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## Dogs and Horses as Heroes: Animal (Auto)Biographies in England, 1751-1800

In 1751, a new genre was introduced to English literature: Francis Coventry's *The History of Pompey, the Little – or the Life and Adventures of a Lap-Dog*, the first animal biography in England,<sup>1</sup> set the tone of the genre for many years to come.<sup>2</sup> With the dog as the main focalizer of the story, it was possible to criticize and satirize human behaviour in a realist rather than allegorical setting, as, for example, in the much older beast fable. By doing so, however, the genre also engages in the complex interplay between two different notions of *hero*: the hero as protagonist<sup>3</sup> and the hero as the representative of heroism.<sup>4</sup> Studying animal (auto)biography, I suggest, will help us gain insight into this relationship. In the case of Coventry's book, the link between the two is the satirical mode: Its very title, evoking the name Pompey the Great (i.e. the title of an English translation of Corneille's tragedy, published in 1664), suggests that the protagonist of the story is endowed with (mock-) heroic features. This places the book not only in the tradition of animals as mock heroes – beginning with the *Batrachomyomachia* as a parody of the heroism of the *Iliad* – but also serves to take a dig at the rise in the number of heroes in what Coventry calls a "life-writing age" (Coventry 8):<sup>5</sup>

But as the politicians of the age, and men of gravity may be apt to censure me for misspending my time in writing the adventures of a lapdog, when there are so many MODERN HEROES, whose illustrious actions call loudly for the pen of the historian; it will be not amiss to detain the reader, in the entrance of this work, with a short panegyric on the CANINE RACE, to justify my undertaking. (Coventry 2; emphasis in original)

The narrator in *Pompey the Little* plays on the ambiguity of *hero* as protagonist and as a being renowned for admirable actions and qualities when he opens his biographical tale with

A Panegyric upon dogs, together with some observations on modern novels and romances (Coventry 1)

in which he writes:

[N]o exception can reasonably be taken against the dignity of *my hero*, much less can I expect any will arise against the nature of this work, in this life-writing age especially, when no character is thought too inconsiderable to engage the public notice, or too abandoned to be set up as a pattern of imitation. The lowest and most contemptible vagrants, parish-girls, chamber-maids, pick-pockets, and highwaymen, find historians to record their praises, and readers to wonder at their exploits. [...] Even the prisons and stews are ransacked to find materials for novels and romances. [...] (Coventry 8; emphasis added)

It does not really come as a surprise that the narrator of the first animal biography begins with an explanation, if not justification, of his choice of hero.<sup>6</sup> It also fits the mocking tone set by the title that he regards the protagonist of his novel to be more worthy "as a pattern of imitation" than those of other works: He contrasts the lapdog Pompey the Little as an object – or rather subject – of the following biography with other heroes of pieces of life-writing, namely those who are not thought to be "too inconsiderable to engage the public notice," mostly from low(er class) and even criminal backgrounds, and thus criticizes the novels, in particular fictional (auto)biographies, of his time.<sup>7</sup> The narrator accordingly goes on to hope that

the very superiority of the character here treated of, above the heroes of common romances, will procure it a favourable reception. (Coventry 9)

But then, at the same time, he calls the dog "Pompey *the Little*," which can be regarded as a hint to the satirical stance of the novel and points to the distance he takes from his own chosen subject.<sup>8</sup>

Almost half a century later, in 1799, the first autobiography of a horse appeared, the anonymous *Memoirs of Dick, the Little Poney*. Again, the

title points to the notion of the hero: according to the ESTC, *Memoirs* as a title was first used for an English printed book in Walter Pope's *The Memoires of Monsieur Du Vall* (1670), i.e. the life story of Claude Duval, a famous gentleman highwayman of the time. Duval (or his mythical persona) belonged to that special class of hero, the heroic criminal, which in the 18<sup>th</sup> century had its most romanticized representative in Dick Turpin (see Sharpe); his famous horse, Black Bess, was later turned by William Harrison Ainsworth into "the heroine of the Fourth Book of [his] Romance", *Rockwood* (1834). *Memoirs of Dick* thus appears as a title carefully inscribed into the history of heroism; the change of perspective (and of what is heroic) from highwayman to horse in the two *Memoirs* is borne out by the story of Dick when the protagonist and his mother become the means of catching a robber by lying in the path of the highwayman's horse in chapter 2 (Anon. 8-9; and see below).

