

Panel 19
Illustrations, Text, and Cultural Engagement

**Non-Anthropocentric Anthropomorphism:
A Multimodal Analysis of Animal Characters in Children's Picturebooks**

Qian Rui
Nanyang Technological University

This paper leverages on picture theory and posthuman ethics to advance a multimodal analysis of anthropomorphic animals in children's picturebooks. Recently pedagogists and education psychologists take issue with the use of human-like animal characters for encouraging anthropocentrism in children. Nevertheless, these empirical studies predominantly prioritize the pedagogical implications of the deployment of anthropomorphism over its aesthetic and critical value. This paper rectifies this bias by foregrounding the role of visual representation of animals and its potential for eliciting children's non-anthropocentric awareness. Building on W. J. T. Mitchell's concept of "imagetext," I highlight the artistic representation of animals as visual texts in *Dear Zoo* (1982), *Frog and the Stranger* (1993), and *Pip and Posy: The Snowy Day* (2012). I adopt a multimodal analytical tool and further develop it by drawing on Lawrence R. Sipe's "synergy," Perry Nodelman's idea of mutual gap-filling in verbal and visual narratives, and Nikolajeva and Scott's "complementary" word-picture relation in their typology. By centering on the interplay of visual and verbal elements, we explore how the combined effect of words and images contributes to non-human-centred meaning-making of animal characters in children. This is where I turn to animals ethics, informed by Jacques Derrida's groundbreaking work, Donna Haraway's notion of "companion species," and Deleuze and Guattari's idea of "becoming-animal." I argue that anthropomorphic animals facilitate children's awareness of species equality and interdependence, which can be analogized to broader social issues. Teaching this pedagogically requires enhanced training in instructors and mediators' own visual literacy and semiotic skills, which underscores the imperative for a more comprehensive inclusion of literary criticism within scholarship on children's picturebooks.

Biography

Angel Qian Rui is a third-year PhD student in English literature at the School of Humanities, Nanyang Technological University. She obtained her master's degree from the University of Edinburgh. Her research interests include literature and philosophy, Victorian literature, and children's literature. She has published research articles in the *Journal of Victorian Culture*, *Women's Studies*, and *English Studies*.