With or Without the “Divine Spark”:

Animalised Humans and the Human-Animal Divide

in Charles Dickens’s Novels

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Abstract

Animals appear in many guises in Charles Dickens’s novels, as wild animals, domestic animals, animals used in the service of humans, and, not least, as images and symbols. Based on a close reading of all of Dickens’s major novels, this thesis centres on the symbolic use of (both metaphorical and actual) animals in the depiction of human characters, the chief aim being to explore a phenomenon that Dickens frequently resorts to, namely, the animalisation of human characters. Certain Dickensian characters are in fact more or less consistently compared to animals – to animals in general, or to specific animals. On occasion, not only individual characters but also groups of characters are animalised, and sometimes to the point of dehumanisation. By and large, being animalised equals being portrayed in a negative light, as if what Dickens himself at one point termed “the divine spark” – the special light accorded to the human brain as opposed to the animal brain – has been extinguished or has at least become almost imperceptible.

Furthermore, in conjunction with the investigation of Dickens’s animalisation of human characters, the thesis discusses his implicit attitude to the human-animal divide and argues that, though largely anthropocentric and hierarchical, it also points to a view of human and nonhuman animals as part of a continuum, with no fixed boundaries. A number of different approaches inform the discussion, but theoretical frameworks such as ecocriticism and, above all, contemporary theory on the significance of Darwin’s ideas in the Victorian era, are foregrounded.

Keywords: animalisation, continuum, Darwin, Dickens, ecocriticism, hierarchy, human-animal divide
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1 Introduction

It may not be obvious at first, but on close inspection it emerges that most of Charles Dickens’s novels teem with animals, animals that appear in different capacities. There are real, literal animals – sometimes in the shape of pets, such as dogs, canaries, or cats, or in the shape of animals that are used in the service of humans, for example horses, oxen, and sheep, and sometimes simply in the shape of creatures that are part of the environment, and then mainly different kinds of wild birds, like sparrows, rooks, and jackdaws, and insects. Chirping birds and barking dogs are relatively frequent ingredients in Dickens’s novels; they often constitute a backdrop or create an atmosphere (sometimes urban, sometimes rural or even pastoral), “evoking certain emotions, and defining a way of life” (Ettin 56). There is also a plethora of animals that figure in metaphors and similes with the object of describing various objects (such as machines), or phenomena (such as mist and fire), or – above all – human characters, in a distinctive, often colourful and vivid way. It is animals used in the last, metaphorical, capacity that will be the chief focus of the present thesis, which will not exclude references to actual animals whenever they take on a symbolic significance.

The process whereby a writer resorts to animal imagery in order to portray human characters could be seen as a kind of animalisation, closing or reducing the ontological gap between humans and nonhumans, and Dickens fairly often animalises his characters. Sometimes he does so through explicit comparisons between animals and human characters, and sometimes through the use of a kind of “mirroring”, which is when an animal by its very presence conveys additional facets to the characterisation of certain humans. Thus, when a character and a literal animal are juxtaposed in the same scene(s), the behaviour of the animal often reflects the personality of the human character, or vice versa, a phenomenon that is sometimes referred to as metonymy. I have, consequently, used the concept of animalisation in a wide sense in this thesis. Moreover, though the word *animalisation* is often charged with
negative connotations, and interpreted as having a meaning similar to that of *dehumanisation*, or even *brutalisation*, it is important to point out that this is often but far from invariably the case in the findings of this thesis. Hence, even women who are compared to sweet, innocent birds are considered to be animalised, simply because they are depicted as having certain animal traits. A possible alternative would have been to use the word *zoomorphism*, which means “the attribution of animal-like [physical and mental] traits to humans” (Schmitt 41), but to my mind that word has a more neutral ring to it than animalisation and hence risks obscuring certain layers of meaning, such as the insensitivity, or the vulnerability, of many animalised Dickensian characters, that I hope to bring out in the following exposition.

The animalisation of human characters is a common phenomenon in literature. My original reasons for focusing on Dickens rather than on another writer were pragmatic. Immersed in one of his novels at the time of choosing a topic for my master’s thesis, I discovered that there was often a certain edge to those of his characters that were either explicitly compared to, or accompanied by, animals and that the many of his portrayals both of bad and of particularly vulnerable characters seemed to be coloured by references to animals. Furthermore, the realisation that Dickens lived in an era when there was a great deal of discussion regarding evolution, and, hence, the human-animal divide, made me aware of the potential of studying his novels from such a perspective.

Specific animal species are often referred to when a human character is animalised in Dickens’s novels, and those animals range from flies to tigers. But the concept of animality in a general sense, that is, not in relation to any specific animal species, is also present in Dickens’s characterisation of certain protagonists, or certain groups of people – sometimes explicitly so, and sometimes more implicitly, through analogy, and expressed by means of verbs that make the character(s) in question out to be more animal (read: bestial) than human. Although Dickens’s animalisations occasionally concern a character’s looks, they are usually
related to behaviour and personality. A question that will be touched on in the thesis is whether the fact that a human character is animalised contributes to the representation of that character’s personality as stable and unchanging. Furthermore, animalised Dickensian characters – individuals as well as groups of people – are often portrayed as insensitive, with a tendency to treat other characters badly. In contrast, “the very notion of animality has” often, according to ecocritics Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, “condemned human ‘others’ to ill treatment” (194), but although there are definitely instances of animalised characters being degraded or exposed to ill treatment by others in Dickens’s novels as well, they are few and far between.

Most of the animals, whether literal or metaphorical, that people Dickens’s novels are not “actors . . . [but] bearers of symbolic projection” (Latour 10). The effect of this is that often “the animal as animal becomes invisible”, as stated by Huggan and Tiffin, when they write about “the ways in which our classic narratives have dealt with animal subjects, . . . reading them as more-or-less transparent allegories of ourselves” (173). Such literary use of animals as “allegorical figures” is further emphasised by Mary Allen (3), who adds that “[b]eyond their figurative uses, animals have been man’s servants, his companions, the objects of his hunts, and the food on his table” (3) and that “sometimes they have [also] been allowed to play their own parts” (3).

Although the figurative use of animals is very much to the fore in Dickens’s novels, animals do sometimes “play their own parts” in them, at least to some extent (the description of these more individualised animals being often tinged with anthropomorphism,¹ however), and in a number of instances it is difficult to draw the line between the symbolic role of an animal and its existence in its own right, as a nonhuman character who is not merely meant to

¹. Animals are fairly often humanised in Dickens’s novels, an aspect that has not, however, fallen within the scope of this thesis.
illustrate something other than itself. After all, even individualised animals (for example, the
dog Bull’s-eye in *Oliver Twist*, who has been called “the most complicated animal to appear
in any of Dickens’s novels” [Moore 201-2]) are always in some way connected to, and
presented as an appendage of, a human character. In other words, despite certain exceptions,
the anthropocentric perspective is predominant.

The aforementioned connection between human and nonhuman animals\(^2\) is noticeable in
several ways in Dickens’s novels. According to John Berger, “[t]he 19th century, in western
Europe and North America, saw the beginning of a process . . . by which every tradition
which ha[d] previously mediated between man and nature was broken . . . [But w]hatever the
changes in productive means and social organization, men depended upon animals for food,
work, transport, clothing” (12). No reader of Dickens’s novels can avoid being alerted to the
human dependence on animals, particularly with regard to transport, which is largely and
almost wholly (until the appearance of railway trains, in *Dombey and Son*, 1848, and apart
from the use of boats, of course) reliant on horses. There are stage coach horses and
carthorses and horses that are ridden, and sometimes ponies and donkeys appear in similar
functions, if on a much smaller scale. Horses naturally occur in urban as well as rural settings,
and there are numerous references to them, but overall the fact that most of Dickens’s novels
are chiefly set in an urban environment does of course to a large extent determine what (non-
metaphorical) animals are included or given pride of place. Thus, cows, oxen, and sheep
appear but rarely in urban settings (other than in connection with markets), whereas dogs,
canaries, sparrows, and rooks seem to be an obvious part of urban life. When gushing about
the pleasures of the countryside and asking himself, “Who could continue to exist, where
there are no cows but the cows on the chimney-pots . . .?” (83), the city dweller Mr Pickwick

\(^2\) See page 22, for a short discussion of the terms *human animal* and *nonhuman animal*. 
appears to express the fraught transition from rural to urban life that many of Dickens’s novels illustrate and that is inevitably reflected in his references to animals.

Whether in town or in the countryside, horses are fairly often shown to be taken good care of, and every now and then Dickens pays attention to them not only in their capacity as means of transport. But on an emotional level, horses in general do not play any prominent role\(^3\). A number of other animals, namely, some individual pets, and above all pet dogs, do, however. Dickens’s depiction of pets has been fairly thoroughly explored and commented on\(^4\) and I will merely touch on it insofar as it is relevant to the overall topic of my thesis.

Despite a by and large positive depiction of pets, it would seem as if in Dickens’s novels humans are rarely compared to either pets or other animals in order to highlight any positive qualities. With respect to this phenomenon, Michael J. Gilmour points to the fact that the use of animal imagery “is perhaps most evident in depictions of literary villains” (*Goats and Gods* 6), illustrating his statement with examples of animal ingredients in Dickens’s portrayal of Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield* (6-7). In fact, despite Dickens’s well-documented interest in and appreciation of animals, and despite certain indications to the effect that Dickens sometimes attributed qualities to animals that made them out to be superior to human beings, an implicit hierarchy between human beings and animals may be detected in his use of animal imagery and symbolism.

One possible interpretation of the fact that references to animals very often (though far from always) serve to point out or emphasise negative characteristics (in Dickens’s novels usually in overall unprepossessing characters) is offered by Kate Soper: “The animal is . . . used to police rather than confuse the human-nature divide; by associating all our ‘lowlier’

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3. Whisker, a pony in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, is a noteworthy exception, since a close relationship develops between him and a character called Kit.

4. See, for example, works by Laura Brown and Grace Moore.
characteristics and bodily functions with animality, we assert the importance of sustaining those higher or more spiritual attributes that grant us human sovereignty over the beast” (qtd. in Garrard 143). Or, in other words, if what is bad and undignified in humans is presented as signs of animality, and not integral to human nature, our superiority as humans may be safeguarded. One of the questions that this study tries to answer is whether Dickens adheres to such a view, and, if so, whether he ultimately places humans “at the pinnacle” (Beer 54) of creation, or if he objects to “that hubristic separation” (55) between humans and animals and puts credence in a Darwinian “kinship with all . . . forms of life” (57).

A hierarchical world view is likely to have been predominant in Dickens’s time and, thus, signs of such an attitude to the human-animal divide in his novels can hardly be seen as surprising. However, this thesis argues that traces of a completely different attitude are also detectable – implicitly as well as, on occasion, explicitly – in Dickens’s literary treatment of both figurative and literal relations between human characters and animals; that is, the thesis argues that the above-mentioned kinship between living creatures, where human and nonhuman animals are seen as belonging to a kind of continuum that is not merely biological but also relates to mental characteristics, is to some extent visible in Dickens’s novels.

With regard to the hierarchical aspect of Dickens’s view of the human-animal divide, there seems to be a tension worth exploring between Dickens’s apparent love and respect for the nature, autonomy, and life of animals, and a tendency to have them represent, or symbolise, negative characteristics – for example, between his depiction of (mainly pet) dogs as affectionate, loyal creatures and his use of dogs in metaphors and similes, or in terms of address, where being a dog indicates something very far removed from affection and loyalty. This seeming inconsistency, or tension, may be a result of a hierarchical view of the relations between humans and nonhumans, so that when a human character is compared to an animal this will automatically imply a devalorisation of the human character. But it may also simply
be caused by an adherence to conventional conceptions and patterns of imagery, certain animals being traditionally resorted to in order to represent certain human characteristics. “Let it be reported,” writes Greta Olson, “that Dickens loved his pet raven, liked his dogs, frequently went to the zoo where he supposedly talked to animals and that he criticized vivisection: Yet he also defended fox hunting as a manly and patriotic pastime. These contradictions seem perfectly coherent with the mores of his time” (248-249). Thus, what may strike a modern reader as inconsistent and contradictory\(^5\) may not have made a similar impression on a reader from Dickens’s own time. Moreover, the animals employed by Dickens on comparing unpleasant human characters and animals are usually animals with strong negative connotations in the public mind, animals such as vultures, reptiles, and insects.

It goes without saying that the topic of animals in Dickens’s novels is far from virgin ground; several writers have made this their object of study. I have not, however, come across much material on the specific angle that I have chosen to adopt, namely, the animalisation of human characters. But animal studies – the heading under which this thesis could, at least in some respects, be said to come – is a vast and to all appearances growing academic field that I cannot claim to survey; having gleaned a number of fertile seeds from that field I may have inadvertently overlooked others that would have been relevant to the present study. However, the ambition of this thesis is to try to contribute to a broader and more nuanced understanding of Dickens’s animalisation of human characters, through covering all of his major novels\(^6\)

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5. According to Steve Baker, who discusses “contradictory attitudes to animals” (166) in detail, “animal images, animal symbols and of course animals themselves can evoke a bewildering variety of responses” (167). Such “unresolved contradiction” (Huggan and Tiffin 138) could to some extent be said to characterise Dickens’s literary treatment of animals.

6. Though there are quite a few animals in *The Pickwick Papers*, animalised human characters are not a conspicuous feature in this novel, which is why it is explicitly alluded to only once in the present thesis.
(where many other researchers seem to have focused on animalised characters in one or a few
of them), as well as to the understanding of some of the possible implications of that
animalisation.

A number of writers and academics have had a particularly important impact on my
perception and interpretation of Dickens’s use of animal imagery. Gilmour, according to
whom “animal imagery is ubiquitous in [Dickens’s] work” (Animal Imagery 4), has looked
into the comparisons between human characters and animals in, above all, Dombey and Son,
and his ideas both confirm and contradict some of my own ideas and findings. Further,
Stefanie Meier has written a study of Dickensian imagery, called Animation and
Mechanization in the Novels of Charles Dickens, mainly focusing on the personification of
objects that is very characteristic of Dickens’s style, as well as on the objectification of certain
Dickensian characters. In connection with the latter aspect of her study, she also touches on
animal imagery applied to human characters and I have on various occasions drawn on her
pertinent observations. Other writers that have especially helped inform my analysis of
animality in Dickens are Laura Brown, James R. Kincaid, Ivan Kreilkamp, Grace Moore,
Thomas Gene Nelson, and Greta Olson, who have all written thought-provoking texts, or
passages, on the subject. The main objective of most of the texts of those writers is not,
however, the animalisation of individual characters, as distinct from R.D. McMaster, whose
article “Man into Beast in Dickensian Caricature” does deal specifically with that kind of
animalisation. McMaster draws the reader’s attention to the fact that “the characters
resembling animals, a more miscellaneous gathering than the petrified characters, have
received less attention” (354). His own study is fairly short and consequently does not provide
a thorough analysis of the topic, but he explores a number of conspicuous instances of
animalised characters that are also included in the present thesis and I will, thus, every now
and then refer to his ideas and observations, both specific and general ones.
My perspective on Dickens’s animalised characters is slightly different from that of McMaster, however, in that I do not focus specifically on seeing or presenting them as caricatures. Rather, my focus is on the extent to which the animalisation of a character obscures or extinguishes the “divine spark” (see page 25) that Dickens appears to associate with human animals as distinct from nonhuman animals and that, in my interpretation, refers to both a moral and an emotional dimension, the dimensions sometimes referred to as someone’s soul. I hasten to add, however, that I omit any religious connotations from my application of the expression “divine spark” in the analysis of Dickens’s animalisation of human characters.

The second section of the present thesis is devoted to a presentation of my method, which is primarily based on close reading of all of Dickens’s major novels, and to my use of theory, which could be characterised as largely eclectic but which foregrounds thoughts and ideas connected to the perception of evolutionary theory and Darwinism prevalent in Dickens’s time, as well as ecocriticism. In order to provide a necessary background to the subsequent analysis, a subsection dealing with animal imagery, both in general and with specific reference to Dickens’s imagery, is also included.

As for the main body of the thesis, it is divided into three sections (3, 4, and 5). Section 3 deals with the human-animal divide and includes a thumbnail, and therefore of necessity very simplified, exposition of various views on this divide, chiefly from a historical perspective. It also contains a brief discussion of relevant terminology, as well as a subsection discussing instances of what could sometimes be interpreted as moral and/or emotional superiority in Dickens’s depiction of certain animals, a subtheme that is meant to point to the contrast between Dickens’s portrayal of certain actual animals and the majority of his portrayals of animalised humans.
Section 4 consists of an analysis of different aspects of the overarching theme of the thesis, that is, animalised humans, also expressed as parallels between human and nonhuman animals, in Dickens’s novels. It is in turn divided into two subsections, dealing with i) parallels between groups of people and animals, where the emphasis will be on the generic concept of animal, and ii) parallels between individual human characters and animals, both animals (and animality) in general and a number of animals that play a particularly significant role in Dickens’s symbolic use of animals, with a special focus on felines.

