept of archetype as he stated: “There are forms or images of a collective nature which occur practically all over the earth as constituents of myths and at the same time, as individual products of the unconscious”. According to him these images occur recurrently reflecting certain brands or personality types and are called it archetypes “These [archetypes] are imprinted and hardwired into our psyches.” He presents twelve such archetypes that showed their resurgence in literature. Likely to these brand types each of them contributes to the formation of respective genres as Frye mentioned.

Fantasy as a meta-genre evolved to various other genres including fairy tales. The set convention of using anti-realism makes it different from any other genre. Vladimir Propp states in his *Fairy Tale Transformations* “the tale is born out of life; however, the fairy tale reflects reality only weakly”. Reality is put down and emphasis is given more to the supernatural or the mystic or the magic in it. Fantasy visibly disobeys the natural law of actuality. It is chiefly a genre that is imaginative and highly potent in expressing the repressed desires, the overthrown ideas expressed through magic, monsters, and other fantastic elements. Magic thus is an elementary feature in almost all fantasies around.

Creating magic, mystic or supernatural scenarios is often identified alongside a magician, witch, or monster. They enact in the creation of the genre as set symbols or images which help in analyzing the genre effectively. Notably from the time immemorial, the mystic image is reciprocated through the symbol of a feline archetype. Throughout the literature of various cultures, the image of a feline that is mystic, magical, or powerful has been created knowingly or unknowingly. As Frye portrays his archetypes, these felines themselves becomes an archetype of that kind exhibiting similar and universal characteristics. Interestingly, across the centuries this magical feline archetype is found across centuries in literature of various cultures. A close examination of the ‘The Master Cat’ or ‘The Booted Cat’ from “Puss in Boots”, ‘The Cheshire Cat’ from Alice’s *Adventures in Wonderland*, ‘Mogget’ from *Sabriel*, and ‘The Lying Cat’ from *Saga* a comic fantasy can help us in identifying the particular feline archetype and how they become a part in recognising the genre: Fantasy.

The feline characters that are perceived in fantasies are all about powerful stares and imbue a supernatural mystery in them. Such a feline is the one that is found in the sixteenth-century European tale *The Facetious Nights of Straparola*. The particular work was much celebrated as it is renowned for equipping European literature with fairy tales for the first time. The work carried several folk and fairy tales with the themes of intrigue, tragedy, magic, etc: Among those 74 tales, fifteen were later adapted by many writers in their works, and “The Puss in the Boots” is an accomplished tale even now.

In “The Puss in the Boots”, the Master cat is the sole inheritance endowed to one of the major characters in the tale. The youngest son of the Millers receives the cat as a gift. It promises to build the man’s fortune. Every time the cat gifts his master, he is rewarded and continues to do the same. The feline is not presented as an ordinary cat here. The cat is an anthropomorphic one who makes use of tricks and magic to acquire wealth and position and

get his unfortunate and poor master married to a princess. The anti-realism is explored here. And it is certainly the cat that is responsible for this. This moulds the particular work to fit in to the set convention of fantasy. The tale details several incidents like this, in which the cat showcases its magic and how it revolves around the main plot. The feline is a fairy in disguise and has given way to the creation of the trickster cats in the following centuries. The work is one of the earliest to get marked under the genre fairy tale or the broader fantasy creates this mystique and magical archetype of the feline. Nevertheless, it is not to assert that, such a feline appeared first in this work of art but rather it becomes a clear example of confronting the feline archetype of magic which has helped in the categorization of the particular genre. Puss reappeared in various other works in the following centuries which contributed to tracing the fantastic elements in those particular works. It is also to wonder how we can draw a parallel between the European Puss and its counterpart in Indian folk tales. The Panchatantra tales of the second century B. C also present a feline who attempts to create a fortune in its king's palace. However, the following centuries after the creation of Puss saw many such magical felines which stood as a solid image or rather an archetype.