In comparison to Coventry's animal biography, *Memoirs of Dick* features an autodiegetic instead of a heterodiegetic narrator, a difference that contributes to the overall tone and the make-up of the animal hero<sup>9</sup>: while the focus still is on uncovering, from the unprejudiced perspective of the animal, the ridiculous, strange or even comic human behaviour as in the earlier text, the interest shifts more and more to the suffering animal whose fate and well-being depends on human behaviour and human-animal interaction. The satirical mode is thus maintained, but the animal's suffering at human hands is made much more explicit than in the earlier novel. The difference not only correlates with the fact that the experience of the protagonist becomes more explicit and direct as it is narrated by himself.<sup>10</sup> It is also to be seen in the kind of animal hero, as the change from pet (lapdog) to working animal (pony/horse) results in a change of the scope and the focus of the experience narrated.<sup>11</sup>

### The lapdog as animal hero: "A great variety of adventures"

If, however mockingly, the heroism of the lapdog protagonist is at first proclaimed by the narrator of *Pompey the Little*, it becomes clear in the course of Coventry's narrative that the "superiority of [...] character" in the hero Pompey is hardly ever visible and that he might not even be a protagonist in the sense of being the most important character throughout the book. The life that he leads is one of constantly changing hands, beginning with his birth in Bologna and subsequent travel to London. At the end of chapter four in the

first book of the narrative, for instance, he is given to Lady Tempest, a "lady of quality" (Coventry 27), who loses him during an outing at the Mall because she forgets all about him while talking to another lady of quality (66-67). Pompey is found by a little girl and taken home by her (69-71). The story comes full circle only when his earlier owner recovers him in the penultimate chapter of the novel: while taking a walk at the Mall after another return to London, he is seen by Lady Tempest with his new owner and taken away by her (274-278). The impending lawsuit for theft is abandoned only because of Pompey's death at the age of fourteen (285-287).

Whenever Pompey is not a mere device of linking satirical episodes, his story also, to a certain degree, resembles that of a picaresque hero (see Ellis 104). In the light of the claim that the anti-heroic figure of the picaresque reflects the inhumanity of the society with which he has to cope,<sup>12</sup> it seems plausible to present the picaresque hero as a non-human individual: the very fact that Coventry has a lapdog as hero of his picaresque novel points towards the parody of the genre that goes along with the satire of human behaviour.

In the conclusion it then becomes evident that the narrator himself does not regard Pompey as a superior character, except, perhaps, in one respect:

Let it be remembered in the first place, to his credit, that he was a dog of the most courtly manners, ready to fetch and carry, at the command of his masters, without ever considering the service he was employed in, or the person from whom he received his directions [...]. Far be it from us to deny, that in the first place of his life he gave himself an unlimited freedom in his amours, and was extravagantly licentious, not to say debauched, in his morals; but whoever considers that he was born in the house of an Italian courtesan, that he made the grand tour with a young gentleman of fortune, and afterwards lived near two years with a lady of quality, will have *more reason to wonder that his morals were not entirely corrupted* [...]. As to religion, we must ingeniously [sic] confess that he had none; in which respect he had the honour to bear an exact resemblance to all the well-bred people of the present age [...]. (Coventry 288-90; emphasis added)

Whatever moral corruption Pompey shows is rooted in his position in society, i.e. the people he lives with: he merely imitates his owners' behaviour, and it is surprising that the resulting corruption of his character is not worse.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, however, Pompey also falls victim to the whims of his owners, be it that he is forgotten in the park (Coventry 66-67); tormented

by children who regard him as a mere plaything (81-82),<sup>14</sup> or being thrown out of the house for waking up his mistress during a pleasant dream of her admirer (195-196). And yet Pompey's status remains ambiguous: he never fully turns into an underdog hero that is meant to become the object of the reader's sympathy. Although he is the member of a prototypically clever species<sup>15</sup> (in ch. 1, "A Panegyric upon Dogs", the narrator speaks of the dog's "Brother-Logicians" at "our two famous Universities"; 3), Pompey lacks any superior understanding: he mostly follows his instincts, "ready to fetch and carry", without being capable of much reflection. At one point, however, he is being lost in the streets by an inattentive maid and found by a watchman (116-117). It is in this instance that Pompey is given a voice of his own by the narrator:

[...] the watchman [...] next bethought himself of poor Pompey [...]. Him he presented that day to a blind beggar of his acquaintance, who had lately lost his dog, and wanted a new guide to conduct him about the streets. Here our hero fell into the most desponding meditations. 'And was this misery,' thought he, 'reserved in store to complete [sic] the series of my misfortunes? Am I destined to lead about the dark footsteps of a blind, decrepit, unworthy beggar? Must I go daggling thro' the streets, with a rope about my neck, linking me to a wretch that is the scorn of human nature? O that a rope were fixed about my neck indeed for a nobler purpose, and that I were here to end a dreadful, tormenting existence! [...] I, who have conversed with lords and ladies; who have slept in the arms of the fairest beauties, and lived on the choicest dainties that London could afford. Cruel, cruel Fortune! when will thy Persecutions end?' (Coventry 123-124)

The chapter is titled "Our hero falls into great misfortunes", and Pompey appears to be very much aware of this: the hero-protagonist seems to turn into a *heroic* hero by being singled out for misfortunes. Yet this conceptual shift is immediately undercut: his "meditations" express not only self-pity but also a rather unpleasant sense of superiority. He regrets not so much having lost his former owners but rather having to live in such low society from now on. He ends his soliloquy on the apostrophe "Cruel, cruel Fortune!" One finds the same exclamation in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749): in the embedded history of Mrs Miller (Fielding 25-30), Tom learns of her misfortunes, and when she laments the death of her husband, she cries out "Cruel, cruel Fortune!" as she was left with two little girls and no income. Coventry thus appears to create a link

with other examples of "life-writing" in which the hero bewails his or her undeserved misfortune – and to make fun of this, especially so as Pompey's fortune in this case turns out to be much more favourable than anticipated. Although he at first assumes the worst, based on his prejudice against the "blind, decrepit, unworthy beggar," things turn out to be quite good, as the beggar earns some money to take care of Pompey and feed him well; eventually he even takes Pompey to Bath and reintroduces him to genteel company. Within the satirical context of the biography, the concepts of the hero as protagonist and the hero as outstanding character merge in a mock-heroic fashion, and the social roles that are to separate human beings from each other and humans from animals become less and less distinct. Pompey's adventures hence serve not only to present the world from the perspective of a lapdog but also, and perhaps even first and foremost, to question the ways in which social identities, and self-estimations, are established.

### The horse as animal hero: "to soften one obdurate heart among the lords of creation"

Pompey has been described as an "essentially *passive* hero" (Hammond and Regan 144), and, indeed, he hardly ever sets action in motion on his own. A similar basic structure can be attributed to *Dick, the Little Poney*: the protagonist of this story is barely able to determine his fate with regard to his owners; for example, he lets himself be lured away by gypsies when he is still very young: "I suffered myself [...] to be haltered and led away" (Anon. 14). Later in the novel, however, he does take his destiny into his own hands (or, rather, hooves), when he is able to get rid of a rather unpleasant female owner by leaving her on a dunghill (120-121). But the pony's occasional ability to influence his own life is not the only difference between Dick and Pompey.

Dick not only writes the story of his life himself but even provides the reader with a preface:

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 (Anon. v)

The focus of this preface is on the instruction and amusement of the readers: the narrative of the pony's "checquered life" aims at "improvement", its content being the observation of "human manners" as well as the sundry experiences of the pony with human beings.<sup>16</sup> It hence makes explicit a critical stance towards the "lords of creation" whose hearts need softening. Dick as narrator throughout the story foregrounds his suffering ("my strictures") at the hands of those who do not know how to treat animals properly. As becomes clear in the course of his narrative, he regards himself, at least sometimes, as superior to these human beings that, accordingly, are satirized; at the same time, he is also capable of evaluating his own actions, which exemplifies his superiority and the satirical reversal of roles even more.<sup>17</sup>