Finally, section 5 contains a summarising discussion of whether Dickens’s attitude to animals, as it emerges mainly in his animal imagery, is characterised by a hierarchical perspective, where being compared to an animal (small birds excepted) invariably equals being an inferior, and sometimes even evil human being, or if he conceives of the relationship between humans and animals as a kind of continuum, where animal and human characters may be more or less illuminated by the “divine spark” yet without any absolute boundaries between the species.

To sum up, the chief questions that are raised in this thesis, and that I attempt to answer, are what characters are animalised, and for what reason, as well as in what ways, or by what means; how animalisation affects the perception of those characters (individuals or groups) that are animalised; and, on a more general level, what Dickens’s animalisation of human characters tells us about his attitude to the human-animal divide.

2 Method and Theory

The method adopted for the present study is traditional, in that it is based on close reading, in this case of all of Dickens’s novels – with the omission of the Christmas Books, as they are often considered novellas rather than novels. Having decided that I wanted to investigate Dickens’s literary treatment of animals, I started by noting down all references to animals that
I came across in his novels. After a while, however, the theme of animalised human characters crystallised as the main focus of my research, and, in connection with this, Dickens’s attitude to the human-animal divide, as reflected above all in his animalisation of human characters but also in his depictions of animal superiority, emerged as another worthwhile aspect to explore.

With regard to theory I have opted for an eclectic approach, where I lean on a number of different theories and ideas. In order to contextualise my findings and observations regarding animalised humans characters in the novels, and place the view of animals, and of the relations between animals and humans, that transpires from Dickens’s novels within a historical framework, I have drawn on what a number of contemporary critics, such as Gillian Beer and George Levine, have written about the impact of Darwinism and evolutionary theory on Victorian literature. Another writer who has contributed considerably to helping me flesh out the historical background to Dickens’s literary treatment of animals is Keith Thomas, even if he focuses chiefly on earlier periods of English history.

Apart from contemporary criticism on the significance of Darwinism, I have also to some extent made use of ecocritical perspectives. Although ecocriticism includes aspects that I am not able to apply to the present study, in view of both the character and the limited scope of the study, it nevertheless contains ideas and perspectives that are attuned to my topic. The fact that, according to Greg Garrard, “the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human” (5) including “the problematic distinction between our species and other animals” (15), and that “[e]cocriticism is essentially about the demarcation between nature and culture” (179) and deals with questions such as anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism, points to a powerful link between the theory in question and the objectives of my thesis. Ecocriticism also “entail[s] critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself” (Garrard 5), something that I believe inevitably infuses my own
discussion of the human-animal divide, which is central to the thrust of this study. Other aspects of ecocriticism, however, such as “an avowedly political mode of analysis . . . [with] a ‘green’ moral and political agenda . . . closely related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory” (3) and, therefore, a “close relationship with the science of ecology” (5), are themes and orientations that are not covered. But since “no single or simple perspective unites all ecocritics” (Garrard 15) I trust that I am justified in borrowing from ecocriticism those aspects that could be said to fit my study while ignoring others that I find less applicable. Thus, despite the fact that ecocritical thoughts – not least with regard to anthropocentrism and the symbolic use of animals that sometimes obscures their lived reality – underlie most of the analysis, I cannot claim to read Dickens “with green eyes” (Bate 4), and my explicit use of ecocriticism as a theoretical framework is limited and complemented with ideas about and insights into the role of animals in literature from various other sources.

There are, furthermore, obvious links between Darwinism and ideas propounded and defended by ecocriticism. One such link is the strong non-anthropocentric perspective adopted by ecocriticism and which could be said to tie in with a Darwinian world view, in that everything does not revolve around human beings. Dickens’s own world view may be anthropocentric in many respects, but there are glimpses of alternative viewpoints, where humans are not necessarily the centre of creation. Apart from the fact that evolutionary ideas and theories were spread and discussed in England even before the publication of *On the Origin of Species* (Beer 10-11) and may therefore well have influenced Dickens before 1859, he obviously also read and appreciated Darwin; he even wrote a favourable review of *On the Origin of Species* in his literary journal *All the Year Round* (Levine, *Darwin* 128-129).

Regarding Dickens’s novel *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit,* which was

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7. Usually referred to simply as *Martin Chuzzlewit.*
published in monthly instalments between 1843 and 1844, Levine points out that “[t]he opening chapter [which contains a ludicrously long list of Martin Chuzzlewit’s ancestors] . . . alludes comically to the theory that man is descended from the apes” (Darwin 127), and he also quotes a passage from the said chapter where Dickens talks about the “doctrine touching the probability of the human race having once been monkeys” (Martin Chuzzlewit 8), a doctrine that in this case is not put forward by Darwin, however, but by the Scottish scholar and philosopher Monboddo (8). That said, fairly few of Dickens’s characters are explicitly compared to apes or monkeys.

Levine also discusses aspects of Dickens’s novels that show a marked difference between a Darwinian view of the nature of species, and thus of both human and nonhuman animals, and a Dickensian one. Dickens’s characters seldom change, that is, Dickens seems to adhere to an essentialist view of the nature of human character, and when his characters do change it is usually not as a result of “slow processes . . . by which characters learn and grow” (Darwin 144) but rather abruptly (146). Darwin, on the other hand, forcefully claimed that “nature made no leaps” (144) but that species were “perpetually transforming” (143; emphasis added). However, although Darwin was far from being an essentialist (144) and was, consequently, “not very interested in types” (150), which is what Dickens’s characters are often said to be, Levine argues that a rapprochement could still be made between Dickens’s portrayal of his characters and a Darwinian outlook. He refers to the fact that “Dickens’s characters . . . are atypical in their excesses” (150), and that Dickens “has an astonishing eye for the aberrant” (151) – aspects that somehow clash with his tendency to “strain . . . towards the comfort of design” (151) and thus set him closer to Darwin than one might think at first.

My task with respect to this is to try to explore, among other things, whether the animalisation of human Dickensian characters serves to emphasise what Levine calls their “conformity of physical and moral status” (Darwin 146) and the non-Darwinian stability and immutability of
those characters, or whether it works the other way around. That is, does the “excessive”
aspect of some of the Dickensian characters in any way show in his animalisation of them and
thus, perhaps, contribute to making them less clearly definable as types?

Though Dickens can rarely be said to “displace man from his central position and to look
at the organisation of nature from the point of view of other species and orders of life” (Beer
31), like Darwin did, there are instances of such a world view in Dickens’s novels. By way of
illustration of this, Beer mentions “the terrible redundancy of human kind” (42) displayed in
an exceedingly poor part of London called Tom-All-Alone’s in *Bleak House*, where a group
of people are likened to vermin and maggots in the way they drag out their miserable destitute
existences. A noteworthy fact in this context is that just as Dickens’s analogy between human
and nonhuman animals reflects a Darwinian view, in his autobiography Darwin himself “uses
a Dickens description of a snarling mob in *Oliver Twist* to support his argument that human
expressions are ultimately derived from rudimentary animal behaviour” (Levine, *Darwin
121). Thus, though there is no record of Dickens and Darwin having ever met in person or
even corresponded (Levine, *Dickens and Darwin* 250), they were familiar with each other’s
work (in fact, according to Beer, Dickens “was one of Darwin’s most frequently read authors”
[6]) and seem to have been at least partly preoccupied with similar aspects of life.

Yet another interface between Dickens and Darwin (and an aspect that reflects ecocritical
concerns) could be found in the fact that Darwin’s “ecological image of the ‘inextricable web
of affinities’” (Beer 19) seems to square with Dickens’s works as regards his intricate plots
with their often “profuse interconnection of characters and events” (40), something that is
particularly noticeable in *Bleak House*. This idea of “interconnection” might perhaps also be
applied to Dickens’s frequent juxtapositions of man and beast, on a symbolic level, both with
regard to individual characters and with regard to groups of characters/people.
The above-mentioned juxtapositions of man and beast often take the shape of metaphors and similes, an aspect of Dickens’s novels that constitutes a significant part of my study of the animalisation of human Dickensian characters. This means that the issue of animal imagery needs to be looked into, and in the process of doing so I draw on thoughts, ideas, and observations by, above all, Steve Baker, John Berger, Marcus Bullock, and Harriet Ritvo. It may not be too far-fetched to refer to Darwin in this context as well, in view of what Beer says about “[t]he grotesque, the beautiful and the wonderful in the everyday [being] a major Victorian theme” and about “Darwin shar[ing] this pleasure in ‘making strange’, in skimming off the familiar and restoring it, enriched and stabilised” (74-75). Comparing a human character to a nonhuman animal, as Dickens often does, could in a sense be seen as an instance of “making strange”, of presenting that character in a different light. It might also, however, be seen as reductionist, shearing a character of complexities while clothing him or her in animal apparel.

2.1 Animal Imagery – Comparisons between Human Characters and Animals through Metaphor, Metonomy, and Simile

As mentioned above, imagery is a frequent vehicle for Dickens’s animal references, usually through metaphors, as when, in *David Copperfield*, Dora’s aunts are “little birds hopp[ing] out with great dignity” (490), or similes, as when Dolly Varden is *like* “a poor bird in its cage” (*Barnaby Rudge* 714). Another rhetorical device used by Dickens as a means of animalising human characters is metonymy; in this context that means that a human character is indirectly depicted through the association between, and contiguity of, the character in question and an actual animal (usually a pet). Olson points out that “[a]nimal figures serve as stand-ins for or metonymical extensions of the characters with whom they are most closely associated as with Jip for Dora in *David Copperfield*, Bull's-eye for Sikes in *Oliver Twist* and
Grip [for Barnaby] in *Barnaby Rudge*” (248), and her list will be complemented with other examples below.

With regard to animal metaphors, Meier writes that “[a]lthough both animals and humans are living creatures, the barrier between them is generally considered strong enough to permit the creation of forceful and telling metaphors” (61), which is a thought-provoking point of view, in stark contrast to another idea, namely, that it is the very similarity between animals and humans that is at the heart of animal imagery. Berger, who takes a particular interest in the age-old use of animal metaphors, offers interesting comments on this issue, claiming that “[i]f the first metaphor was animal, it was because the essential relation between man and animal was metaphoric. Within that relation what the two terms – man and animal – shared in common revealed what differentiated them. And vice versa” (16). He consequently stresses the fact that animal metaphors are built on both similarities and differences.

Another claim put forward by Berger is that there is an “old tradition, whereby a person is portrayed as an animal so as to reveal more clearly an aspect of his or her character” (28) – a phenomenon that is very much a characteristic of Dickens’s animal imagery. A different, very pertinent phrasing of the same idea is that the “device” of animal imagery is “like putting on a mask, but its function [is] to unmask” (28). Several Dickensian characters are in fact provided with metaphorical animal masks and those masks are frequently painted in fairly gaudy colours, leaving the reader in no doubt as to their symbolic interpretation. Regarding such symbolic interpretation, Huggan and Tiffin observe that “most animals – though some more obviously than others – exist for modern-day populations as primarily symbolic: they are given an exclusively human significance, a ‘whole repertoire of metaphoric associations’” (139), and some of those associations are very much to the fore in Dickens’s use of animal imagery.
A related aspect is the conventionality and, hence, the somehow precoded interpretation of many animal metaphors and similes, something that is discussed by Baker, who argues that

[within the vicious circularity of the present animal mentalité, only that which is already known will be readily recognized as having meaning. Such meanings as there are will operate largely independently of the living animal even if they once derived from it or even now apply to it. The intelligibility of these stereotypes is entirely dependent on their conformity, and that conformity is not (and never was) to some ‘truth’ of the animal. (28)

When he likens a character to, for example, a tiger, Dickens makes use of a stereotype that presupposes a certain preconceived understanding of what a tiger is like or represents. The use and the effectiveness of such animal imagery is of course based on “shared cultural assumption[s]” (Beer 41), and the “[s]tereotypes [in question] are commonly, but not necessarily, accompanied by prejudice, i.e. by a favourable or unfavourable predisposition towards any member of the category in question” (Scarry, qtd. in Baker 29), something that typically applies to imagery involving snakes, for example.

Furthermore, Marcus Bullock, who investigates the nature of animal imagery in his article “Watching Eyes, Seeing Dreams, Knowing Lives”, says that we may “take animals as emblems of a higher or a lower condition within our cosmos” (110) and points to “the thinness of observation that has gone into these conventional ideas” (108). He reflects that we “can see ourselves as eagles or vultures, lions or jackals, bees or sloths” but that “such expressions limit us to quite ordinary levels of perception” (108). It is fairly obvious that Dickens’s animal imagery constitutes no exception with regard to these “levels of perception” insofar as he by and large does not seem to strive for originality in his choice of animal metaphors or similes, or for zoological exactitude.
Harriet Ritvo points out “all human-animal relationships in nineteenth-century England . . . were conditioned by a limited set of metaphors or images” (*The Animal Estate* 4), which seems to confirm the idea that the animal imagery resorted to in Dickens’s time and, thus, by Dickens himself, was indeed largely conventional and generally accepted. It does, therefore, seem highly likely that at least some of the metaphors and similes used by Dickens in order to depict unpleasant characters were in established usage at the time he wrote his novels. Moreover, several of those metaphors and similes are equally familiar to readers of today: calling a person a vulture or a snake does not strike us as unnatural or original and the pejorative ring of such a description does not escape us. Incidentally, at one point in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Dickens himself demonstrates an explicit awareness of the conventionality of some animal imagery: “Accepting the jackass as the type of self-sufficient stupidity and conceit – a custom, perhaps, like some few other customs, more conventional than fair – then the purest Jackass in Cloisterham is Mr Thomas Sapsea, Auctioneer” (34).

Another relevant aspect of Dickens’s animal imagery and a common occurrence in his novels is what Huggan and Tiffin call “the metaphorisation and deployment of ‘animal’ as a derogatory term” (135). Huggan and Tiffin emphasise the fact that “[t]he history of human oppression of other humans is replete with instances of animal metaphors and animal categorisations frequently deployed to justify exploitation and objectification, slaughter and enslavement” (135). An ostentatious Dickensian example of an animal metaphor used to denigrate human beings is when a French aristocrat in *A Tale of Two Cities* is shown as viewing the poor people in the Parisian streets as rats.\(^8\) Furthermore, by way of rebuke (though the rebuke is not necessarily very negative or hostile but at times rather playful), Dickensian characters occasionally address, or talk about, each other as “animal”, “cur”, “dog”, or “hound.” Sometimes they do so with an added adjective that colours the epithet in

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8. For a more extensive discussion of this example, see page 38 below.
question as either humorous or hostile, as when Mr Brass in *The Old Curiosity Shop* says about his sister Sally, “Now, here’s an aggravating animal!” (270), or Dick in the same novel calls the wicked character Quilp “an artful dog” (171), or when Martin Chuzzlewit in the novel with the same name exclaims, “Listen, hypocrite! . . . Listen, you shallow dog” (772) to Mr Pecksniff, and Mr Harthouse in *Hard Times* characterises Mr Bounderby, who is far from noble in any sense of the word, as “a noble animal in a comparatively natural state” (101).

According to Huggan and Tiffin, “[a]nimal categorisations and the use of derogatory animal metaphors have been and are characteristic of human languages” (135); it is, thus, not a phenomenon that is unique to Dickens, or to his rendering of fictional conversations, but more of a culturally informed convention.

With regard to Dickens’s use of “dog” as a term of address or insult, despite his own well-documented interest in and affection for dogs (Kreilkamp 92, Moore 201), a possible explanation may be found in Thomas’s comments on the view of dogs that prevailed in England long before Dickens wrote his novels but that may well have left traces in his language: “The Eastern view of dogs as filthy scavengers had been transmitted via the Bible to medieval England and was still widely current in the sixteenth century. . . . In popular proverbs there was no suggestion that the dog might be faithful and affectionate” (105). He goes on to quote “a mid-eighteenth-century author” who said that “[i]n all countries and languages, . . . ‘Dog’ is a name of contempt’” (105). To sum up, Dickens’s seemingly ambiguous literary treatment, or use, of dogs – who are sometimes presented as beloved pets and sometimes, at least indirectly, as “filthy scavengers” – may be a sign of the fact that “[i]n many parts of the world, dogs . . . move freely back and forward across the conceptual divide” (Garrard 150) between wild and domestic animals (it is, after all, hardly cherished pet dogs that give rise to recriminatory or denigrating epithets or terms of address).
Finally, Beer, writing about Darwin’s use of metaphor, claims that “[t]he multi-vocal nature of metaphor [that is, the ability of metaphor to convey a whole complex of meanings] allows [Darwin] to express . . . kinship” (56), and, whether conscious or not, there is perhaps an element of this in Dickens’s novels as well, that is, the use of animal metaphors might to some extent serve to illustrate and emphasise the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman animals, and not just a contingent resemblance between a human character and an animal. Consequently, seen as a whole, the perceived conventionality of much of Dickens’s animal imagery might, partly through its very profusion, transcend the limits of its own conventionality and contribute to a sense of “[m]ixing and denial of absolute boundaries” (Levine, *Darwin* 150) between human and nonhuman animals.

