

Exploring Human-Animal Relations in William Bruce Cameron's *A Dog's Purpose: A Novel For Humans*: A Critical Posthumanist Approach

by

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Abstract:

This paper examines the critical concept of posthumanism through an analysis of William Bruce Cameron's novel *A Dog's Purpose: A Novel For Humans* (2010). Human-animal studies have the power to resist the supremacy of humanism. Thus, nonhuman animals are seen as a key participant in a challenge to humanism. They are also displayed as being the victims of anthropocentric humanism. Adopting an analytical approach, this paper is divided into two parts: theoretical and practical. Theoretically, posthumanism challenges the anthropocentric view of the world by decentering the human and acknowledging the agency and subjectivity of non-human beings, particularly animals. Practically, by focusing on the human-animal relations depicted in *A Dog's Purpose*, this study aims to explore how the novel disrupts traditional notions of human exceptionalism and highlights the interconnectedness between humans and animals. Through a posthuman lens, the paper investigates themes such as animal consciousness, empathy, and the ethical implications of human-animal interactions. Human-animal studies have the power to resist the supremacy of humanism.

Keywords: *A Dog's Purpose*, animal consciousness, Bruce Cameron, empathy, ethical implications, human-animal relations, posthumanism

الملخص

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى دراسة مفهوم نقدي ما بعد إنساني من خلال تحليل رواية بروس كاميرون "مصير الكلب". تتحدى ما بعد الإنسانية الرؤية الإنسانية المركزية للعالم من خلال تجاوز الإنسان والاعتراف بوكالة وذاتية الكائنات غير البشرية، وخاصة الحيوانات. تحاول هذه الدراسة ان تظهر كيف يتفاعل الكاتب الأمريكي ويليام بروس كاميرون (1960-) مع فكرة الدراسات بين الإنسان والحيوان في روايته غرض الكلب: رواية للبشر (2010). تتمتع الدراسات التي توضح العلاقة بين الإنسان والحيوان بالقدرة على مقاومة سيادة الإنسانية. وبالتالي، يُنظر إلى الحيوانات على أنها مشارك رئيسي في تحدي الإنسانية. كما يتم عرض الحيوانات على أنهم ضحايا النزعة الإنسانية المتمركزة حول الإنسان. باعتماد نهج تحليلي، تنقسم هذه الورقة إلى قسمين: نظري وعملي. من خلال التركيز على العلاقات بين الإنسان والحيوانات التي تصورها رواية "مصير الكلب"، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيفية تفكيك الرواية للمفاهيم التقليدية لاستثنائية الإنسان وتسليط الضوء على الترابط المتبادل بين البشر والحيوانات. من خلال منظور ما بعد الإنسانية، تستكشف الورقة مواضيع مثل وعي الحيوان، والتعاطف، والمعضلات الأخلاقية لتفاعلات الإنسان مع الحيوان.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الإنسانية، العلاقات بين الإنسان والحيوان، بروس كاميرون، مصير الكلب، وعي الحيوان، التعاطف، المعضلات الأخلاقية.

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This paper critically examines the concept of posthumanism through an analysis of William Bruce Cameron's novel *A Dog's Purpose: A Novel For Humans* (2010). Human-animal studies have the power to resist the supremacy of humanism. Thus, nonhuman animals are seen as a key participant in a challenge to humanism. They are also displayed as being the victims of anthropocentric humanism. The current research derives its significance from adopting a critical posthumanist approach towards investigating the nature of human-animal relations in a novelistic literary expression. The present study is argued here to transcend the limited scope of posthumanism and reach out the new critical reformulations of the human-animal relations in the literary idiom. With the critical dimension adduced to the descriptive premises of posthumanism, these kinds of literature-informed human-animal relations may hypothetically reveal fresh representations of the voices of both humans and animals in fiction. Towards this end, this paper is divided into two parts: theoretical and practical. Theoretically, critical posthumanism challenges the anthropocentric view of the world by decentering the human and acknowledging the agency and subjectivity of non-human beings, particularly animals. Practically, by focusing on the human-animal relations depicted in *A Dog's Purpose*, this study aims to explore how the novel disrupts traditional notions of human exceptionalism and highlights the interconnectedness between humans and animals. Through a critical posthuman lens, the paper investigates themes such as animal consciousness, empathy, and the ethical implications of human-animal interactions. Human-animal studies have the power to resist the supremacy of humanism.