The first instance of Dick merging his own strictures and adventures with satire is a piece of unwitting heroism when still a foal: while he is lying on a meadow with his mother, he hears a carriage stop in the road and people shouting. Dick comments that

Till this moment I had no idea that man was an enemy to man. From what I had seen, I began to learn that he claimed superiority over the rest of the creation; but I could not suppose that the strong of the human race tyrannized over the weak [...]. After a short period of terror and confusion on the road, a man mounted on one of my species, rode furiously towards the place where we lay, and, as it was extremely dark, tumbled over us before we could get out of his way [...]. (Anon. 7-8)

By inadvertently lying in the way, he and his mother are able to stop the robber, who is taken into custody by two of the men on the robbed carriage. These men subsequently praise Dick and his mother as "the means of stopping a plunderer, and recovering what was lost" (9). The incident leads to Dick's reflections on the assumed superiority of man over beast but also on hierarchies among human beings: he "learn[s]", in a quasi-Hobbesian allusion, that "man was an enemy to man", an idea new and strange to him. The event is crucial to Dick's character development as he – in a very child-like manner – learns about the nature of evil. He goes on to reflect on the experience:

The spoil which 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 [...]; 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 [i.e. coins]. (Anon. 10)

By taking a naïve (as unknowing) view from a distance, Dick is able to comment on human folly, thus turning his account of the incident into satire. He describes money for what it is to him: coins do not serve for food and raiment, and yet they are of such importance that they lead to fights and crime. He clearly cannot see the function of money, and his perception is restricted to the material aspect of the coin. In what follows, he takes the satire even one step further:

Men are, no doubt, wiser than horses: a poney must not attempt to account for what they do; yet must I 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. (Anon. 10-11)

This 'naïve' limitation of knowledge on the part of the horse leads to his insight into the fact that money is much overvalued when it comes to the necessities of life. Dick here chooses the rhetorical figure of *praeteritio* and combines it with pretended humility (as a form of *dissimulatio*): he should not account for the behaviour of human beings as he lacks their wisdom – but he is going to do it anyway, thus proving his own superior wisdom. And by taking a particularly modest stance ("Men are [...] wiser than horses"), Dick makes the unbiased truth of his statement appear even more clearly as he foregrounds the lack of wisdom in man who pursues the gain of money and risks his life for it.<sup>18</sup>

This moral superiority of the narrating pony is prevalent in a large portion of his story and results even in the reflection on his own heroism (which is another example of a *praeteritio*, though, in this case, an unwitting one):

Had vanity been a leading feature in my disposition, I should, like other heroes who are the trumpeters of their own fame, have thrown a veil over the degrading connexion [with the gypsies who stole him], this humble introduction into life. – But I plume myself on this very part of my history, which the unthinking may impute to me as a disgrace. (Anon. 32-33)

Dick here reflects on himself as the narrator of his own life and as its heroic protagonist, and again, as in the narrative of *Pompey the Little*, the two concepts of the hero as protagonist and

the hero as outstanding character merge: In the autodiegetic narrative, of which Pompey is the hero-protagonist, he can only become the heroic hero at the price of unheroic self-praise. As a narrator he does not wish to appear vain by leaving out experiences that might show him in a socially inferior light. But the phrase “I plume myself” (revealing his regard for equestrian finery) reminds us of his own alleged superiority and vanity. Quite fittingly, the disclaimer thus serves as an introduction to contemplate his own achievements:

When I reflect on the eminence to which I have since risen, and what honourable masters I have carried, the original meanness of my condition only serves to give a lustre to my good qualities. It is evident, if I rose, it was by merit alone: if I was esteemed, it was because I was useful. The general tenor of my conduct has raised me to what I now am, and I wish my readers to aim at similar rewards by similar means. They need not then blush at the retrospect, however humble their birth. (Anon. 33)

Dick’s self-reflection focuses on his eminence and merit, rooted in his usefulness. The tone is overtly didactic here, and he goes so far as to regard himself as an example to be imitated by his (human) readers. The implied criticism in this statement is social: a humble birth does not necessarily mean that social eminence is impossible, and his good qualities are later described when he refers to his living with sick children, who both die in the course of the narrative (see 96-97; 168) and whom he mourns for, which shows that he is also a feeling animal.<sup>19</sup>