3 The Human-Animal Divide

An incontrovertible aspect of the issue of animalisation of human characters is the human-animal divide, which is in turn closely related to the question of terminology. In other words, what are the boundaries between humans and animals, how can humans and animals be defined, respectively, and what are the most appropriate terms for them? Ecocritics speak about fixed species boundaries as a “fiction” (Huggan and Tiffin 135). But many attempts have been made at establishing such boundaries. Thus, as distinct from animals, human beings are often said to be characterised by, for example, “rationality, [verbal] language and [self-]consciousness” (Calarco 40), even if certain thinkers and researchers find the lack of those characteristics in the animal realm highly debatable. Derrida – who believes as a matter of course in an “abyssal limit” between “man and . . . animal” (30) at the same time as he is intent on siding with the animal, or rather, animals – reels off the following list of different kinds of “power” that supposedly characterise human beings: “speech, reason, experience of death, mourning, culture, institutions, technics, clothing, pretense of pretense, covering of
tracks, gift, laughter, crying, respect, etc.”, adding that “the list is necessarily without limit” (135). Such a list covers things that are lacking in animals compared to humans, yet delimiting what constitutes an animal, in opposition to human beings, seems to be a controversial and complex issue. In their introduction to *Victorian Animal Dreams*, Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay remark that “defining the term ‘animal’ remains a perplexing problem for both academic disciplines and popular discourse” (2). They refer to Derrida, saying that he considered “classifying the multiplicity of other life forms under the homogenizing category ‘animal’ . . . a ‘crime of the first order against animals . . .’” (4; see also Derrida 4). Huggan and Tiffin, who in their turn refer to Baker’s thoughts in this matter, chime in and find it “tempting to conclude that the collective term ‘animal’ is absurd, incorporating as it does anything not recognised as human, from orang-utans and elephants to grasshoppers and bacterial forms” (138). Although I am indeed susceptible to such a point of view, I still choose to adopt the term animal for all the nonhuman species referred to in the present thesis – mainly for simplicity’s sake, but also because Dickens himself seems to group all kinds of living creatures under that heading.

Unlike Dickens, however, I also use the terms *nonhuman animal* and *human animal* on occasion – terms that could be said to signal a conviction that animals and human beings are not separate entities, but part of a “human/animal continuum” (Denenholz Morse and Danahay 4). I believe those terms are appropriate in the present study, since in Dickens’s novels animals and humans sometimes merge, in the sense that human characters are equipped with animal features or qualities, and vice versa, or, otherwise expressed, in the sense that human characters can be more or less animal, and animals more or less human.
As a matter of fact, Dickens sometimes does apply the term *animal* to humans,⁹ or has his characters do so. In *Hard Times*, for example, the pupils in Thomas Gradgrind’s school are referred to as “reasoning animals” (3). And Lord Chester in *Barnaby Rudge* makes the following claim: “Virtuous and gifted animals, whether man or beast, always are so very hideous” (241), thus making no difference between human and nonhuman animals. In addition, in *David Copperfield*, when Rosa Dartle asks Steerworth about David’s friends the Peggottys, headed by Mr Peggotty, who is a fisherman, she phrases her question like this: “Are they really animals and clods, and beings of another order?” (240). And Steerworth answers that “they have not very fine natures, and they may be thankful that, like their coarse rough skins, they are not easily wounded” (240). In the novel it will soon be evident whose natures are fine and whose are anything but. What is interesting about this passage, however, is that Rosa’s question probably reflects an attitude that existed in Victorian times, namely, that some people – usually people from the lower classes – were closer to animals than others, in the sense of being considered more coarse and of less delicate sensibilities. Such an attitude, however, whereby only poor, uneducated people are animalised, is clearly not shared by Dickens, whose animalised characters seem to come from all walks of life.

On the subject of the human-animal divide, Matthew Calarco concludes his book *Zoographies: the Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* by making a radical statement. He says that “we could simply let the human-animal distinction go” (149). In a similar vein, Erica Fudge contends that “we must write a history which refuses the absolute separation of the species; . . . [where] the meaning of ‘human’ is no longer understood in opposition to ‘animal’” (16).

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⁹ Referring to human beings as animals is an old phenomenon that may, for example, be found as early as in Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), in whose *Metaphysics* “[m]an . . . is defined as rational animal” (Cohen).
At the opposite end of such a standpoint is the Old Testament conception of the relation between humans and animals, which emphasises the separation of human beings and other species – not least because, unlike animals, human beings are said to be created in God’s image and to be set to “subdue” the earth and “have dominion over . . . every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (King James Bible, Gen. 1:28), that is, over all animals. It would seem as if animals, on the biblical view, exist for our sake, to provide us with food, clothing, etc., but have little worth in themselves.  

This is a world view that has been very influential.

Another influential “doctrine” that drew a sharp dividing line between humans and animals was the one “developed and made famous by René Descartes from the 1630s onwards” (Thomas 33), which said “that animals were mere machines or automat . . . without minds or souls” and which inevitably “had the effect of further downgrading animals by comparison with human beings” (33). England, however, “threw up only half a dozen or so explicit defenders of the Cartesian position. . . . Most later English intellectuals felt with Locke and Ray that the whole idea of beast-machine was ‘against all evidence of sense and reason’ and ‘contrary to the commonsense of mankind’” (35). Since this thesis deals with animalisation in the novels of an English nineteenth-century writer, the reluctance of English thinkers to accept Descartes’s mechanistic view of animals seems particularly relevant.

Moreover, with the introduction and spread of evolutionary ideas in England, the “doctrine of human uniqueness” (Thomas 132) was gradually undermined, and it was eventually “dealt a serious blow” (132) by the publication of the second of Darwin’s two great works, namely The Descent of Man (1871). As noted earlier, Dickens read and wrote about On the Origin of Species, but since he died in 1870, he obviously never had the opportunity of reading the sequel, where Darwin “argue[s] not only that man and animals were descended from a

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10. I am aware that this is not a completely fair picture of the biblical representation of animals, which is of course much more complex than I am able to enter into in this thesis.
common ancestor, but also that the mental difference between humans and the existing higher animals was only one of degree” (Thomas 141). Nevertheless, such an attitude does not seem to be alien to Dickens.

Discussing animality in Great Expectations, Kreilkamp states that “Dickens's implication that human beings might be grouped with animals as fellow ‘creatures’ may well have been influenced by Darwin's On the Origin of Species, published a year before the first serial of Great Expectations” (88, footnote 20). In this context he refers to Beer. She claims “that the tendency of Darwin's argument is to range man alongside all other forms of life” (Beer 56), a tendency that would seem to link Dickens to Darwin in that “[t]he theme of hidden, yet all-pervasive kinship is one which their [that is, Darwin’s and Dickens’s] narratives share” (56). This is an aspect that is also forcefully stressed by Levine: “Dickens’s world . . . is as much a tangled bank as that evoked by Darwin at the end of the Origin. . . . Dickens takes the metaphorical . . . view, that Darwin was to make literal, that we are all one” (Darwin 149).

Perhaps the fact that Dickens often depicts a human character, or a group of humans, by means of comparisons with, or parallels to, animals, could be interpreted as a result of his apparent belief in “the complex interrelationship” (Levine, Darwin 149) between all living things and as proof that he conceived of human beings as part of the above-mentioned “human/animal continuum”. If so, this could perhaps be seen as being in line with evolutionary theory, which holds that human beings and animals have a common ancestry. After all, “[t]he cultural theme of connection” that Levine writes about, and that characterises Dickens’s novels, is not without “its implication in genealogy” (130). According to Denenholz Morse and Danahay, “many Victorians were grappling with the consciousness of man-as-animal, and with the interpretation of Darwin’s On the Origin of Species (1859)”, and “[t]he effect of Darwin’s ideas was both to make the human more animal and the animal more human, destabilizing boundaries in both directions” (2). It is worth pointing out in this context
that Dickens did in fact write an essay, published in his own magazine *All the Year Round* in 1859, where he “comfortably accepts the biological closeness of gorilla to man” (Levine, *Darwin* 127). He does, however, remark that “the complex brain [of the gorilla] is kindled by no divine spark” (Dickens, qtd. in Levine, *Darwin* 127), thus widening, or at least confirming, the gap between humans and animals at the same time as he appears to be willing to bridge it. In other words, he seems to believe in a biological continuum that nevertheless includes a clear demarcation line between species with respect to mental and spiritual characteristics.

Finally, another phenomenon that is likely to have shaped the perception of animals and of the relation between humans and animals in England is the increasing popularity of pet-keeping. Thomas, for example, believes that pet-keeping was an important reason “for scientists and intellectuals to break down the rigid boundaries between animals and men which earlier theorists had tried to raise” (122). And Philip Armstrong suggests that “pet-keeping . . . emerged as cultural compensation for the ontological and material separation of human from animal” (13), which could be linked to what Teresa Mangum states about the “deepened . . . attachment to pets” (15) during the Victorian era and about the fact that “pets, in particular dogs, received the greatest attention” (16). Dickens himself had numerous pets and appears to have taken a great deal of interest in them, which seems to have rubbed off on his novels.

### 3.1 Instances of Animal Superiority

There is, as hinted at above, a seeming discrepancy between Dickens’s fairly consistent (if not all-pervasive) use of animal characteristics as indicators of less desirable human qualities and his depiction of actual animals in his novels. Far from depicting real, literal animals as, for example, cruel, despicable, scary, or sneaky, he often presents them in a very positive light, with the signal exception of cats. Individualised, actual animals – that is, animals who are not
used in metaphors or similes, but who could be considered as, more or less important, characters in the novels dealt with in this thesis – are relatively scarce, however. They consist mainly of a number of pet dogs (Bull’s-eye, Diogenes, Jip, and Lion), a pet raven (Grip), and a pony (Whisker), but these animal characters are portrayed in a way that seems to respect the animals’ individuality and that bespeaks careful, even loving, observations of dogs, ravens, and ponies. As pointed out above, Dickens and his family did in fact have several pets, among others a raven called Grip on whom Barnaby Rudge’s raven is said to be modeled (Ackroyd 323), so that Dickens must have had plenty of opportunities for observing the behaviour of domestic animals. Moreover, the animal characters in question all have close ties to human characters and are more or less anthropomorphised, that is, humanised. Thus, although Dickens by and large appears to distinguish between animals as such (except, perhaps, cats) and animal qualities or character traits in human beings, the anthropocentric perspective is almost invariably in evidence. In this context it needs pointing out, however, that the animals Dickens resorts to in his animal metaphors and similes are often either exotic or wild, and thus animals that most of his English readers at least were not close to and in some cases probably knew only from books, pictures, or, possibly, menageries.\footnote{That is what the first zoos were called (Beatson 18), and it is the term that Dickens himself uses to design areas where animals are on display, for example, on page 47 in A Tale of Two Cities.}

With respect to a claim made by Denenholz Morse and Danahay, namely, that in literature “the ‘animal’ can at once express the deepest fears and greatest aspirations of a society” (4), it would seem as if Dickens tilts both ways. Although he tends to list towards a view of animality as expressive of society’s “deepest fears”, seeing the animality that surfaces in certain characters, and in groups of characters in certain situations, as repulsive, frightening, and threatening, and indicative of undesirable and objectionable human traits, animals are sometimes described as being in some respects superior to human beings. Thus, every now
and then animals in Dickens’s novels appear to be possessed of a more elevated moral stature than (certain) human characters, or than humankind in general, because they are incapable of certain kinds of baseness, like greed and envy. An illustration of this view occurs when Dickens says about a piteous character in Our Mutual Friend named Fledgeby, whose main interest in life is money, that “[h]e was the meanest cur existing with a single pair of legs”, adding that “instinct . . . going largely on four legs, and reason always on two, meanness on four legs never attains the perfection of meanness on two” (251). Dickens was far from alone in this standpoint, as confirmed by Thomas who states that

[t]here were those who said that men were morally no better than animals, possibly even worse; and there were those who . . . denigrated the claims of humanity, urging that men were beastlike in their inclinations and capable of vices of which animals never dreamed. It was a humanist commonplace that man’s very possession of reason and free choice enabled him to descend to infinitely greater moral depths than could the brute; so-called animal instinct was much less fallible than reason. Scores of commentators pointed out that beasts did not get drunk or tell lies, were not sadistic and did not make war on their own species. (122)

Sometimes Dickensian pet animals are invested with this moral superiority. According to Nelson, Dickens at times “uses the creatures to comment negatively on human nature” (“Abstract”) and on occasion “the confreres of evil (or ignorant) characters in Dickens put the humans a little to shame. . . . [in that] they . . . have a spark of human-like moral virtue which their owners do not possess” (24). Thus, Bull’s-eye in Oliver Twist is a scruffy “misanthropical” (349) dog who mirrors the evil personality of Bill Sikes, but who, even though he receives a rough treatment at the hands of his master (who at one point even intends to drown him), remains loyal and faithful to the last.
Animal superiority need not be displayed in the shape of moral pre-eminence, however. Nonhuman animals, and dogs in particular, are sometimes depicted in a way that makes them seem in advance of human beings in matters of emotional insight. One case in point is the normally peaceful and affectionate Lion, the Newfoundland dog in *Little Dorrit*, that seems to see through the evil, devious character called Blandois; he overtly manifests his hostility, and is barely restrained from attacking this character, whom the humans, including Lion’s owner Henry Gowan, appear to either respect, or at least accept, or be afraid to oppose or challenge openly (465-466). This incident could be seen as an illustration of the fact that animals do not pretend, and are in fact unable both to pretend (other perhaps than while “playing dead” or in similar instinctive reactions) and to “pretend to pretend” (Derrida 120), which sets them apart from humans.

Similarly, in *Bleak House* there is a passage where a dog is made out to be of finer sensibilities than a certain human character. Jo, a poor, miserable, and illiterate streetsweep, listens to the music played by a band in the market-place with “probably. . . much the same animal satisfaction” as a nearby sheep dog, while at the same time being less sophisticated (“improved, developed”) than the dog: “how far above the human listener is the brute!” (222). To have sunk really low on the social ladder is evidently to have become more animal than human and in fact more animal than some animals.

Apart from the above-mentioned Lion and Bull’s-eye, there are a number of other pets in Dickens’s novels who exhibit qualities, such as loyalty, spontaneity, and unguarded affection, that Dickens appears to see as praiseworthy. Diogenes, for example, Florence Dombey’s pet dog in *Dombey and Son*, not only lavishes love on Florence herself (who is motherless as well as emotionally abandoned by her father) but also, through his expansive body language, expresses the feelings for a young man called Walter that Florence herself dare not show or

12. This character is sometimes referred to as Rigaud, but I will use the name Blandois throughout the thesis.
even admit to herself at the outset (Moore 206). In the same novel, Carker’s (unnamed) pet parrot shows signs of what might be interpreted as loyalty to his master, when he appears to understand that his master – feared, despised, or even hated by most of the human characters that approach him – is in danger, and he makes as if he wishes to fly off and warn him. Thus, some pet animals demonstrate a measure of independence, that is, behaviour and reactions that are not always, at least not on the face of it, governed by what their owners wish or command. Brown, who comments on Diogenes’ demonstrations of affection or hostility/dislike (82-82), remarks that “as pet keeping became pervasive [in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries], animals were sometimes cited as exemplary models for human behavior, preferable to humans themselves” (69). The link referred to earlier between pet-keeping and a more respectful, nuanced attitude to animals, where the boundaries between human and nonhuman animals are to some extent redrawn, is, consequently, observable in Dickens’s novels. Another telling example of this shift in boundaries, and of indirect superiority in animals, is when Whisker, the pony in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (who is, admittedly, not quite a pet animal but nevertheless individualised), is treated with disrespect by a man who tries to “strike terror into his heart” in an attempt to “assert . . . the supremacy of man over the inferior animals” (279), an attempt in which he fails signally, thereby demonstrating who is in fact, in this situation, the inferior animal.

Regarding the aforementioned idea that in some areas human beings ought to model themselves on the – conventionally perceived – behaviour or attitude of certain animals, there is a funny and extended comment in *Our Mutual Friend*, where Eugene Wrayburn, one of the protagonists, expounds his views on the fact that bees are often held up as examples of diligence and tireless work, and where he objects to “any analogy between a bee, and a man in a shirt and pantaloons” (88). Here the boundaries between animal (albeit the metaphorical use of the animal in question) and human being are strenuously, if humorously, upheld by
Eugene Wrayburn, a stand-point that does not, however, appear to be characteristic of
Dickens’s own view of those boundaries, judging by his frequent analogies between human
characters and animals in many of his novels.