Following the repeating pattern, a major identical feline coming under this archetype was found in a nineteenth-century fantasy novel created by Lewis Carroll. The plot, structure, characters, and images of one of the most iconic and famous works of English-language fiction, *Alice in Wonderland* played an enormous role in popular culture, and literature, most evidently in fantasy. An 1865 British publication, the novel explores the journey of a young girl with many anthropomorphic creatures. The Cheshire Cat is one among them. It fulfills the features of a fantastic feline with its general description itself; the mischievous grin. The iconic grin of this feline appeared in various media as it enmeshed in popular culture. Cheshire, "the cat of Duchess" first makes its appearance in Chapter 6 and Alice finds the cat in a tree while she leaves the Duchesses' home. The magical element is explored as it can appear and reappear anytime leaving its grin behind. The ability of the cat to become invisible and intangible makes its appearance in the work more worthy and calls the reader's interest. Remarkably, it is just the Cheshire Cat who listens to Alice and often gives hues. The feline acts as a guiding spirit for Alice. This feline helps Alice to reach her final destination – the March hare's house. The feline also seems to possess a profound understanding of the functioning of Wonderland which is undoubtedly magical in conjunction with its capability to immaterialize. We also discover the essentials of the Wonderland from the Cheshire Cat that it's mad. With this 'flawed logic,' the cat proves itself to be mad. The cat often pops up to trouble Alice and help her subsequently. How man is being dependent or subordinate to them also reveals the anthropomorphic elements in the work. However, the frequent appearance and disappearance of the cat create supernatural surroundings and its ability to hint at her at times explores the archetype of the magical feline that has been discussed so far.

Unlikely to the Cheshire and the Puss is Mogget. Mogget is a small white furry cat who is seemingly cute. Unpredictably, the cat is a ruthless free spirit with magic powers. The

feline carries a collar that holds the magic. Mogget is the 'Eighth Bright Shiner' of the Old Kingdom Series; an immortal free spirit. It largely plays the role of wry and often passes comments on the present situation throughout the story. It makes its appearance in Sabriela's fantasy novel by Garth Nix, which first came out in 1995. In the work, we see Mogget finally being released as he removes his collar putting end to the enslavement, and finally achieves his old essence as Yrael, a humanly form. Mogget later had been in the service of the Abhorsens to provide moral advice. It is not to state that this magical feline is the sole reason for the book being established under a fantastic genre; rather it is to identify the archetype which is knowingly or unknowingly followed throughout history in these fantasies. An encounter with such powerful felines is seen often in such genres and has come out as a type of itself. Just like a hero is placed parallel to the Romantic genre, a magical feline is properly placed parallel to fantasy. As discussed by Propp, the relationship of the constant to variables is explicit through Mogget. Such creatures often appear as a companion to the protagonist or a major character enabling them to combat the hurdles. The functions of the actors remain constant and all others remain as variables. Just like we saw Cheshire, the guiding spirit of Alice and Puss who acts for the better fortune of the Miller, Mogget is determined to serve the Abhorsens. Similar images of these felines are repeated, and their further association and relationship with other characters and their functions are often repeated. This association creates a similar relationship which we found in the words of Frye and other archetypal critics who were in the idea of connecting images with their sequential genre.

The latest work of the twentieth century, a comic fantasy has also conveniently used this feline archetype. Saga, an epic space opera or rather a comic fantasy, first made its appearance in 2012 through an American company named Image Comics. Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples rightly used a cat to express the fantastic elements in the comic and named it 'The Lying Cat'. Suggestive to the name, the cat is a feline who's a companion to one of the protagonists Will and can detect lies spoken out. It can easily identify when a person is lying. The anti-realistic element in fantasy is well established. As it moved forth to the twenty-first century, the creators have rightly put logic in forming the character. The feline is unable to identify a lie that a person speaks not knowing it to be a lie or rather it can only detect deliberate deception. Also to fit the cat to the archetype, it's been portrayed as less likely to be a pet and more likely to be a business partner to the protagonist considering the century's demand.

Serpents as Cultural Archetypes of Resilience

During the sacred month of Shraavan, snakes are worshipped in India. Cobras and snakes both consume milk, thus killing a snake during that month is forbidden. The serpent spirits that live in the underworld are known as nagas. They originated from the earliest Indus valley culture, most likely from the ancient snake cults of India. The snake or serpent is a common

emblem of the soul or life force in songs, stories, and tales from both India and other countries.

Different cultures have different interpretations of snake symbolism and significance. However, in the majority of cases, it denotes change and rebirth. Snakes can signify both healing and the Devil or Satan, depending on the context. It may even represent the soul itself, Mother Earth, and feminine strength. The appearance of a snake in your life, whether through dreams, real-world experiences, or tattoos, should typically indicate that something significant, transforming, and healing is about to happen.