His “good qualities” are, however, even more foregrounded when it comes to Dick’s own physical suffering and endurance. It is here that the animal hero becomes a spokesperson for animal protection:

I began to suspect that new calamities awaited me. I saw other animals of my species, though much larger and stronger, curbed with something in the mouth, bearing a saddle on their back, and treading on iron, to all which I was an utter stranger, and wished to continue so. (Anon. 40)

A little later, Dick himself has to undergo the treatment he observes in others of his kind, and he describes the torment this means to him.<sup>20</sup> His point is to expose the thoughtlessness of human beings in their treatment of animals as they meddle with nature and have no idea of what this means to them:

Some are ignorant enough to imagine that a horse has no sensibility, and he is too frequently treated as if this were really the case. (Anon. 77)<sup>21</sup>

The mode of satire, i.e. human behaviour being upheld to critical scrutiny, is here complemented with an emphasis on the horrors of animal treatment as experienced and observed by the narrator. The story of *Dick, the Little Poney* can hence be read in the context of the movement that would result in the foundation of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1824.<sup>22</sup>

But Dick’s heroism even extends beyond his speaking out for animal protection: he repeatedly expresses his desire to set an example to the reader by his good conduct; moreover, he also shows a degree of self-reflection (as opposed to self-pity in Pompey) that is meant to be exemplary. When, for example, he is ill-treated by one of his young masters, he throws him and runs away:

I eluded every stratagem to catch me; and animated by resentment, felt my consequence in the scale of being, and proudly triumphed in my liberty. Vain, silly creature that I was! I was yet ignorant of the superiority of man, and the necessity of implicit submission to his will. The provocation I had received might have justified revenge, but it was certainly very impolitic to exercise it. It is wisdom in an inferior not to feel the injury which it cannot redress with effect. The dictates of passion are always wrong [...]. (Anon. 48)

As much as the reader may sympathize with and understand his throwing the rider, this incident is telling in several regards. For one, the distance the narrating I here takes towards the experiencing I shows the didacticism of this passage: in hindsight, Dick is able to reflect on his wrongs – his resentment and his pride. The self-reflection, however, also contains criticism of human behaviour: he only threw the boy because the latter was subject to the “dictates of passion” as well,

he was conceited and ignorant, and evinced his power only by its abuse [...] [his] distress and *passion*. (Anon. 46; emphasis added)<sup>23</sup>

It is the treatment of animals that immediately affects their behaviour; and the animal is only in a very limited manner able to “redress” ill-treatment.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the allusion to the shared trait of uncontrolled passion may even be supposed to suggest that, if a pony is capable of this degree of self-reflection, even more so should this be the case with human beings: as they are ‘superior’, they should behave in a manner

that does not provoke their inferiors to “impolitic” actions. Not only is the horse here capable of understanding the psychology of human (and animal) behaviour, he even regards himself as a model to be imitated and thus reverses social roles in human–animal relationships. He holds his own learning process up as an example, teaching strategic restraint to socially inferior (but morally and intellectually superior) beings of all kinds when confronted with the exertion of superior power.

Accordingly, while human beings in the narrative often fail to change their behaviour (as they lack the ability to reflect on it), Dick proves the contrary. When one of the children he stays with dies, he becomes idle: not only is he left in a pasture where he eats excessively, but also does he forget the girl he formerly loved so much:

I grew wild and untractable for want of exercise, and acquired such a load of flesh that I was quite a burden to myself. I seemed wholly to forget that I had a part in existence to perform [...]. (Anon. 102-103)

He is consequently treated by a vet and thinks he will be killed in the course of the treatment but eventually learns that he is being cured of his fatness. He concludes the experience with the recognition:

Had I been more temperate I might have escaped this penance; but I learned wisdom from past sufferings. (Anon. 107)

Similarly, when he is made much of by a young squire and his parents, he thinks that “some of the human race were only born to be servants of horses” (72). This inversion of social (or human–animal) roles is soon replaced by a quietist message of wise submission; but this very message establishes the (animal) speaker as a superior being.