On another occasion, however, when Eugene Wrayburn is walking in the countryside, he
observes sheep grazing and suddenly pays more attention to them than he has done before:

> It was very quiet. Some sheep were grazing on the grass by the riverside, and it
> seemed to him that he had never before heard the crisp tearing sound with
> which they cropped it. He stopped idly, and looked at them. ‘You are stupid
> enough, I suppose. But, if you are clever enough to get through life tolerably to
> your satisfaction, you have got the better of me, Man as I am, and Mutton as
> you are!’ (653)

This may not exactly be a glorification of sheep, or of animals in general, but it is
nevertheless a noteworthy instance of the view that animals are not necessarily inferior to
human beings, in certain respects.

When Blandois, the above-mentioned shady character in *Little Dorrit* who is in prison at
the beginning of the novel, is compared to what by all accounts appears to be a lion, it is to
the detriment of the human character, whom Dickens describes thus: “He was waiting to be
fed; looking sideways through the bars, that he might see the further down the stairs, with
much of the expression of a wild beast in similar expectation. But his eyes, too close together,
were not so nobly set in his head as those of the king of beasts are in his” (7). Blandois is a
beast, yet less noble than a beast, seems to be the conclusion, if such an extrapolation is
allowed. A possible reading of this is that animals, thus, however “beastly” in their animality,
do not sink as low as human beings sometimes do. As seen above, this implicit valorisation of
animals is sometimes made more explicit and crops up every now and then in Dickens’s
novels.
In *Barnaby Rudge*, for instance, when the rough character called Hugh is asked shortly before his execution by hanging if (having just condemned his father in sulphurous terms) there is anything else he would like to say, he starts by claiming that there is not but then thinks better of it and says,

> glancing hurriedly back, – ‘unless some person has a fancy for a dog; and not then, unless he means to use him well. There’s one, belongs to me, at the house I came from; and it wouldn’t be easy to find a better. He’ll whine at first, but he’ll soon get over that. – You wonder what I think about a dog just now,’ he added, with a kind of laugh. ‘If any man deserved it of me half as well, I’d think of him’. (784-786)

When human beings let you down, pets remain true and faithful, appears to be the message. Disowned by his father, Hugh was left an orphan when his mother was hanged for a petty crime many years earlier, and according to Hugh himself he and their dog were the only ones that “howled that day. The dog and I alone had any pity. If he’d have been a man, he’d have been glad to be quit of her, for she had been forced to keep him lean and half-starved; but being a dog, and not having a man’s sense, he was sorry” (241-243). In this context it is hard not to perceive the reference to “a man’s sense” as resonating with irony. Hugh himself is not a good character, by the way, and when *he* is portrayed as an animal it is not in order to emphasise faithfulness and loyalty, rather the opposite; yet he has a way with animals (at the beginning of the book he takes care of the horses of the innkeeper and of those who stay at the Maypole inn, and he keeps company with dogs), and even though he commits acts of cruelty and violence, he is far from being as scheming, manipulative and cold-hearted a man as Sir John Chester, the aristocrat who begot him.

Although human characters are by no means consistently dethroned from their dominant position in relation to animals, it is obvious, from the above, that on many occasions
Dickensian animals are in possession of a spark of emotional insight or intelligence that humans, and particularly animalised humans, lack or are at least deficient in. It is also obvious, however, that the animals referred to in this positive light are almost exclusively dogs, animals that usually live in close proximity with humans. Significantly, as Ritvo observes, “throughout the nineteenth century naturalists debated the rival claims of dogs and apes to be top animal and therefore closest to humankind” (Our Animal Cousins 61-62), an attitude that seems to be confirmed by one aspect of Dickens’s literary treatment of dogs – although this attitude is offset by his application of the epithets “dog”, “cur”, or “hound” to eminently unpleasant human characters, and by his occasional comparisons between dogs and objectionable characters, such as Gashford, Lord Gordon’s secretary in Barnaby Rudge, who is said to “fawn. . . like a spaniel dog” (354). That is, as pointed out in an earlier section, a human character who is likened to a dog is not possessed of the praiseworthy qualities that Dickens appears to associate with actual dogs, a seeming inconsistency, which is, however, in all likelihood attributable to traditional and conventional patterns of thought and imagery.

4 Animalised Humans

In this section I analyse Dickens’s animalisations of human characters from a number of different angles, starting with the animalisation of different kinds of groups of humans and going on to look at the animalisation of individual characters who are compared either to a generic or to a specific animal. The section concludes with an exploration of animalised human characters that are likened to felines.

4.1 Parallels between Groups of Human Characters and Animals
When human characters are likened to animals in Dickens’s novels, it is, as noted above, very often in order to emphasise negative aspects of the characters in question. This applies to the description of groups, or mobs, as well as to the description of individual characters. Animality with reference to groups appears, in fact, to carry particularly pejorative connotations, and to denote primitive behaviour or attitudes, often associated with a dehumanising loss of individuality.

In some of Dickens’s novels there are instances of groups of humans that are, in the words of Dinny Thorold, seen as “a dehumanised mass” (XVI). One example of this is when, in *Hard Times*, it says about Louisa, who lives in a loveless marriage with Mr Bounderby, a powerful mill owner in Cokestown, that she “knew [the workers in the mills] in crowds passing to and from their nests, like ants or beetles. But she knew from her reading infinitely more of the ways of toiling insects than of these toiling men and women” (124). The crowds of human insects observed by Louisa Bounderby are hardly threatening, merely alien, because they belong to a different social class and because they are defined in terms of their function as factory workers whose individual identities are of little consequence to the factory owners in the cruel capitalist society described by Dickens in *Hard Times*.

What Thorold terms “mob scenes” are, however, a different matter. She claims, that “[t]he mob scenes in *Barnaby Rudge* . . . show Dickens’s deep fear of collective action” (XVII), which seems to turn men and women into animals – either into ferocious beasts, or into relentless swarms of insects. The plunderers of the Maypole inn, in *Barnaby Rudge*, are described as “men . . . – more, more, more – swarming on like insects” (546). In the same novel, a crowd of enraged people “howled like wolves” (641) and, in another scene, “savage faces . . . glared upon him [Gabriel Varden, one of the main characters], look where he would; [and he heard] the cries of those who thirsted, like wild animals, for his blood” (643). What is typical of these scenes, where groups of unidentified, nameless human beings act in concert,
and often on impulse, is the lack of individuality, and hence, it would seem, of humanity and benevolence. The very number of people seems to imply a threat and transform the persons involved into animals, animality here equalling something uncontrolled, uncivilised, and often downright cruel, with a conspicuous lack of any divine spark.

With regard to numbers, it is a well-known fact that insects often appear in swarms, and consequently, that they are rarely thought of as individuals, which of course makes them ideal animals to use as parallels to large groups of people. This ties in with what Kreilkamp writes about “the expansive category of animal, of which there are always too many”, specifying that “essential to the category of the animal is an excessive multiplicity . . . [and] the undistinguished masses of animal life” (91). There are exceptions, but overall, insects, whether flies, blue-bottles, moths, or other kinds of insects, and whether they appear in large quantities or individually, seem to find little favour with Dickens. The dislike of, or distaste for, insects is a fairly wide-spread phenomenon that is not peculiar to Dickens but that he puts to good use in his comparisons between insects and less palatable human behaviours or reactions. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, for example, Dickens resorts to flies to refer to, or reflect, the presence and behaviour of a group of unspecified, non-individualised human beings. There is a telling scene (55-66), where the audience at a court proceeding are compared to flies, blue-flies to be precise. This metaphor (Dickens never explicitly says that the persons in the crowd are like blue-flies; he merely introduces the insect in question and leaves it to the reader to make her interpretation) is kept up through the whole description of the court scene, and lends an ominous character to the narrative, since it is obvious from the senseless, non-articulate behaviour of “the blue-flies” that they are anything but kindly disposed.

Flies are also invested with a particular significance in another passage in the same novel:

The day was very hot, and heaps of flies, who were extending their inquisitive and adventurous perquisitions into all the glutinous little glasses near madame
[Madame Defarge, the ruthlessly aristocracy-hating wife of the owner of a wine-shop in Paris], fell dead at the bottom. Their decease made no impression on the other flies out promenading, who looked at them in the coolest manner (as if they themselves were elephants, or something as far removed), until they met the same fate. Curious to consider how heedless flies are! – perhaps they thought as much at Court that sunny summer day. (209)

At the same time as this is a graphic – and to some extent humorous – description of flies, it seems to refer to human beings (not least because of the added comment about the court), perhaps to all those who were expeditiously executed and all those who were still unsuspecting of their pending fate at the guillotine during the period when the novel takes place, namely, the French Revolution. The mindlessness of the flies thus mirrors that of certain human beings.

Similarly, in Our Mutual Friend the humans who try to sponge on the newly acquired fortune of Mr and Mrs Boffin are referred to as – or what does at least sound like – insects: “behold Mr and Mrs Boffin established in the eminently aristocratic family mansion, and behold all manner of crawling, creeping, fluttering, and buzzing creatures, attracted by the gold-dust of the Golden Dustman!” (196). The ugly greediness of certain people is thus colourfully conveyed without Dickens actually mentioning money, or begging, or greed in so many words. And once again, the people in question are seen as an indiscriminate mass, who, although they may not be overtly threatening, are nevertheless up to no good. The same negative ring attaches to the following reference to “human bees” in Little Dorrit: “Pardon me, but I think you really have no idea how the human bees will swarm to the beating of any old tin kettle; in that fact lies the complete manual of governing them” (698), says a character called Ferdinand Barnacle apropos of all those people who were ruined due to their believing in the financial solidity of Mr Merdle and his businesses. Thus, when human beings are
portrayed as insects they seem to lose their individual characteristics and become either unmanageable and destructive, or easily manipulated, or – sometimes – simply annoying, if in a slightly creepy way, as when the suitors of attractive women are described as moths. When Mrs Skewton prepares an invitation list for the wedding of her daughter and Mr Dombey, she includes “a variety of moths of various degrees and ages, who had, at various times, fluttered round the light of her fair daughter, or herself, without any lasting injury to their wings” (*Dombey and Son* 596). And, in a similar vein, Estella in *Great Expectations* at one point refers to her admirers as “[m]oths, and all sorts of ugly creatures . . . [who] hover about a lighted candle” (294), thus clearly revealing her contempt of the men in question by animalising them. The association between insects and someone, or something, that is hard to ward off is a fairly frequent phenomenon in Dickens’s novels.

Incidentally, an example of an individual character being compared to an insect, and whom other characters have trouble warding off, is Quilp, the signally disagreeable, evil-minded dwarf in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, who, “finding himself unusually . . . near the ceiling, entertained a drowsy idea that he must have been transformed into a fly or blue-bottle in the course of the night” (371). Bluntness, stupidity, narrow-mindedness, and mindlessness, and sometimes even cruelty, are qualities that seem to characterise humans whom Dickens associates with insects, whether individual human characters or groups of people.

Another significant parallel between a group of human characters and animals is to be found in *Bleak House* with reference to the deprived people who live in Tom-All-Alone’s, a very poor part of London, and who are likened to vermin and maggots:

> Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As on the ruined human wretch vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in;
and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever and sowing . . . evil in its every footprint . . . (7)

These people are dehumanised in that they are reduced to an existence characterised by such social and economic misery that it is all about surviving and that does not allow them to fulfil their human potential, which might have deleterious consequences. As mentioned in the Method and Theory section, Beer comments on Dickens’s description of Tom-All-Alone’s, in her book *Darwin’s Plots*, and points out the analogy between Darwin’s interest in “broken and failing groups of organic beings” (Darwin, qtd. in Beer 42) and scenes like the above.

Rats are sometimes referred to as vermin, and in *A Tale of Two Cities* there is a (previously referred to) passage where “Monsieur the Marquis”, a haughty and heartless nobleman travelling the streets of Paris, views the people he passes by in his carriage as rats, that is, as indistinguishable creatures unworthy of individual attention or respect. This is an obvious case of the animalisation of human characters being seen as an excuse for maltreating them: the nobleman’s carriage happens to run over and kill a child, but he displays nothing but indifference to the tragic accident. Although a human character, Monsieur the Marquis is clearly devoid of the “divine spark”, that is, of empathy and humanity, and his perception of others as rats reflects most unfavourably on himself; in fact, you could almost say that the more he distances himself from people in the street, the more animalised, in the sense of dehumanised, does he himself appear. The word “rats” appears four times in this passage: “Monsieur the Marquis ran his eyes over them all, as if they had been mere rats come out of their holes” (94); “his contemptuous eyes passed over . . . all the . . . rats” (95); “The rats had crept out of their holes to look on” (95); and “the rats were sleeping close together in their dark holes again” (95). Only once does Dickens introduce the word “rats” in the shape of a simile; in the other three cases the use of the word is more stark, in that it is presented as a metaphor without any mitigating “as if”, that is, the people in question have literally become
rats in the eyes of the marquis. The fact that the perspective is that of the marquis is of course of crucial importance and leaves little doubt about what Dickens/the narrator himself thinks.

In *Little Dorrit* there is also a reference to poor people seen as rats, but this time the rats are children, in Covent Garden in London, and the reference has a completely different connotation or emotional charge: these “miserable children in rags, . . . like young rats” were seen by Amy Dorrit, also known as Little Dorrit, as they “slunk and hid, fed on offal, huddled together for warmth, and were hunted about” (158). However, the deeper significance of the animal image may not differ that much between the two novels/situations: the “rats” in *A Tale of Two Cities* are representative of the poor people who will soon rebel against and overthrow the French aristocracy, represented by Monsieur the Marquis, and with regard to the “rats” in the streets of London observed by Little Dorrit, the narrator makes the following comment: “look to the rats, young and old, all ye Barnacles, for before God they are eating away our foundations, and will bring the roofs on our heads” (158). The Barnacles mentioned in the quotation are a family that occupy many important posts in society in *Little Dorrit* in spite of being both incompetent and ruthless; like barnacles—a kind of parasitic crustacea – they make a living by exploiting others, by attaching themselves to other organisms, just as the aristocrats in revolutionary France were thought to exploit the poor people.

Furthermore, on one occasion beast-like groups of humans appear in the guise of a certain nationality, namely, the Americans, as described by Dickens in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Kincaid presents a very pertinent analysis of this strand of Dickens’s references to human animality, saying that, according to Dickens, America

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13. Interestingly, Darwin actually studied the barnacle; according to Jonathan Smith “he . . . devoted eight crucial years prior to the *Origin* to an exhaustive (and exhausting) taxonomic study of [this animal]” (327), and maybe Dickens had knowledge of this.
accelerates a tendency to the bestial, and the major warning of the book

[Martin Chuzzlewit] is that without the checks of tradition and culture, without
the selfhood firmly nurtured on civility and restraint, men become beasts . . .
The laughter evoked at the Americans expresses both a rejection of their
condition and a shoring up of the restraining inhibitions that protect us from
this animal state. . . . Dickens, for once, is solidly on the side of kindly
tolerance and social accommodation. We are led towards accepting this norm
by a brilliant evocation of America as a giant pigsty, a vision whose hilarity is
muted by a note of terror. . . . The Americans are beasts. (144-45)

An entire nation is, thus, likened to animals, without, however, Dickens specifying what kind
of animals he has in mind – merely human animals, that is, humans characterised by vulgarity
and a very thin veneer of civilisation and as such potentially threatening.

Even little boys, like David Copperfield and his classmates at the boarding school, Salem
House, take on an uncharitable aspect when acting and reacting in concert. Submerged in the
group, these boys are depicted as “miserable little dogs”, who laugh when the headmaster
makes a joke before beating up one of their classmates for being remiss (72), and whose mild-
mannered teacher Mr Mell cuts the figure of “a bull or a bear . . . baited by ten thousand
dogs” (76) when they disrupt his lessons. But though the boys are animalised, it is an
animalisation that does not run very deep but seems to be closely related to the fact the school
is a largely cheerless place, with little or no space for emotional development.