Serpent archetypes have always been a part of the collective unconscious, being the crude symbols of rebirth, prosperity, and procreation accelerating fear and reverence. In the Kerala context, serpent archetypes often stand for rebirth or regeneration, healing, and vital powers. The metaphor of Adishesha (the snake Ananta who is adorned with a blessing that even after the whole universe burns out, he lives) itself makes serpents the synonym of eternal strength and vitality. The crucial significance is attached to the serpents as the symbols of procreation and fertility.

Beyond being just the symbols of fertility and vitality, serpents are archetypes that demand flawless scrutiny. The branch of Cognitive aesthetics equips us to analyse a piece of art as a source of understanding. The ritualistic art forms like Sarppamthullal, and Pulluvanpattu have played a crucial role in the recognition of serpent worship as a way of life, the serpent culture. Serpent worship thus becomes a significant source of understanding or knowledge. The article deals with the substantial object of the serpent getting recognised as the archetype of resilience analysing the cultural texts directly or indirectly inclined to serpent worship. Beyond just regeneration and procreation, the existence of the serpent foregrounds the idea of resilience. To establish and substantiate the aforementioned objective, the study makes use of different cultural texts ranging from Sarppam Thullal or Sarppappattu to different art forms. Jung finds the serpent as the oldest symbol for eternal life and wisdom. It remained to be also the symbol of fertility and procreation all over the world. Though there are different symbolic undertones for the figure of the serpent, the attachment of the same to fertility is crucial.

The symbol of the serpent, originating in proto-religious times, has been absorbed into world religions and survived the conquest and changes in the religious structure of dominant belief systems. The resiliency of the serpent points to an archetype, an energy potential located deeply in the human unconscious, ready to raise its head when needs for expression arise (Jung 1959). In the course of the paper, the cultural texts would be analysed to establish the less identified existence of the serpent as the archetype of resilience.

The rise of Kundalini (the double serpents Ida and Pingala) from the base of the spine is reported, for example, by quite several Americans who are on a spiritual path. The cultural texts of art forms and ritual forms are analysed here to check how the serpent stays as a symbol and archetype of resilience foregrounding the lesson of incessant resilience showering wisdom upon one. In most parts of India, mainly in Kerala, whenever the risks of

skin diseases arise, people offer powdered turmeric to the Serpent God. Turmeric, according to Ayurveda helps in the repair of skin tissues. The serpent symbolises rejuvenation as “the aspects of healing and wholing are intimately connected with symbolic expressions of the serpent.” (Heinze 55)

The serpent also “represents the challenge we have to accept when we want to escape human inertia.” (Heinze 54) This itself is the idea of resilience put forth by the mere existence of the serpent which acquires the status of a divine being with the shedding of the skin or healing oneself and getting back to the pre-trauma stage in life.

In *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 9*, Jung is said to have propounded a question regarding the biological purpose of archetype and he reports that “just as physiology answers such a question for the body, so it is the business of psychology to answer it for the archetype.” (11). He cites the example of the child motif where he finds that the archetype is always an image belonging to the whole human race and not merely to the individual. While we analyse the serpent motif in this direction, as Jung says, it stands as represents the preconscious, childhood aspect of the collective psyche.

Conclusion

From the sixteenth to the twenty-first century, the genre of Fantasy has opened up a wide range of storytelling possibilities. With the continuing commercial culture, it has adapted or merged to pop culture as well. Fantasies have moved from books to media including games and films. But its adherence to the basic convention and its functions are property aligned which is evident from the four fantasies that have been taken up for the study. While going through the history of the genre, it is evident that certain archetypes occur repeatedly in literature of various cultures. Such repeating archetypes of mystic, magical and powerful felines, as well as serpents, have been traced throughout. The position of these animals in framing the genre and their functions within the text is notable. The similar pattern and function respective to the specific culture and time reveal the prominence of these feline and serpent archetypes in literature just like any other image or symbol that has been discussed under archetypal criticism. It is noteworthy that this archetype of cats is not limited to this particular image or respective genre, rather it opens up to other feline archetypes like the lazy, the homely, and similar types that matter while snakes become more of a cultural symbol. A snake in the grass could be a sign of deceit or wickedness. A snake with its tail in its mouth represents the fusion of the physical and spiritual selves. Also, it opens for more adequate studies toward anthropomorphism and related scholarships.

The article brings in how the animals in reality as revealed through scientific facts have found their place in literature through symbolic and cultural representations. It also reveals how science is entwined with literature and all the narrative representations have their bearings on scientific shreds of evidence.

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