The moral superiority and vanity of Dick may be irritating to modern readers at times, as may his overt didacticism. The narrative, however, in its own period of origin, aimed at “softening” the hearts of readers towards animals: Dick is all the more ‘human’ for his vanity and therefore more credible as we become aware of his weaknesses as well as his strengths. In the conclusion of his biography, Dick lives contentedly with a family who keep him in his old age:

Happy are those who are born to servitude, that have the good fortune to fall into such hands; happy was it for me that my humble endeavours to please and to be useful, met with such a bountiful recompense. (Anon. 176-177)

Animal (and human) happiness depends very much on the responsiveness of those with whom they are bound to live, and those with a superior position in society should not abuse it but make good use of it, as much as those who are inferior (“born to servitude”) should make themselves useful and pleasing.<sup>25</sup> At the end of the day, animals may even be favoured by nature:

Life, I find, is chequered 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 are less susceptible of wrong. [...] Contentment is true wisdom, because it conduces to felicity; and gratitude for good received, is an evidence that it has in some measure been deserved. (Anon. 178-179)

Given this outlook, the life-story of Dick proves to be rather conventional – and even conservative, considering the statements that refer to servitude and hierarchies within society – in its moral implications. What is, however, remarkable is the inclusion of animals in the conventional moral wisdom, and the ambiguity of the hero concept: the hero as protagonist is still a tool in the hands of the author, who uses it to make his satirical and moralistic point. At the same time, however, and perhaps as unwittingly as Dick and his mother become heroes in catching the highwayman, the animal hero becomes an object of sentiment through its capacity of moral self-elevation.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion: Animal heroes and human antiheroes

If we regard the conclusion that Dick provides to his narrative, it would seem that the equine hero takes a stance of superiority towards human beings:<sup>27</sup> the hearts of horses “are less susceptible of wrong”, which brings us full circle to his satirical remarks on money at the beginning of his life-story. His experience of ill-treatment and the follies of “the lords of creation” are exposed to his readers immediately, through his own voice. The mode of “satire on a range of human affectations” (Hammond and Regan 141) as we find it in *Pompey, the Little*,<sup>28</sup> is supplemented with a voice admonishing human beings for animal ill-treatment, and instead of the mock-heroic tone of *Pompey*, Dick’s autobiography is much more overtly didactic, as he regards himself as a role model. While *Pompey*, who is only given a voice very rarely in the narrative, remains distant, there is a lot more room for what Blackwell calls “sympathetic identification” (Blackwell xvii)

in the autodiegetic narrative of Dick. The animal hero accordingly gains in complexity based on the animal at the centre of the biography: with Pompey and Dick, we move from the observant lapdog who allows us to look behind the closed doors of society and who is corrupted in the course of his adventures, to the self-reflective horse who gains wisdom:

The master ought to be more intelligent than the servant; and if the former abuses his knowledge and his power, in the revolution of events he will certainly be called to an account. (Anon. 17)

Well-meaning human beings who treat animals with respect will bring out the good in animals: while Pompey merely imitates his owners, Dick's behaviour is dependent on how he is treated.

As we move from life-writing as biography and satire to an autobiography foregrounding the awareness of suffering, the function of the animal hero changes from being a mere focalizer and satirical device (i.e. the hero as protagonist) to a proponent of animal protection (i.e. the hero as an outstanding and superior character). We thus also move from distance to sympathy, and from the focus on human beings to their behaviour towards animals and human-animal interaction. The latter, however, affects inter-human relationships as well, as the Epilogue to the narrative of Dick proposes:

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. (Anon. 182)

Animal (auto)biography from the eighteenth century has recently become a research focus in the humanities, especially within Animal or Human-animal studies.<sup>29</sup> What animal (auto)biographies remind us of is the fact that it sometimes does not take much to be a hero: the kind of experience undergone may be sufficient to turn even an animal into one.

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<sup>1</sup> The story of *Pompey the Little* had gone through ten editions by 1800 (see Lupton 148); it is here quoted from the fifth edition (1773).