4.2 Parallels between Individual Human Characters and Animals

Although Dickens’s metaphorical use of animals is mainly pejorative, there are several
exceptions to this rule, such as those female (and a few male) characters who are compared to
small, delicate birds, or, for example, when Stryver and Sidney Carton – a lawyer and his
clerk, neither of whom is a bad character – in *A Tale of Two Cities*, are several times referred to as the lion and the jackal (though Sidney Carton turns out to be far less of a jackal, that is, a subordinate person,\(^\text{14}\) and much more of a lion, that is, someone who is in charge and has the power to act, than anyone ever suspected, when he, in an incredibly generous act of heroism, sacrifices his own life in order to save another man). With respect to Dickens’ animal metaphors, Meier remarks that “the implications of an animal-metaphor need not necessarily be negative, its function being merely to give a colourful and slightly humorous description of a character” and that “what [many such animal] metaphors have in common is the notion of harmless idiosyncracy which they attribute to the particular characters” (63). In this thesis, I have, however, opted to focus chiefly on the instances where animalisation implies some kind of condemnation, or at least critique, of the animalised character in question, that is, cases where the “divine spark” seems to have either waned considerably or gone out altogether.

Gilmour argues that Dickens’s animal imagery helps “identify those [characters] who represent a threat to the virtuous and vulnerable” and that “[b]estial imagery distinguishes those who are domestic, tame, and safe from those who are wild, uncontrolled, and dangerous” (*Animal Imagery* 8). An example of this is the repugnance that Arthur Clennam, Amy Dorrit, and young Mrs Gowan in *Little Dorrit* feel towards Blandois, whom they instinctively liken to a repulsive animal (see below). Their reaction is paralleled by other characters’ perception of other objectionable characters as animals, that is, there seems to be a tendency in Dickens’s novels whereby unpleasant characters appear in the guise of non-cuddly animals to those that are frightened or repulsed by them. This might be interpreted as a

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14. Cf the following entry from the *New World Encyclopedia*: “The expression ‘jackalling’ is sometimes used to describe the work done by a subordinate in order to save the time of a superior. (For example, a junior lawyer may peruse large quantities of material on behalf of a barrister.) This came from the tradition that the jackal will sometimes lead a lion to its prey.”
way of creating distance and establishing an insuperable divide between good and bad characters, thus in a way presenting a bad character as “the Other”. It is inevitably also a kind of simplification, a reduction of individuality, where a character is pared down to a number of forcefully brushed traits, some of which are reminiscent of the conventionally perceived characteristics of certain animals.

The more like an animal a character is, the more does he or she forfeit their stake in the companionship of their fellow man, and, what is more, they invariably get their comeuppance and meet with a tragic, or at least bad, end. Hugh in *Barnaby Rudge* is hanged, Carker in *Dombey and Son* is run over and crushed by a train, Mademoiselle Hortense in *Bleak House* will not escape her punishment for having murdered, Blandois in *Little Dorrit* dies when the Clennam house collapses with him inside, Madame Defarge in *A Tale of Two Cities* is stabbed to death, Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield* is imprisoned and will most likely be deported to Australia, etc. (These characters will be dealt with in more detail below.)

Moreover, the animals used to set off the personalities of the bad characters, as opposed to the good ones, are more or less wild and/or exotic depending on the degree of evil or unpleasantness. Thus, characters who are compared to dogs may be nasty (for example, Jeremiah Flintwinch, the cold and calculating butler-cum-business partner of Mrs Clennam in *Little Dorrit*, and who is at one point likened to a snappy dog: “‘No,’ said Mr Flintwinch very shortly and decidedly: much as if he were of the canine race, and snapped at Arthur’s hand” [643]) but they are not necessarily dangerous or seriously threatening, whereas characters who are said to have animal traits reminiscent of wilder animals, such as snakes, tigers, vultures, or wolves, or even nameless beasts, are often much more spine-chilling.

With regard to the reference to nameless beasts, one example is Squeers, the malevolent schoolmaster in *Nicholas Nickleby*, who, as Meier points out, “is likened to a wild beast” (64). Another conspicuous example is Bill Sikes in *Oliver Twist*; he ends up murdering his
companion Nancy, and has thereby become completely dehumanised and “so alienated from metropolitan morality that by the end of the novel he has moved beyond mere cruelty to become an animal himself and is referred to as the ‘wild beast,’” (Moore 204). Like so many of the other animalised characters, he, too, is “punished”: he involuntarily hangs himself.

Bill Sikes is a thief and a murderer. Do any of the other Dickensian characters who are compared to wild animals have a criminal record, or criminal propensities (or perhaps a touch of madness)? Fudge argues that “the animal is a powerful rhetorical category into which some humans – the mad, the criminal – are placed. Real animals are not the issue. . . . The opposition ‘men and beasts’ slides into the opposition of human and subhuman, and the animal disappears from view” (14). Similarly, Olson contends that “Dickens remains immured in discursive patterns common to his period that linked animalism with crime” and that “criminal [Dickensian] characters are troped as animals” (248). Characters that come to mind in this context are Orlick, who is something of a subhuman and tries to kill Pip; Uriah Heep, who besides being generally repulsive is also a traitor and a blackmailer; Blandois, who is a criminal (he has murdered his wife, among other crimes); Mademoiselle Hortense, who is a murdereress (and appears to have streaks of madness); Madame Defarge, who may not be mad, properly speaking, but who is a monomaniac in her urge to punish a whole class of people; and Carker, who turns out to be not only cruel and scheming but also a fraud, who has mismanaged Mr. Dombey’s company, and whose behaviour throughout appears to be that of a psychopath. All of those characters are compared to animals, but the animal imagery (in these cases mainly feline) seems to be chiefly a means of underlining their distance from other, good-natured, sane, and well-intentioned characters. Their animality is a sign of their departure from ordinary human decency, into a more animal, hence primitive, state, whether it is expressed in criminality or in cruelty to other people.
Meier’s contention that “[a]nimal metaphors become more alarming when they reflect the situation of a character who is treated like an animal by the other characters” (63) is hard to refute, but, as noted earlier, examples of this phenomenon are fairly rare in Dickens’s novels. It does, however, to some extent apply to a character called Hugh in *Barnaby Rudge*. Hugh is one of the characters in Dickens’s novels who are fairly consistently portrayed as animals, and according to Meier, he “is probably that Dickensian character who comes closest to the animal-like state” (63), without being, however, regularly compared to a specific species. He is a young ruffian who in the first part of *Barnaby Rudge* is employed as a hostler at the Maypole, an inn that plays a central role in the narrative, and he is on several occasions more or less explicitly compared to an animal. Sometimes characters in his surroundings term him so. When Meier highlights the fact that “there are a number of characters in [Dickens’s] novels who treat other characters like objects or animals, thereby depriving them of their human dignity” (88), she exemplifies this by quoting what she calls “the remarkable theory which John Willet [the innkeeper] develops with reference to Hugh” (63): “that chap that can’t read nor write, and has never had much to do with anything but animals, and has never lived in any way but like the animals he has lived among, is a *sic* animal. And’, said Mr. Willet, . . . ‘is to be treated accordingly’” (*Barnaby Rudge* 117-118).

On another occasion the innkeeper at the Maypole also says about Hugh that he is “more at his ease among horses than men. I look upon him as a *sic* animal himself” (115), rubbing it in a few pages later by claiming that Hugh is “quite a *sic* animal . . . If he has any soul at all . . . it must be such a very small one, that it don’t signify what he does or doesn’t in that way [namely, praying]” (130). Furthermore, Dennis, the hangman that Hugh joins during the riots in London, describes Hugh thus in order to recommend him as a fighter for the protestant cause: “He wants as much holding in as a thorough-bred bulldog” (445-6).
Sometimes Hugh behaves and reacts in a way that is directly reminiscent of the behaviour or reactions of an animal, as well as having a number of talents or skills that are likened to those of certain animals; he has, for example, “a sight as keen as any hawk’s, and, apart from that endowment, could have found his way blindfold to any place within a dozen miles” (341). Moreover, he is often said to growl, as in the following three examples: “Hugh, with much low growling and muttering, went back into his lair” (341); “you may be sure of that,’ growled Hugh in answer” (522); “Finishing this speech with a growl like the yawn of a wild beast, he stretched himself upon the bench again, and closed his eyes once more” (751). Thus, the very verbs that Dickens uses to describe him are sometimes verbs that usually apply to animals; this goes also for certain nouns, as can be seen in the first of the three quotations above, where Hugh retires to “his lair”. In the latter part of the novel, when Hugh takes an active, even leading, part in violent riots and thereby gets to display the animal aspects of his personality in a different setting, he even speaks of himself as follows: “You see what I am – more brute than man, as I have been often told” (784). Moreover, at one point, after having participated in a riot he says, “I’m . . . as full of ugly scratches as if I had been fighting all day yesterday with wild cats” (522), and there is an even more obvious animal reference when, in between their raids, he and his companion Dennis lie “wallowing, like some obscene animals, in their squalor and wickedness on the two heaps of straw” (524).

Right before, and during, the riots, when Hugh is made to cut a more prominent figure among the destructive rioters in London, he is also at least twice compared to, or compares himself to, a lion, an animal whose connotations of majesty and power would hardly have been in order in the first part of the novel when Hugh is still a very lowly servant, if seething with hostility and resentment: “My bark is nothing to my bite [he claims]. Some that I know, had better have a wild lion among ’em than me, when I am fairly loose – they had!” (403) and, once, after having “looked about him . . . [he] passed out with the gait of a lion” (781), in
which case it is the narrator who sees him in that light. There may be something impressive about a lion (Allen, when pointing out how many animals have been “epitomized by a single characteristic”, mentions “the majesty of the lion” [3]), but for the most part the animalisation of Hugh is hardly meant to be flattering.

In a way “the human/animal dichotomy in relation to savagery and civilisation” (150) discussed by Huggan and Tiffin could be said to be personified by Hugh (significantly, he does not have a last name). He is cast as the savage who does not fit in (he does not even live in the house where the other inmates of the inn live), and he somehow lives on the margins of a civilisation that he both rejects and is rejected by, and is seen and treated as an animal. He tries to get his revenge but is conquered, at least in one sense, in that the repressive powers of civilisation see to it that he is executed for his misdeeds. The offending animal is finally put down. Dickens does, however, point to a number of redeeming features, such as Hugh’s love of and particular connection with dogs, and his affection for, and perception of the innocence of, Barnaby (a young man who is a simpleton, but a simpleton with a big heart). Dickens also seems to want to give some kind of explanation of his lack of civilised behaviour, namely, his background as the illegitimate child of a gypsy servant – who was, as mentioned earlier, executed for petty theft when Hugh was still a child – and a heartless nobleman who has never acknowledged his fatherhood and who, significantly, calls him “my friend the centaur” (754), obviously perceiving him as not entirely human. In a sense the animalisation of Hugh makes him into a “grotesque”, that is, a character who is somehow larger than life and whose nature is set in the animal mould provided for him. On the other hand, the hard-edged animalisation is to some extent mitigated by the fact that the portrait that Dickens paints of him is not entirely devoid of nuances.

A question that arises is whether the fact that Hugh is of gypsy blood on his mother’s side possibly influences the description of him as less civilised and thus closer to the animal realm.
With regard to gypsies, Tara MacDonald quotes the nineteenth-century racial theorist Robert Knox, who compares them to “wild animals” (50). As far as I can tell, there are fairly few indications that Dickens entertained that kind of ethnic prejudice, but they seem to exist, for example, with respect to the background of Neville in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (see the section dealing with parallels between human characters and felines), and in *Oliver Twist*, where it is hard not to interpret the portrait of Fagin (who is animalised on a few occasions) as anti-Semitic.

In contrast to an interpretation of Dickens’s depictions of human and nonhuman animals according to which they could be seen as belonging to a continuum, or, in other words, to the same tree of life – to use a metaphor dear to Darwin (Beer 32-33) – an alternative interpretation might be made in light of what Thomas refers to as the “abiding urge to distinguish the human from the animal.” “For”, Thomas states, “if the essence of humanity was defined as consisting in some specific quality [such as compassion, or empathy], then it followed that any man who did not display that quality was subhuman, semianimal” (41). This could apply to quite a few Dickensian characters, perhaps above all to those that are consistently likened to animals, such as Carker in *Dombey and Son*, whose cat-like qualities are stressed throughout and serve to emphasise the diabolical nature of this character, as will be demonstrated more fully below. According to McMaster, the above-mentioned Hugh in *Barnaby Rudge* could also count as subhuman; he even claims that Hugh “embodies society’s subhuman animal ferocity, a potentiality that needs but the occasion to erupt” (355). Another significant case in point is Jo, the homeless streetsweep in *Bleak House* referred to earlier, who is often treated like an animal and who is also portrayed either like an animal-like creature or like a human being who is inferior both socially and mentally to certain animals, such as dogs, “his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish”¹¹⁵ (641). In the following

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¹¹⁵. Regarding the use of the verb *perish* in relation to the death of animals, see page 68.
quotation from page 221, the resemblance between Jo and an animal is made conspicuous and stark not least through the words “Jo and the other lower animals”:

> He [Jo] goes to his crossing, and begins to lay it out for the day. The town awakes; the great tee-totum is set up for its daily spin and whirl; all that unaccountable reading and writing, which has been suspended for a few hours, recommences. Jo and the other lower animals get on in the unintelligible mess as they can. It is market-day. The blinded oxen, over-goaded, over-driven, never guided, run into wrong places and are beaten out; and plunge red-eyed and foaming, at stone walls; and often sorely hurt the innocent, and often sorely hurt themselves. Very like Jo and his order; very, very like!

Allan Woodcourt, a young doctor who takes pity on Jo and tries to help him, reflects that “‘[i]t surely is a strange fact . . . that in the heart of a civilised world this creature in human form should be more difficult to dispose of than an unowned dog’” (636; emphasis added), and when the doctor has bought Jo some food and drink, Jo is said to be “looking anxiously about him in all directions as he eats and drinks, like a scared animal” (636). It would seem as if being like an animal, and also, by extension, being an animal, is, at least on one interpretation, synonymous with being vulnerable and unsure of belonging to the “civilised world”.

Jo is compared to an animal, and thus animalised, not because he is primitive in the sense of being brutal, but because he has been left to his own devices, abandoned by society and therefore never allowed to develop his humanity. In other words, if the “divine spark” is missing in him, it is through no fault of his own. Hugh, on the other hand, is portrayed as brutal and savage, but he has also been let down by society (McMaster goes so far as to say that Hugh represents “an indictment of the social order” [355]) and there is thus an explanation for his insensitive and on occasion cruel behaviour.
The most extreme example of a subhuman character in Dickens’s panoply of such characters is probably Orlick in *Great Expectations*. He is one of the characters that surround Pip, the protagonist of the novel, when he grows up. He is a so-called journeyman, that is, in this case, a blacksmith who is not yet a master, at the forge of Joe, Pip’s brother-in-law, and he is uncouth and primitive in a very different way from Jo and Hugh. Kreilkamp describes him as “a figure of ambiguous and amphibious animality who poses a particular threat in his metonymic relation to the oozy marshes of Pip’s upbringing, that site of primordial origins where – in this post-Darwinian novel – human identity may become indistinct, its boundaries blurred or undefined” (90).

Late in the novel, Orlick lures Pip, who has now become a gentleman, into a trap and threatens to murder him, and in the course of that scene various references are made to animals. Orlick is said to have a “mouth snarling like a tiger’s” (402) and is likened to a “tiger crouching to spring” (404). Furthermore, he addresses Pip as “wolf” (403, 405) and promises to “kill [him] like any other beast” (403). According to Kreilkamp, who presents an extended analysis of the whole scene in question, “Orlick’s attack on Pip foregrounds the problem of human-animal resemblance and constitutes a terrifying fulfillment of Pip’s deepest fear: that he will disappear and be forgotten or mis-remembered like a dog” (91), and he claims that “Orlick’s revenge may be seen as a revenge of the animality that has always been defined as the abjected other of the human” (91). This revenge aborts, however, as Pip is saved by his friends. But the fear of death and of “a form of dehumanization, an annihilation so complete that it would prevent any true memory of Pip to outlive him” (91) that Orlick raises in Pip is itself a kind of revenge in that it reduces Pip himself to being an animal, not only in the eyes of Orlick but also, in a way, in his own eyes, as he is, using Kreilkamp’s words, swept “into a realm of mute, helpless animality” (92).
In summary, in Dickens’s novels animality as helplessness and extreme vulnerability (a phenomenon evident also in his numerous parallels between vulnerable female characters and small birds) seems to contrast with animality as brutality, and lack, or loss, of empathy.

Parallels between Human Characters and Specific Animals, with a Focus on Felines

Singularly unpleasant characters are often compared to animals that carry unmistakably negative connotations in Dickens’s store of animal imagery. Animals frequently used to portray such unpleasant individual characters are reptiles/snakes, vultures and other birds of prey, rats, small and big cats, foxes, wolves, and sometimes crabs, and other shellfish, fish (in general, or specified fish, such as sharks), leeches, snails, and spiders. Even objectionable features or behaviour in otherwise nice characters are every now and then described by means of those animals, as when David Copperfield compares himself to a spider in relation to his young wife Dora (556, 568). The odd dog crops up as well in unfavourable character portraits, but overall there seems to be some kind of hierarchy even among the animals in Dickens’s fictional menagerie, in that certain animals almost invariably symbolise evil, sneakiness, and other negative qualities, whereas other animals – such as small, non-predatory birds, horses, donkeys, ponies, and, to a large extent, dogs – tend to come in for a more lenient literary treatment. In Meier’s words, “[a]nimal metaphors . . . are used with exceeding frequency for the villains in Dickens’s novels” and “[n]ot surprisingly, it is predatory beasts that appear in this context” (64). A colourful example in point is Mr Smallweed, who is “a leech in his dispositions, . . . , a snake in his twistings, and a lobster in his claws” ([Bleak House] [473]), though he is, admittedly, also described as “an ugly old bird of the crow species” (36) and “a monkey” (373).
Among characters who are compared to snakes, there is Fagin, the evil fence in *Oliver Twist*, whom his partner in crime Bill Sikes calls “a wiper [that is, viper]” (350), and who, gliding “stealthily along [at night, in the streets of London] . . . seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved” (186). Other examples of characters being likened to snakes are the Murdstones, that is, David Copperfield’s cruel stepfather and his sister, whose “influence . . . upon [David] . . . was like the fascination of two snakes on a wretched young bird” (43), and Mrs Pipchin, a mercenary boarding-house owner in *Dombey and Son*, in whose “hard grey eye” there “is a snaky gleam” (972). Furthermore, in *Little Dorrit*, Amy and young Mrs Gowan “felt towards Blandois of Paris . . . an aversion amounting to the repugnance and horror of a natural antipathy towards an odious creature of the reptile kind” (482). Similarly, when the same Blandois is engaged in “making cigarettes” his fingers are perceived by Arthur Clennam, one of the main, and good, characters in *Little Dorrit*, as snakes: “There had been something dreadful in the noiseless skill of his cold, white hands, with the fingers lithely twisting about and twining one over another like serpents. Clennam could not prevent himself from shuddering inwardly, as if he had been looking on a nest of those creatures” (708). Yet another character, namely, Steerforth in *David Copperfield* – who is perhaps painted in more variegated colours than other bad characters but who is nevertheless heartless – is at one point referred to as “that theer [sic] spotted snake” (592), though not by David himself but by a character called Mr Peggotty.

The particular vileness associated with snakes also applies to another character in *David Copperfield*, namely, Uriah Heep, who displays “snaky twistings of . . . throat and body” (192). Uriah Heep is in fact one of the most villainous characters in all of Dickens’s novels, and he is likened to several other animals as well, all of which are apparently meant to emphasise his objectionable characteristics. For example, when David and Agnes are having a
conversation before her departure in a coach, Uriah “hover[s] about [them] without a moment’s intermission, like a great vulture: gorging himself on every syllable” they utter (313). He is also, and his hands in particular, compared to a fish (192, 468), and at one point, when “reading a great fat book . . . his lank forefinger followed up every line as he read, and made clammy tracks along the page . . . like a snail” (190), imagery that very graphically underscores the unappetising aspects of this character. Other animals that he is compared to are: “an Ape” (421), an eel (422), “a red fox” (423), a bat (466), and “a malevolent baboon” (467). In addition, Mr Micawber claims that “his appearance is foxy; not to say diabolical” (576). A whole avalanche of animal comparisons is, thus, heaped on Uriah, all of them highlighting what the narrator perceives as his cold-hearted, calculating, and sneaky nature as well as his repulsive exterior. There is definitely no divine spark in sight; Uriah is thoroughly and unmistakably bad.

The same goes for the previously overweening character called Carker who, towards the end of Dombey and Son, is “[s]purned like any reptile” and “entrapped and mocked; turned upon, and trodden down by the proud woman whose mind he had slowly poisoned, as he thought, until she had sunk into the mere creature of his pleasure”, so that “undeceived in his deceit, and with his fox’s hide stripped off, he sneaked away, abashed, degraded, and afraid” (894). He is also, in the course of the novel, compared to a wolf (428), a shark (356), a monkey (279), a hyena (279) and, above all, a cat (which I will say more about below).

Apart from comparisons between disagreeable characters and various negatively charged animal species, parallels are sometimes drawn between human characters and individual animals, usually pets. Examples of the latter are the parallels between David Copperfield’s childish young wife Dora and her lapdog Jip, Florence and the “rough and gruff” (Dombey and Son [298]) but very affectionate dog called Diogenes, and Bill Sikes and Bull’s-eye, his bad-tempered and aggressive canine companion (in Oliver Twist). The pets in question may,
at least to some extent, be seen as invested with symbolic meaning, or as mirrors of, or “foils to” (Nelson 1), their owners. Bill Sikes is probably, however, the only one among the Dickensian dog owners who could be said to be truly animalised by Dickens, as he loses more and more of his humanity in the course of the novel, even if Dora’s childishness and naïve irresponsibility in a sense put her on a level with her dog (Moore speaks of Jip as “an alter-ego for the giddy, girlish young Dora” [206]). The artificiality, vapidity, and emotional barrenness of Mrs Merdle in Little Dorrit is, likewise, illustrated by the interaction between her and her pet parrot, which constitutes a telling metonymic relationship between a human and a nonhuman character.

In the following, I will give some more illustrative examples of characters who are animalised in various degrees but who are either likened (through metaphor or simile) to, or, in some cases, juxtaposed and thereby closely associated with, one specific species, namely, felines. The reason I have chosen to focus on felines is twofold. First of all, felines could be said to represent one pole on a scale of animalisation going from power, stealth, and violence to vulnerability, innocence, and sweetness, the other pole being often represented by characters that are likened to, or associated with, small birds. Secondly, parallels between various kinds of felines and human characters are not only fairly frequent in Dickens’s novels but they are also often particularly vivid and charged with powerful negative associations that make them stand out.

According to Ritvo, in nineteenth-century England “[t]he most frequently and energetically vilified domestic animal was the cat” who was considered “deceitful” and “[u]nnervingly similar . . . to its most ferocious wild relatives” (The Animal Estate 21-22). Consequently, Dickens seems to have assimilated a fairly generalised adverse view of cats. An additional

16. A previous version of this thesis included a section devoted to avian imagery in Dickens’s novels, but it had to be cut out for reasons of length.
noteworthy aspect is that several of the characters that he compares to aggressive, wild cats are female, which may be linked to what Philip Armstrong calls “the conventional association between femininity and feral animal agency” (94), though this is by no means an all-pervasive aspect of Dickens’s feline imagery and should be viewed in light of the fact that the most consistently cat-like character in Dickens’s panoply of human cats, namely, Carker, is male.

Apart from ordinary cats, the tiger is the most common feline in Dickensian metaphors and similes, often symbolising aggression and (ruthless) violence, or at least a strongly hostile set of mind. Human characters who are compared to tigers are colourful, intense, often dangerous, and threatening but – in some cases – also exotic and perhaps even a tad exciting. Thus, though human characters who are compared to any kind of feline are rarely likeable or good-natured, they do, however, often have strong, assertive personalities. It is as if the dislike, or at least wariness, of cats that seems to be manifested in Dickens’s use of this animal in relation to disagreeable, and sometimes even scary, characters, is coupled with some kind of fascination. There may even be a hint of racism in Dickens’s association of tiger blood with characters who are of foreign extraction, an aspect that I will return to below.

Among felines, the lion seems to be set apart, however. Although lions are mentioned in connection with a ruffian like Hugh and a scoundrel like Blandois, Dickens appears to harbour a respect for the king of animals that he does not have for other cats. This could perhaps be related to “the bestiary tradition” that, says Ritvo, “elevated the lion and other emblems of desirable human qualities” (The Animal Estate 34).

Fagin, the vile character (a “black-hearted wolf” [400]) from Oliver Twist mentioned above, is at one point termed “the lynx-eyed Fagin” (356), and Quilp in The Old Curiosity Shop is said to be as “[w]atchful as a lynx” (355). This may well be a reference that is not particularly weighty or significant, since to be lynx-eyed is simply to have very good eyesight. Nevertheless, a lynx is a wildcat, and since all kinds of cats seem to come in for a
rough literary treatment in Dickens’s novels, it may not be far-fetched to assume that there is a connection between Fagin’s and Quilp’s evil natures and their having the eyes of a lynx.

Evil intentions, falsity, and sneakiness are often linked to cats in Dickens’s novels, which may be seen as a kind of stereotype (see quotation from Baker in the section dealing with animal imagery). Whether the age-old association between cats and evil, in the shape of, for example, the devil, witches, and black magic, underlies Dickens’s seemingly negative attitude to cats is hard to tell. But there is a hint of this in the following passage from *Dombey and Son*:

> Mrs Pipchin had an old black cat, who generally lay coiled upon the centre foot of the fender, purring egotistically, and winking at the fire until the contracted pupils of his eyes were like two notes of admiration. The good old lady might have been – not to record it disrespectfully – a witch, and Paul and the cat her two familiars, as they all sat by the fire together. (125)

Mrs Pipchin is not, however, an outright evil character; she is merely not very nice, being incapable of tender feelings for the children that are confided to her and more interested in financial gain than anything else.

The negative charge that Dickensian cats seem to be invested with obviously applies not only to the use of cats in metaphors and similes but also metonymically, when they appear in the guise of actual pets, as they are practically always the pets of less palatable characters, such as Mrs Pipchin.

Other unpleasant characters that are either likened to, or associated with, cats are Mr Vholes and Mr Krook in *Bleak House*. In the case of Mr Vholes, a grasping, chillingly insensitive (“without a human passion or emotion in his nature” [820]) legal adviser/lawyer, Dickens uses the behaviour of his pet cat, or at least the office cat, to illustrate Mr Vholes’s

17. Writing about French folklore, Robert Darnton states that “cats suggested witchcraft” (92).
character and intentions. The reader’s mind is prepared for the interpretation of the scene with
the literal yet symbolic cat by a passage where Mr Vholes is said to look at Richard, his client
in the Jarndyce vs Jarndyce case (which will eventually wear Richard down and lead to his
premature death), “as if he were looking at his prey and charming it” (535), even if this
animalisation need not refer to a cat, but could of course refer to, for example, a snake, as
well. Then, later on in the novel, while the ever courteous but heartless Mr Vholes is dealing
with Richard, the presence of a cat and its intense watch of a mouse hole could be seen as
mirroring and symbolising, or serving as a parallel to, what Mr Vholes is up to, without the
writer having to spell it out: “Mr Vholes, after glancing at the official cat who is patiently
watching a mouse’s hole, fixes his charmed gaze again on his young client” (551) and “[a]ll
the while, Vholes’s official cat watches the mouse’s hole” (554). Mr Vholes wants to squeeze
as much money as possible out of his client, and he succeeds in his evil intent, just as the cat
probably ends up sinking its teeth into the mouse. In fact, the metonymic relation between Mr
Vholes and the cat appears to make them almost identified one with the other.

The same goes for Mr Krook, a malicious old rag-and-bone man, who is illiterate (and thus
perhaps even more on a par with an animal), and his pet cat, Lady Jane. This cat, with whom
Mr Krook “might have changed eyes . . . as he cast his sharp glance around” (139-140), has
“tigerish claws” (52) whose tearing power her master has her demonstrate to visitors in order
to scare them, and she gives the impression of being as vile as her master. Esther, one of the
main characters in, and also the occasional narrator of, Bleak House, says that Mr. Krook
“looked so disagreeable, and his cat looked so wickedly at [her], as if [Esther] were a blood-
relation of the birds upstairs” (57), that is, as if she were a potential tidbit. Mr Krook and his
cat could perhaps be seen as two manifestations of the same, or at least a similar, spirit, which
might justify regarding Krook as animalised by Dickens, although he is only once (see above)
expressly compared to a cat. Susan McHugh points out how “animals can [sometimes]
function as ‘demonic’ or menacing figures” (13), and the very presence, as well as the 
behaviour, of the cat may serve to demonise, or compound the demonic traits of Mr Krook. 
Lady Jane’s reaction on her master’s sudden death through spontaneous combustion is strong 
and, it seems to me, redolent of the diabolical:

‘Look here,’ says Tony, recoiling. ‘Here’s that horrible cat coming in!’ Mr. 
Guppy retreats behind a chair. ‘Small told me of her. She went leaping and 
bounding and tearing about, that night, like a Dragon, and got out on the house-
top, and roamed about up there for a fortnight, and then came tumbling down 
the chimney very thin. Did you ever see such a brute? Looks as if she knew all 
about it, don’t she? Almost looks as if she was Krook. Shoohoo! Get out, you 
goblin!’ Lady Jane, in the doorway, with her tiger-snarl from ear to ear, and her 
club of a tail, shows no intention of obeying; but Mr. Tulkinghorn stumbling 
over her, she spits at his rusty legs, and swearing wrathfully, takes her arched 
back upstairs. (560)

Her master’s shady affairs as well as the less than clear consciences of Tony, Mr Guppy, and 
Mr Tulkinghorn (who are involved in those affairs), are somehow reflected in the behaviour 
and attitude of the cat, who, as we have seen, “[a]lmost looks as if she was Krook”. Nelson 
calls her “the animal mirror of the bad individual” (23-24). But perhaps Lady Jane, who is 
anything but submissive and refuses to obey when humans other than her master want to 
chase her away, could be considered a representative of the animal/pet who is not “just a 
mirror, reflecting back our gaze with no autonomy” (Garrard 139), who is in fact a rebellious 
pet and not “domesticated, broken in, trained, docile, disciplined, tamed” (Derrida 39), who is 
in other words “the seeing animal” that Derrida refers to (14). Perhaps being “seen seen by 
the animal” (Derrida 13) is what makes the cat scary to the above-mentioned characters. On
the other hand, Lady Jane could also be considered in another light, namely, as an example of an anthropomorphised cat whose reactions and behaviour reflect those of human characters.

Just like *Bleak House*, the novel *Dombey and Son* is mainly set in London and this is where we find Carker, who is a conspicuous example of an obnoxiously feline character. When the narrator says about him that “he was ready for a spring, or for a tear, or for a scratch, or for a velvet touch, as the humour took him and occasion served” (367), we may, as readers, get a hint of the reason for Dickens’s apparent aversion to cats (though he did at one point have a pet cat [Schlicke 459]); he may have seen them as unreliable and capricious, properties that are usually not associated with dogs, for instance, and dogs, at least actual, individual dogs, seem to find much more favour with Dickens. Carker, repulsive and coldly manipulative, is on several occasions, and not only in passing but quite extensively and colourfully, likened to a cat – often with reference to his mouth and his insincere smile:

> Mr Carker was a gentleman thirty-eight or forty years old, . . . with two unbroken rows of glistening teeth, whose regularity and whiteness were quite distressing. It was impossible to escape the observation of them, for he showed them whenever he spoke; and bore so wide a smile upon his countenance (a smile, however, very rarely, indeed, extending beyond his mouth), that there was something in it like the snarl of a cat. (204)

Almost whenever this character is in focus there is one or several explicit references to cats, particularly with regard to his mouth, but also in connection with the character as a whole: “feline from sole to crown was Mr Carker” (352). Employed as manager of Mr Dombey’s originally successful and then crumbling company, he maintains a sleek, ingratiating façade but is an evil schemer at heart. His outward neatness and cleanliness (he has “a natural antipathy to any speck of dirt” [352]) is compared to that of a cat in a way that denotes a much less clean inside. These observations are confirmed by Meier, who points out that
“[o]ne of the finest examples of animal-metaphors is to be found in *Dombey and Son*; it refers to Mr. Carker . . . The analogy between Mr. Carker and a cat is particularly apt to intimate the cunning falsity of that character; the metaphor reappears throughout the novel in a *leitmotif* manner” (64). Though well aware of the association between Carker and feline characteristics, Gilmour, somewhat surprisingly, claims that “the shark imagery recurs most frequently” (*Animal Imagery* 12-13), something that I contest, as Carker is only once explicitly compared to a shark and then rather more in passing.