<sup>2</sup> The genre of the animal (auto)biography is often subsumed under the term "it-narratives." Mark Blackwell, for example, writes about *Pompey the Little*: "the peculiar eighteenth-century genre that has come to be known as the it-narrative, and it is the first life of an animal that belongs to this genre" (Blackwell ix). However, it-narratives usually focus on inanimate objects, and one should not disregard the difference between animals and objects, especially concerning animal sentience. A number of researchers in the field have therefore introduced alternative terms to describe the genre: Freya Johnston refers to "little lives", Hammond and Regan to "spy novels" (138), which comprises texts with objects and animals at the centre that come close to human beings so as to 'spy' and comment on them and their behaviour. Another term widely used for reference of this group of texts is that of the "circulation novel" (see also Hammond and Regan 138); and Keenleyside, "The First-Person Form of Life."

<sup>3</sup> See *OED*, "hero, n." 4.: "central character or protagonist [...]; esp. one whom the reader or audience is intended to support or admire."

<sup>4</sup> According to the *OED*, the hero's features range from the superhuman ("hero, n." 1.) via "courageous or noble actions" (2.) to "great qualities or achievements" (3.). See also Bröckling on the supposed exemplarity ("Exemplarität") or model-character ("Vorbilder") of the hero (Bröckling 9).

<sup>5</sup> Coventry's mock-heroic tone in the tradition of Fielding has been commented on, for example, by Hammond and Regan (138-140). See also Lupton (290) and Johnston (148-149). The novel is dedicated to Henry Fielding, a master in the genre of fictional biography (e.g. *Joseph Andrews* in 1742 and *Tom Jones* in 1749).

<sup>6</sup> On dogs in literary texts, albeit with a focus on German examples, see Floetemeyer.

<sup>7</sup> In an eighteenth-century context one immediately thinks of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) as well as Fielding's *The Life and Death of Jonathan Wild, the Great* (1743). Hammond and Regan list further allusions and intertextual links made by Coventry in this passage and note that the "novel about a chamber-maid, for instance, is *Pamela* itself" (140).

<sup>8</sup> See also Johnston who notes that Pompey "is and is not important to his own narrative" (158). She reads the title as a "play on absent greatness" that is "an indication of Fielding's (as well as Shakespeare's) influence" (Johnston 159), mainly to "*Measure for Measure*, [where] Escalus tells Pompey that 'in the beastliest sense, you are Pompey the Great' (Coventry 209-210)" and to *Love's Labour's Lost* where "Costard makes a gaffe dependent on a double reading of Pompey's stature (Coventry 544-55)" (Johnston 158).

<sup>9</sup> For the development of the genres of animal biography and autobiography from 1751 to 1800, see Blackwell, esp. xii-xx. Earlier animal autobiographies include, for example, *The Adventures of a Cat* (1760) and Dorothy Kilner's *Perambulations of a Mouse* (1784). The tone of these narratives is, however, different as they address mostly human and animal weaknesses that are set alongside each other with a didactic effect. Dick's *Memoirs* are different in that the horse is a working animal, not a pet or small animal co-inhabiting a house with human beings. The emphasis in the latter is hence on didacticism of a different kind.

<sup>10</sup> The author seems to take it for granted that the horse can write. In Anna Sewell's later and much more popular equine autobiography *Black Beauty* (1877), the subtitle indicates that the narrative is "Translated from the Original Equine by Anna Sewell," thus assuming a human translator of horse language.

<sup>11</sup> This may also be related to the second definition given of "hero" in the *OED*: someone "distinguished by the performance of courageous or noble actions" (*OED*, "hero, n." 2.), "generally admired or acclaimed for great qualities or

achievements in any field" (*OED*, "hero, n." 3.a.). Meaning 2. mostly refers to "a brave or illustrious warrior, soldier," a notion that does not apply to the animal heroes presented in the following. Still, especially Dick the Pony repeatedly distinguishes himself through his courage and empathy. For a more specific definition see e.g. Bröckling.