A writer who does concur with Meier regarding the consistent association between Carker and feline characteristics is McMaster, who also introduces a different interpretation of the animalisation of Carker, implying that it “suggest[s] . . . his sensuality” (358) and emphasises his “sinister sexual vitality” (357). Such an analysis is supported by Gilmour, as well as by John Reed, who argues that “Carker’s preference for the voluptuous [is] stressed throughout the text by various means, including the association of Carker with cats” (8). Animality as a sign of heightened erotic propensities is “a commonplace trope in literature” (Gilmour, *Animal Imagery* 11), and “the cat as a sexual metaphor” (Darnton 95) is not that uncommon a phenomenon. But this is not a theme that will be explored in depth in this thesis, not least because “[o]n sexual subjects, Dickens was notoriously . . . evasive, and his novels . . . avoid displays of adult sexuality” (Lonoff 156). Overt evasion of a subject need not, of course, prevent a veiled, hidden presence of the subject in question. Thus, it may well be that hints of (excessive?) sexuality are present “sotto voce” in other instances of animalised characters in Dickens’s novels. In this context McMaster refers to Hugh in *Barnaby Rudge*, who is at one point described as “a handsome satyr” (212), and to Quilp, the evil dwarf and “salamander” (171) in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, “whose imagery is more consistently demonic than animal”

18. This quotation is taken from a context dealing with French folklore but could, I believe, be applied to an English context as well. Cf the use of the word *pussy* for female genitals (Darnton 95).
(358) but whose nature, according to McMaster, “reveals the same streak of sinister sexuality [as Carker]” (359). Furthermore, regarding Uriah Heep, one of the most animalised characters in Dickens’s novels, MacDonald writes that his body is “presented as sexually threatening” (49). Here it may also be relevant to mention the fact that the Marquis St. Evrémonde in *A Tale of Two Cities*, who is described as having tigerish traits (see pages 63-64), has been implicated in a rape.

The tiger (sometimes referred to as “man-eater”; see Schell 246) seems to carry slightly different connotations than other felines in Dickens’s metaphorical menagerie. Although unreliable like the cat, as well as dangerous and threatening, in that it is bursting with potential violence, the image of the tiger also appears to have an element of piquancy, and exoticism. Most of the time a character who is like a tiger is scary, it would seem, as well as reprehensible and bad. There is hardly anything exotic or exciting about Orlick in *Great Expectations*, for example; with his tigerish snarl (402) he is merely brutal and primitive (and on one occasion he is even said to be a “human dormouse” [219], a characteristic that appears fairly harmless and unexciting). This does not, however, apply to Neville Landless, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. He comes from Ceylon, is dark-skinned (61) and hot-headed and on a few occasions likened to an animal, in particular a tiger, although he is on the whole presented as a likeable character. There was something untamed about them both [Neville and his sister]; a certain air upon them of hunter and huntress; yet withal a certain air of being the objects of the chase, rather than the followers. Slender, supple, quick of eye and limb; half shy, half defiant; fierce of look; an indefinable kind of pause coming and going on their whole expression, both of face and form, which might be equally likened to the pause before a crouch, or a bound. (61)
In this passage the comparison with a tiger is not explicit, but possibly hinted at in certain words, such as “supple”, “fierce”, “crouch”, and “bound”. At a later stage, Neville himself relates that he and Edwin Drood “quarrelled” and that Edwin “heated that tigerish blood I told you of to-day” (86), after having told Mr Crisparkle, his mentor, earlier that “I have been brought up among abject and servile dependants, of an inferior race, and I may easily have contracted some affinity with them. Sometimes, I don’t know but that it may be a drop of what is tigerish in their blood” (68). Another character (John Jasper) latches on to this and says: “It was horrible. There is something of the tiger in his dark blood” (88). Neville even at one point thinks of himself, or at least feels himself treated as “a dangerous animal” (85), when he is “bolted and barred out” (85) of John Jasper’s house, after the quarrel between him and Jasper’s nephew.

Several other characters are compared to tigers. Some of those characters are fairly minor, such as Alice, a young woman in *Dombey and Son* who has been ill used by Carker (whose mistress she was at one point) and craves revenge. Though not a foreigner, she nevertheless has something of a foreign streak, as she is back from exile in Australia. Moreover, like some other human cats in Dickens’s novels, she is dark and intense, brimming with bitterness. “I might as well call your face only angry, when you think or talk about ’em [that is, other characters that Alice resents]”, says her mother, Mrs Brown, and the narrator goes on to comment that “[i]t was something different from that, truly, as she sat as still as a crouched tigress, with her kindling eyes” (845).

Mademoiselle Hortense, a lady’s maid in *Bleak House*, mirrors Alice in being a hot-tempered, fiery, dark-haired young woman who thinks herself ill-used and cannot wait to get her own back and punish all those by whom she feels slighted (mainly the unrelenting lawyer Tulkinghorn, whom she murders, and Lady Dedlock, her former mistress, who has dismissed her). The fact that she is dark and an “intemperate foreigner” (738) is emphasised by the
narrator, which ties in with at least two other Dickensian human cats, namely, above all
Madame Defarge in *A Tale of Two Cities* (more about her below) and Blandois in *Little
Dorrit*. Incidentally, like a number of other characters who are compared to felines in
Dickens’s novels, for example, the above-mentioned Carker in *Dombey and Son*, and
Blandois (whose “infernal smile” [728] is in evidence on several occasions), Mademoiselle
Hortense smiles out of context, that is, when no smile is called for, in an eminently unpleasant
and humourless way (“a smile of scorn” [737]), something that Dickens seems to associate
with felines. She is even said to have “a certain feline mouth” (158) and “a tigerish expansion
thereabouts” (589). Animal-like, she has trouble controlling her violent reactions, especially
when exposed to disappointments as well as to slights and accusations. Bucket is the detective
who has found her out and “Mademoiselle, with that tigerish expansion of the mouth, and her
black eyes darting fire upon him, sits upright on the sofa in a rigid state, with her hands
clenched – and her feet too, one might suppose – muttering, ‘O, you Bucket, you are a
Devil!’” (738). The animality of Hortense is, furthermore, brought to the fore in the following
interchange between her and Bucket (whose wife has been instrumental in exposing her):

‘Where,’ she asks him, darkening her large eyes until their drooping lids
almost conceal them – and yet they stare, ‘where is your false, your treacherous
and cursed wife?’ ‘She’s gone forrard [sic] to the Police Office,’ returns Mr.
Bucket. ‘You’ll see her there, my dear.’ ‘I would like to kiss her!’ exclaims
Mademoiselle Hortense, panting tigress-like. ‘You’d bite her, I suspect,’ says
Mr. Bucket. ‘I would!’ making her eyes very large. ‘I would love to tear her,
limb from limb.’ (742)

It seems likely that the tiger’s man-eating reputation has something to do with the last line.

Rosa Dartle in *David Copperfield* is not explicitly compared to a tiger, but she has “the
fury of a wild cat” (355) and she resembles other cat-like female Dickensian characters in
being dark as well as “fierce and passionate” (352) with “lightning eyes” (653) characterised by “their hungry lustre” (351). She is the companion of Mrs Steerforth (that is, the mother of Steerforth, David’s deceitful friend) and has a fraught relation to Steerworth who has “trifled with” (654) and spurned her but whom she appears to hate and love at the same time. Though verbally aggressive, she is not portrayed as an evil, but rather a pained, pitiful character, who frightens David, however, and appears to him to “lie in wait for something” (350) and who later on does make an attack of sorts, not on him but on her “rival,” Emily. Like Hortense, Carker, and Blandois, Rosa smiles and laughs in the humourless way that Dickens apparently connects with felines.

There are, however, no smiles at all on the face of another sinister female character who is compared to a tiger, or rather a tigress, and who thirsts for blood, during the French Revolution, namely, the above-mentioned Madame Defarge (in A Tale of Two Cities).

“[I]mbued from her childhood with a brooding sense of wrong, and an inveterate hatred of a class, opportunity had developed her into a tigress. She was absolutely without pity” (309). The tigress image is fleshed out with the statement that “[i]t was nothing to her, that an innocent man [Charles Darnay] was to die . . . that his wife [Lucie née Manette] was to be made a widow and his daughter an orphan . . . , because they were her natural enemies and her prey” (309). Madame Defarge is utterly ruthless in her craving for revenge (her family having once been badly maltreated by aristocrats) and devotes her life to the extermination of all those she deems guilty, whether directly or indirectly, of the misdeeds that her family were victims of in the past. Her behaviour is also at one point compared to that of an ordinary cat, when a man was about to be hanged from a streetlamp and she, having held onto him by means of a rope, “let him go – as a cat might have done to a mouse – and silently and composedly looked at him while they made ready [to have him hanged]” (192). The apparent
cruelty of cats with regard to their prey seems to have made a strong impression on Dickens, as this is a recurrent image. But it is of course also a conventional image.

Madame Defarge is not the only character in *A Tale of Two Cities* who is referred to as a tiger. So is the Marquis St. Evrémonde. Meier draws attention to the comparison between this character and a tiger, adding that “[t]he effect of the simile is strengthened and the tiger-like qualities in the Marquis are inextricably connected with his character by Dickens’s suggestion that like a figure in a fairy tale he is wont to change at random into a tiger” (64). And by way of illustration she quotes the following passage from the novel: “Rustling about the room, his softly-slippered feet making no noise on the floor, he moved like a refined tiger: - looked like some enchanted marquis of the impenitently wicked sort, in story, whose periodical change into tiger form was either just going off, or just coming on” (*A Tale of Two Cities* [107]). This would seem to suggest that animality is something a character could choose to assume, or perhaps display, or not, at will; as if he or she could don or remove the cloak of civilisation. I do not, however, have the impression that this is how Dickens normally portrays the characters that he likens to animals; it is rather, or so it seems to me, as if their animality seeps out and shows, in spite of their efforts to hide the murky, that is, animal, sides of their nature. This phenomenon is on display elsewhere in *A Tale of Two Cities* as well, when a large amount of red wine has accidentally been spilled on a street and “[t]hose who had been greedy . . . had acquired a tigerish smear about the mouth; and one tall joker so besmirched. . . scrawled upon a wall with his finger dipped in muddy wine-lees – BLOOD” (25). Greediness and blood thirst have the face of a tiger.

**Blandois in *Little Dorrit***, who is something of a caricature of evil, is compared to more than one type of cat. Only once is he expressly likened to a tiger, and the comparison is actually made by himself: he “chinked the money, weighed it in his hand, threw it up a little way and caught it, chinked it again. ‘The sound of it, to the bold Rigaud Blandois, is like the
taste of fresh meat to the tiger [he says]” (727). He is twice compared to a lion, however, first when he is in prison in France (see above) and then, further into the novel, when he is in England and claims to be “a gentleman of the softest and sweetest disposition, but who, if trifled with, becomes enraged. I possess a noble nature. [A statement that the reader of course knows to be utterly false.] When the lion is awakened – that is to say, when I enrage – the satisfaction of my animosity is as acceptable to me as money” (726). On both occasions the presumed likeness between Blandois and a lion is presented in such a way as to diminish him rather than the opposite. Furthermore, in line with his own characterisation of himself as a cat, two pages later Mrs Clennam addresses her antagonist (Blandois tries to blackmail her) thus: “It is better to be torn to pieces at a spring than to be a mouse at the caprice of such a cat” (728). Finally, Blandois is at one point very closely associated with ordinary cats: on his way to his mother’s house, in the evening, Arthur Clennam catches sight of Blandois standing against the iron railings of the little waste enclosure, looking up at those windows, and laughing to himself. Some of the many vagrant cats who were always prowling about there by night, and who had taken fright at him, appeared to have stopped when he had stopped, and were looking at him with eyes by no means unlike his own from tops of walls and porches, and other safe points of pause. (513)

The fact that their eyes are like his eyes, and the other way around, is no doubt a telling piece of information, in light of Dickens’s frequent use of felines, or what he seems to see as feline characteristics, in his depiction of certain odious characters.

The tiger is of course an exotic animal in an English setting, and it may not be a coincidence that a number of those Dickensian characters who are at some point compared to tigers/tigresses are not English but either French (Mademoiselle Hortense, Madame Defarge, Blandois, the Marquis St. Evrémonde) or, in the case of Neville, from Ceylon, or, finally, from an unspecified foreign country, as the servant of a character referred to as the Major and
who is simply called “the Native,” in *Dombey and Son*, and said to be “tigerish in his drink” (526) at a wedding party. This suggested connection between foreign extraction and resemblance to a tiger is not wholly consistent, however, as Orlick in *Great Expectations*, though likened to a tiger, is, as far as I know, as English as Pip himself.

Commenting on popular beliefs about affinities and even blood relations between animals and humans, as well as about the link between “inferior races” and animals, Thomas writes that “as the difference between men and animals ceased to appear an absolute one, polygenism became increasingly attractive. It preserved the superiority of Europeans by showing that it was ‘the lower rank of men’ which . . . was closest to ‘the higher kind of animals’” (136). Another assumption that existed in Dickens’s time was that “[o]ther races. . . could actually contaminate the English” (MacDonald 60). Neville Landless apparently counts as a European, although he has been raised in Ceylon,19 and the temperamental side of his personality is attributed to his association with the natives of Ceylon in a way that is likely to make modern readers raise their eyebrows in wonder but that goes unchallenged in the novel and seems to confirm what Fudge refers to as the “imperialist belief in the lesser humanity of the non-English” (10). Furthermore, according to MacDonald, “a key tenet [of “Victorian racial discourses”] was the privileging of English self-discipline as compared to the loss of control exhibited in ‘other’ races” (50), and the fact that the aggressivity displayed by Neville is branded as tigerish seems to fit this statement perfectly. This also ties in with what Olson writes about “the trope of the animal as Other” (244), which she claims is “a pervasive historical pattern” and which is frequently highlighted by ecocritics, who “seek to examine how metaphors of nature . . . [and by extension of animals] are used and abused” (Howarth 81).

19. His last name – Landless – is undoubtedly significant.
To sum up, apart from Neville Landless, it would seem as if all of the characters who are compared to felines are depicted as egotistical, insensitive, and devoid of empathy. They are not necessarily aggressive or violent, though that is often the case, but they are heartless and consequently seemingly less blessed by the “divine spark” that would, in Dickens’s eyes, mark them as humans rather than animals. Furthermore, does the fact that a character is compared to a feline, in the cases where this image is fairly consistent, indicate a unidimensional personality of the kind often associated with Dickens’s gallery of characters? I would contend that it does. There seems to be little leeway, or scope for development or change, for a Dickensian character who is bound up with the conventional image of a certain animal. Carker is a feline, and a nasty one at that, and virtually all his actions are presented in the light of that characteristic. Considering, however, the overabundance of references to cats and cat-like behaviour or appearance in the case of Carker, he does perhaps overshoot the conventional image of a cat-like figure and in that sense explodes the limits imposed on a type. As mentioned earlier, in the Method and Theory section, such a reading ties in with Levine’s contention that “although Dickens’s characters seem to be ‘types’, they are atypical in their excesses” (Darwin 150). What is more, presenting a character as a “grotesque” rather than a type is, according to Levine, “very much in the Darwinian mode” (150). Darwin did not believe in types; he did in fact have an “urge to move beyond the typical”, and perhaps one of the reasons he was keen on Dickens (Levine, Darwin 120, Beer 6) was that Dickens’s fictional world is filled with “eccentrics, variations from the norm” (Levine, Darwin 149). Thus, although Dickens in many respects appears to be an essentialist with regard to character portrayals, a link may be established between him and the least essentialist of thinkers.

5 Hierarchy or Continuum?
At one point in *David Copperfield* the narrator states that “there is a subtlety of perception in real attachment, even when it is borne towards man by one of the lower animals, which leaves the highest intellect behind” (509). Remarkably enough, in view of the wording, this seems to refer not to a nonhuman animal, but to Mr Dick, the very kind and sweet-tempered but intellectually disabled companion of the narrator’s aunt Betsy. Thus, even a kind-hearted human character may be seen as an animal of sorts in Dickens’s world view, in spite of much evidence to the contrary (once again, small birds excepted). The fact that the expression “lower animals” is used appears to indicate that a human being need not invariably count among the highest of animals; certain requirements seem to be needed in order for a human being to perch on the highest rung of the Dickensian human-animal hierarchy, insofar as the term hierarchy is appropriate. Are we to understand that Mr Dick is lacking in the aforementioned “divine spark”, in that although he is all goodness his intellectual deficiencies put him on a par with intellectually less generously endowed nonhuman creatures? Or is it the other way around, namely, that he does in fact possess this spark because of his emotional qualities? In view of the construction I put on the “divine spark”, the latter alternative seems most likely.

Though Mr Dick lacks certain cognitive properties and is therefore perhaps, if to a very minor extent, animalised, his animality is of an eminently benevolent kind. Normally, however, in Dickens’s novels, animality, and being reduced to an animal state, could be considered either frightening or perilous, for various reasons. For one thing, a human who behaves like an animal is easily seen as threatening, and, for another, animals being to a large extent at the mercy of humans, those human characters who are seen as animals are sometimes at risk of being badly treated, abused, despised, or ignored. Florence Dombey in *Dombey and Son* is sorely ignored by her father, so much so that Captain Cuttle, another character in the novel, says that “[t]hem as should have loved and fended of her, treated of her
like the beasts as perish” (914). Here Heidegger’s contention that human beings die, whereas animals perish (Calarco 17) comes to mind, a contention that seems to mean that “only humans live life with the knowledge of finitude” (Weil 101), that is, only humans are aware of their own mortality. There is, thus, in Heidegger’s view, “a difference in kind” (Calarco 22) between humans and animals, and Florence Dombey is treated, at least by her father, as though she belonged to another (and by extension less valuable) kind than, for example, her beloved but deceased brother – in fact, almost as if she was an insignificant pet animal. In a similar vein, Bill Sikes in *Oliver Twist* at one point tells his partner in crime-cum-antagonist Fagin that he wishes Fagin had been a dog, since “the government . . . lets a man kill a dog how he likes” (154). This is a glimpse of an attitude to animals that *in some respects* could be said to pervade Dickens’s novels, that is, an attitude that conceives of human beings as superior to animals, and who should, therefore, be better treated than animals in virtue of their higher intrinsic worth.