**12** Although Pompey is not an autodiegetic narrator, he fulfils most of the defining requirements of a picaresque, such as being a "half-outsider" (Guillen 81), living the life of a lower-class figure, not really developing or progressing; moreover, the narrative is episodic and satirical (cf. Harmon 382). Or, as Bjornson defines the hero as picaresque: "Essentially this story involves a rootless, unattached individual who must secure his own survival and psychological well-being in a society which openly espouses traditional ideals, while actually sanctioning the most dehumanizing modes of behaviour. [...] In its broadest sense, the picaresque myth functions as one possible paradigm for the individual's unavoidable encounter with external reality and the act of cognition which precedes and shapes his attempts to cope with a dehumanizing society" (6; 11).

**13** This trait of a character remaining untainted despite an ongoing moral corruption around him may be read as an allusion to Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742); see also below.

**14** In this context the narrator comments: "for wretched are all those animals that become the favourites of children" (81).

**15** On the general background of this perception of dogs, see Höltgen.

**16** The reference of the "horse of knowledge" at the opening of the preface is to Marocco, also called the 'thinking horse', that lived in London from ca. 1586 to 1606. Marocco was able to do all sorts of things, e.g. walk on two legs and count (see *Brewer's Dictionary* 102). The "horse of knowledge" was imitated in eighteenth century popular culture, e.g. at Astley's Amphitheatre (see Benedict 206).

**17** The link to Jonathan Swift's Houyhnhnms in book 4 of *Gulliver's Travels* (first published in 1726) is an obvious one. The focus here, however, is on satire as a means to advance animal protection, a pattern taken up again (and not invented as claimed, for instance, by Copeland) by Anna Sewell in her equine autobiography *Black Beauty* (1877).

**18** Later on, in chapter 16, he comes back to the topic of money and to the danger for himself resulting from it: "It appeared that my young master, proud of my fleetness and of his own horsemanship, had betted a certain sum with three of his juvenile companions, that he would ride me a certain distance against any ponies they could produce. It seems this is a fashionable amusement among persons who have a *full purse* and an *empty head*; but if I mistake not, the *heart* must also be wrong, to strain poor dumb animals to the utmost, merely to profit by their pains, or to boast of reaching a certain spot a few minutes before their competitors in the race can come up" (151-152).

**19** "Tears coursed one another down my face. Stare not reader, for a horse has tears; and his feelings for the moment are as acute as yours" (98).

**20** "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" (44). See also his comment at the age of seven: "I had already gone, as the reader will perceive, through many vicissitudes of fortune, and at times had cause to complain of her unkindness; but on the whole I must confess I had as much to be thankful for as other animals, many of which come into the world only to be reared, and then eaten by men" (144-145).

**21** Smith speaks of the "thoughtlessness of human beings towards nonhuman animals" (413); see also Copeland 179.

**22** It became the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1840; see Perkins 19. – There is a close link between animal protection and the abolitionist movement; Samuel Wilberforce, for instance, was part of both. On this link, see Ellis; and Zirker (in prep.).

**23** One might establish a direct link here between the narrative of Dick and the *History of Quadrupeds* (1790) by Thomas Bewick, who, in the introductory chapter on "Horses," writes: "But it must continue to be a matter of regret to the feeling mind, that these excellent qualities should be often shamefully abused in the most unnecessary exertions; and the honest labours of this noble animal thrown away in the ungrateful task of accomplishing the purposes of unfeeling folly, or lavished in gratifying the expectations of an intemperate moment" (3).

**24** This is especially so as they are not able to express themselves; as Dick comments: "Nature had denied me the power of pleading my own cause" (78).

**25** This idea is topical and can be found as early as in Aristotle's *Politics*, Book 3 (e.g., 1277b and 1283a).

**26** For satire and sympathy as "stress points" in 18<sup>th</sup> century literature, see Rawson.

**27** Equine superiority over human beings may be read as an allusion to Book 4 of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).

**28** See also Ellis, who comments that "the trope of the lap-dog was increasingly deployed in attacks on the corrupting influence of luxury and fashion" (101).

**29** See, e.g., Webportal für die Human-Animal Studies im Deutschsprachigen Raum. Chimaira Arbeitskreis für Human-Animal Studies e. V. <http://www.human-animal-studies.de/was-sind-human-animal-studies/>; as well as IF-CEAS, <https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/ifceas/startseite/>.

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