Thus, when David Copperfield, on seeing Mr Wickfield in the company of his despicable partner, the “red-headed animal” (311) Uriah Heep, comments that if he “had seen an Ape taking command of a Man, [he] should hardly have thought it a more degrading spectacle” (421), the implication is obvious: apes are inferior creatures compared to human beings, who are supposed to be in command. Here there is no denying the hierarchical perspective. This is, however, as I have tried to show earlier in the thesis, an attitude which is far from clear-cut, which is, in fact, both ambiguous and complex – perhaps as a result of “the contradictory attitudes to animals that most human societies harbour” (Huggan and Tiffin 138). Thus, a number of instances in Dickens’s novels, where animals are depicted as being of superior mettle compared to human beings, point to a completely different standpoint. Moreover, Dickens’s depictions of Jip, Diogenes, and Bull’s-eye, of Grip, and of Whisker, as well as of numerous anonymous birds and horses, show no or little sign of his seeing these animals as
intrinsically inferior to human characters – though less mentally complex and less intellectually developed than most (but clearly not all) humans, they are often more immediate and straightforward in their emotional reactions, and in that sense more honest because incapable of deviousness (in that they do not pretend, as discussed above), and it would seem as if Dickens sometimes does grant them a flicker of the divine spark.

By contrast, certain human characters who are compared to animals obviously have a very low status, morally and emotionally, in Dickens’s narratives, which seems to indict human and nonhuman animals alike. One possible, if perhaps far-fetched, interpretation of Dickens’s use of animal metaphors to point to objectionable characteristics in humans might be that he had a very negative view of certain animals or of animals in certain situations, so that when certain allegedly animal qualities are applied to humans, they are dragged down to the level of brutish animals, so to speak. That might explain why the dog lover Dickens sometimes compares unpleasant human characters to dogs. However, in this context it is crucial not to lose sight of the fact that the nonhuman animals referred to in Dickens’s metaphorical descriptions should for the most part be seen as representatives, that is, symbols, of lower characteristics in human animals rather than as representatives of actual animal characteristics (as is pointed out in the section dealing with animal imagery). This is why it may be futile to talk about a tension between Dickens’s attitude to actual animals and his employment of animal imagery; if such a tension exists, it seems, rather, to be found on a cultural level, in the generalised use of certain simplified, exaggerated, and anthropomorphised animal traits to depict certain human behaviours and personalities.

Although the reference to animal traits often contributes to making a character more colourful and more vividly portrayed (cases in point being, for example, Blandois, in Little Dorrit, Carker in Dombey and Son, and Hugh in Barnaby Rudge), resembling an animal by and large seems to equal being – either wholly or partly – a rudimentary, emotionally and/or
morally (and sometimes, though more rarely, intellectually) stunted and immature human being. When, for instance, Dickens says about Jonas Chuzzlewit, a particularly villainous character in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, that “[h]is base triumph, struggling with his cowardice, and shame, and guilt, was so detestable, that they turned away from him, as if he were some obscene and filthy animal, repugnant to the sight” (754), it would seem as if being like an (albeit in this case repulsive) animal is as bad as it gets. Furthermore, Kincaid recalls that Dickens says about Jonas that he, when he kills another character, does so “more terribly . . . than ‘a wolf’” (142). He is, thus, even more bestial than a nonhuman predatory animal and has apparently irrevocably lost any divine spark he might once have possessed. Jonas is an animal among other animals, and the notion of a hierarchy between human and nonhuman animals seems remote.

However, when Charley Bates in *Oliver Twist* describes Bill Sikes’s dog Bull’s-eye as “an out-and-out Christian” (181), the narrator comments as follows: “This was merely intended as a tribute to the animal’s abilities, but it was an appropriate remark in another sense, if Master Bates had only known it; for there are a good many ladies and gentlemen, claiming to be out-and-out Christians, between whom, and Mr Sikes’s dog, there exist strong and singular points of resemblance” (182). This is a comment that clearly does not imply praise of the ladies and gentlemen in question, but rather suggests that they are on a par with animals, and in this case with an animal who, though loyal to his master, is often vicious and aggressive. The comparison could be a way of demonstrating that there are no hard and fast boundaries between human and nonhuman animals and that similar character traits or behaviour may appear in both categories, on a kind of continuum.

An alternative interpretation, however, is that when humans are like animals they have derogated from their supposedly higher position in the order of things, which in a sense confirms a hierarchical standpoint. The latter interpretation ties in with Ritvo’s claim that
“[a]lthough [Darwin’s theory] eliminated . . . the separation between man and beast, it did not diminish human superiority. . . . Clearly, if people were animals, they were the top animals” (40). Ritvo also comments on the fact that “[b]ecause of the gap that separated people from animals . . . animals never exemplified the best human types”, as “the sense of human dignity . . . barred animals from realizing, even figuratively, the highest human possibilities” (15-16).

As seen above, this phenomenon is clearly illustrated by Dickens’s employment of comparisons, or parallels, between human characters and animals to offset or emphasise the despicable, coarse, savage, or stupid aspects of humankind, the most salient exception being vulnerable women, and sometimes men, that are likened to delicate birds (a parallel that is, however, usually not consistently maintained in the depiction of the characters in question).

Moreover, animals in Dickens’s novels that are not used figuratively are either part of the setting or the, sometimes atmospheric, background – horses trotting and transporting human characters, birds singing, etc. – or more or less cherished pets, but their role is, in Kreilkamp’s words, “fundamentally ‘minor’” (82), which he claims is typical of “[a]nimals in the Victorian period . . . in the realm of literature” (82). The domestic animals are definitely not minor in the sense of having a minor importance in the lives of their owners (David Copperfield’s wife Dora’s pet dog Jip is extremely important to her, as are Diogenes to Florence in Dombey and Son and Grip to Barnaby in Barnaby Rudge), merely in the sense of not being assigned any really crucial roles in the overall plot of the novels; they appear and disappear without leaving any indelible traces or having any decisive or lasting effect on the plot. They are, Kreilkamp says, “often treated as semi-characters”, and he adds that “animals, or certain privileged domesticated animals, are given names and invested with personality and individual identity, but that this state is unreliable and subject to sudden abrogation” (82).

Possible exceptions among the animals in Dickens’s novels are the aforementioned Jip in David Copperfield and Bull’s-eye in Oliver Twist, as neither of them simply fade out of the
plot. In the case of Bull’s-eye, he is there till the very end and we, as readers, witness his death. We are also present at the death of Jip, who, just like Bull’s-eye, does not survive the demise of his owner. As to the fates of Grip, Barnaby Rudge’s pet raven, Diogenes, Florence’s pet dog, and Lion, the Newfoundland dog in *Little Dorrit*, they are all accounted for, if very summarily so. To sum up, no animals (except, perhaps, for wild birds) in Dickens’s novels lead a completely independent life; they are important in relation to human characters, but never, or at least to a very minor degree, in their own right, which serves to stress the hierarchical pattern as well as the inevitably anthropocentric perspective. The fact that “[a]nimals . . . are rarely seen as independent actors” (Huggan and Tiffin 191) and that “agency” (191) seems reserved for humans, is a phenomenon that ecocritics tend to denounce.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that although the anthropocentric perspective prevails in Dickens’s references to, and descriptions of, animals, and although this perspective inevitably promotes a hierarchical rather than a continuum-based literary treatment of animals, he does not “view . . . animals through a reductive, neo-Cartesian lens” (Calarco 38). On the contrary, many Dickensian animals do appear to have a soul, that is, a personality and an irreducible individuality. He attributes emotions, willpower, and sometimes even, if to a minor degree, powers of reflection and discernment to them, which, although an incontrovertible indication of Dickens’s predominantly anthropomorphic perspective on animals, is also a sign of his respect for them. Moreover, on a few occasions he takes care to emphasise their separateness as animals that human beings do not know everything about, as when he writes about an owl that it “made a noise with very little resemblance in it to the noise conventionally assigned to the owl by men-poets” and adds that “it is the obstinate custom of such creatures hardly ever to say what is set down for them” (*A Tale of Two Cities* 107), thus manifesting an awareness of “the alterity of animal life” (Calaro 38). Such
awareness may not be immediately reconcilable with a hierarchical standpoint regarding the human-animal divide.

Furthermore, in contrast to the hierarchical perspective, a human-animal continuum could perhaps be inferred from the fact that certain human characters are depicted as animals to such a degree that they appear to become animals. That is, the distance between being a human and a nonhuman animal is sometimes blurred, as in the case of Jonas Chuzzlewit referred to above. Armstrong highlights the fact that “Darwinism introduces an arboreal structure to replace the older, hierarchical model of relationships among species” (88), and, ultimately, the image of a tree would perhaps be better suited than that of a continuum to describe at least certain aspects of Dickens’s view and presentation of the relation between human and nonhuman animals. There are definitely, as pointed out earlier, correspondences between Dickens and Darwin, the latter of whom, according to Beer, strove to “undermine the hierarchical and the separatist”(58), which led him to “an enhanced evaluation of all life and to an emphasis on deep community” (58) and made him focus on affinities and interconnectedness between all organic beings (42). Judging by the rich, complex plots of Dickens’s novels where you sometimes get the impression that everyone and everything is related in a huge intricate web (and, as Beer points out, “the web is not a hierarchical model” [159]), Dickens seems to have had a similar approach to that of Darwin. Thus, Dickens’s depiction of certain animals as emotionally and perhaps even morally superior to certain human characters, coupled with the fact that so many human characters seem to be more or less indistinguishable from (albeit a stereotypical and traditional conception of) nonhuman animals in their behaviour, appear to be indicative of a view of the human-animal divide as a continuum – which could perhaps be referred to as a ramified continuum, in order to fuse the image of the tree and that of an unbroken linear continuum – where the boundaries between human and nonhuman animals are fluid. This could be related to Thomas’s contention that
“[t]he growing belief in the social evolution of mankind . . . encouraged the view that men were only beasts that had managed to better themselves” (132), where the words “only beasts” are of course significant and could be interpreted as firmly assigning a low status to nonhuman animals, as well as eliminating any possibility of a hubristic conception of humankind in general. Insofar as such a view of humans, as merely beasts with a veneer of civilisation, as it were, can be said to exist in Dickens’s novels, it would of course further support a perception of Dickens’s portrayal of the human-animal divide as a kind of (ramified) continuum.

If, however, the attribution of animal properties and qualities to certain human characters is seen as a way of distinguishing those characters from what is, ideally at least, essentially human (cf Kate Soper’s claim, quoted in the introduction), or as, in other words, a way of setting them apart as creatures lacking in the divine spark that characterises a “true” human being, then it would be hard to speak of Dickensian humans and animals as existing on a Darwinian continuum or tree. Hence, I would contend that, parallel to a Darwinian approach, an implicit hierarchy (implicit in the sense that it may be deduced from Dickens’s use of animal imagery) does exist in his novels, a hierarchy whereby most nonhuman animals are at the bottom, closely followed by human animals whose minds and behaviour are in various respects primitive and, hence, animal. Some humans are thus more animal than others, having distanced themselves from what seems to be the Dickensian definition of a fully qualified human being – that is, someone who is, above all, good and kind-hearted, and who is fair-minded, generous, selfless, and in possession of (at least some degree of) good sense. A human character who fits such a description is rarely likened to an animal in Dickens’s novels.
6 Conclusion

The relation between human and nonhuman animals, primarily but not exclusively on a symbolic level, is at the heart of this study.

Human characters in Dickens’s novels are frequently likened to various animals, by means of metaphors and similes, or by means of metonymy, in the shape of spatial contiguity (that is, when a human character and an animal are present in the same situation, scene, or room, in which case the relation described is sometimes one of pet and pet owner), and I have chosen to interpret these comparisons and parallels as a kind of animalisation, where the animality of both individual characters and groups of characters is, to a higher or lesser degree, brought to the fore. I have, furthermore, endeavoured to illustrate my claims with a plethora of concrete examples from the novels, while referring as often as possible to the ideas and findings of other writers, both ecocritics and others.

Animalisation is sometimes synonymous with dehumanisation, and this is particularly noticeable in connection with animalisation of groups of people. Though looks, personality, and behaviour are all aspects that are of interest when Dickensian characters are animalised, the focus seems to be on personality and perhaps above all on behaviour. Loss of individuality, on the one hand, and a reduction of individuality, on the other hand, are two facets of the animalisation of human characters in Dickens’s novels. Loss of individuality, and its common corollary of insensitivity, or even cruelty, seems to be what often characterises groups of animalised characters, whereas a pruning off of the potential complexities of a character can be seen in the animalisation of individual characters, where animality highlights certain – often striking and picturesque – traits at the expense of more nuanced ones. This latter process of “making strange” (Beer 75) often results in what could be called “grotesques,” that is, characters portrayed in such a colourful way as to turn them into a kind of idiosyncratic eccentrics (such as Carker in Dombey and Son and Blandois in Little
Dorrit) rather than clearly defined, recognisable types, and this phenomenon appears to be something that, besides the teeming, superabundant, and intricate plots of Dickens’s novels, created an affinity between Charles Dickens and Charles Darwin – two giants who never met but who seem to have been familiar with and appreciative of (at least part of) each other’s work.

The issue of whether Dickens conceives of human and nonhuman animals as part of a continuum, or a tree where all the branches represent different species with a common root, or whether a hierarchical perspective is predominant in his novels, is discussed in the thesis. No conclusive answer is reached, however. There are definitely traces of non-hierarchical evolutionary thought in Dickens’s novels, although a direct, explicit Darwinian influence may not be easily detectable in Dickens’s depictions of animals and animalised humans. The perceptions of interrelatedness and infinitely ramified connections that characterise several of Dickens’s novels (and above all, perhaps, Bleak House) do, however, very much mirror Darwinian perceptions and patterns of thought and point towards some kind of human-animal continuum, web, or tree, where we are all – that is, all living organisms – family, without hard and fast boundaries. But, in Levine’s words, “[t]he attitudes implicit in the language and structure of Dickens’s books are . . . both premonitory of the argument Darwin was constructing and antipathetic to it. Within Dickens’s narratives we can often find the two aspects in unresolved conflict” (Dickens and Darwin 261). Thus, a more traditional attitude that sees animals not only as subordinate to, but also as fundamentally different from, humans (at least those humans that are good and fully functioning) could be said to coexist with a standpoint whereby human and nonhuman animals are very closely related, and almost inseparable, not only biologically but also ontologically.

A great many different kinds of animals put in an appearance in Dickens’s often colourful comparisons or parallels between human characters and animals, but some animals tend to
occur more often than others. Feline imagery, for example, is frequent in Dickens’s depictions of certain characters, and it is almost invariably used to present the characters in question in an unfavourable light. Nonetheless, many of those characters, and particularly those characters that are compared to tigers or tigresses, seem to hold a measure of fascination for the narrator. They are definitely never humdrum; they are, in fact, more often than not, very vividly portrayed.

With the exception of, above all, non-predatory birds, most of the animal imagery used by Dickens makes animals out to be representatives of low, negative aspects of human nature. Animality is, thus, for the most part seen as scary, threatening, or simply disgusting. At the same time, some animals (chiefly dogs) are portrayed or referred to in such a way as to present them as beings of a higher moral and emotional standard than humans. The question whether there is an inconsistency, or a tension, between Dickens’s apparent respect for and love of animals and his tendency to animalise unpleasant characters was put in the introduction. However, the answer both implicitly and explicitly arrived at is that perhaps there is no tension involved at all, but simply a complex, multi-layered attitude to animals, where conventional perceptions of certain animals seem to play an indisputable role. Olson’s claim that there are “contradictions . . . in Dickens's imagined bestiary” and that they reflect “broader Victorian ones” (248) confirms such an interpretation.

In summary, one of the main overall conclusions that may be drawn from the study of the human-animal divide and of the animalisation of human characters in Dickens’s novels is that Dickens’s view of animals as manifested in his literary representations of them is intricate and open to different, and to some extent seemingly contradictory, interpretations. It is, however, probably safe to say that in Dickens’s novels being an actual animal is by and large good, whereas being an animalised human is, with very few exceptions, bad. In order for the divine
spark to exist and to remain untarnished, human characters had better stay clear of the kind of behaviour that could be labelled animal.
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