Thus, the paper is divided into two main parts. The first part is a theoretical part about critical posthumanism and its relation to human-animal studies. The second part is a practical one. It shows how the American William Bruce Cameron (1960-) handles posthumanism theory and the voice of animals in his novel *A Dog's Purpose: A Novel For Humans* (2010). The novel is analyzed from a critical posthumanist

perspective. Additionally, the main objectives of this study are to explore the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals in the selected literary text, investigate how nonhuman animals play a role in humans' life. Moreover, the significance of this study is to raise readers' awareness about the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals. So, this paper aims to address the following question: How can Cameron display the voice of the animals in his novel *A Dog's Purpose*?

In what follows, a historical account of the concept of "posthumanism" is proposed, then the more complex concept of "critical posthumanism" is presented in terms of its key premises and tenets. To begin with, posthumanism can be understood in two ways: either as a condition that follows the existence of human beings or as a condition that follows the era of humanism. As a result, the concept of "post-humanism" establishes the fundamental principles of human-animal studies. It represents the culmination of humanism, a movement that has centered around humans, nature, rationality, and spirituality, and has been the dominant ideology in the Western world since the Renaissance. Humanism has granted superiority to human qualities, but posthumanism challenges this dominance. According to Ihab Hassan (1925-2015), an Egyptian-born American writer and theorist, "Humanism may be coming to an end as humanism transforms itself into something one must helplessly call posthumanism" (843). It is clear that posthumanism is difficult to define. Cary Wolfe (1959-), a leading scholar of posthumanist and animal studies, asserts: "posthumanism [...] generates different and even irreconcilable definitions" (xi).

However, there is no a definite definition of posthumanism. It focuses on the relationship between humanism and anti-humanism. Anti-humanism rejects the belief and assumption that humans are the center of the world. Rosi Braidotti, a prominent figure in feminism, provides a definition of posthumanism in relation to anti-humanism as follows: It signifies a shift in history, where the traditional conflict between Humanism and anti-humanism is no longer relevant. Instead, it encourages a positive outlook towards new possibilities and actively seeks alternative ways of conceptualizing the human subject, without succumbing to the rhetoric of a crisis regarding humanity (37). It is clear that posthumanism seeks to reveal a specific understanding of humans. Thus, there is a difference between posthumanism and anti-humanism. Posthumanism, on the one hand, displays the supremacy of the humanist subject as contradicted, especially by making the human

along with the nonhuman. On the other hand, anti-humanism undermines the supremacy of the humans.

Thus, the main aim of posthumanism is to rebel against humanism that means the moral supremacy of human beings. According to Neil Badmington (1971-), it is emphasized that the human being holds a fundamental and timeless position at the core of existence, setting it apart completely from machines, animals, and other non-human entities. In this central position, humans possess a distinct essence that is shared with all other humans. They are the source of meaning and hold the highest authority as subjects of history (374). Badmington adds: “In the humanist account, human beings are exceptional, autonomous, and set above the world that lies at their feet” (374). It is clear that humanism has a belief that humans are the centre of the universe. Moreover, Badmington concludes by saying that posthumanism scholar has the view that “anthropocentrism, with its assured insistence upon human exceptionalism, is no longer an adequate or convincing account of the way of the world” (381). This asserts that there are other species that share the world with humans, and they have the same rights.

Although the importance of posthumanism theory, Wolfe rejects “the fantasy of posthuman [...], which images a triumphant transcendence of [Human] embodiment” (120). For Wolfe, posthumanism places humans at the top of everything. Moreover, in a recent dialogue between Donna J. Haraway (1944-), a reluctant pioneer of posthumanism, and Wolfe, they pronounce that “[They] never been happy with the term posthumanism” (261). Because they find it, “absurd” (Companions in Conversation, 261).

At the same time, for Haraway, the posthuman is about “getting beyond one troubled category [The human] for worse one” (17). Haraway asserts that posthuman abounds the “urgent work [That] remains to be done in reference to those who must inhabit [...] troubled categories” like the human (*The Companion Species Manifesto*, 17). However, both Haraway and Wolfe emphasize the importance of the posthuman as a cultural and literary trope of the 21st century.

Hence, it is evident that the notion of human autonomy and control cannot be maintained. Consequently, Wolfe presents a definition of posthumanism in the following manner: Posthumanism denotes a particular period in time when the decreasing significance of the human becomes apparent due to its profound interconnectedness with technological, medical, informational, and economic systems. This historical shift not only highlights the need for new theoretical

frameworks but also imposes them upon us. It signifies a new way of thinking that surpasses the cultural constraints, imaginative constructs, philosophical conventions, and avoidance strategies associated with humanism as a historically bound phenomenon (Xv-xvi). It is a strong evidence that posthumanism looks toward new alternatives, namely nonhuman animals and technology. So, the purpose of posthumanism is to help humans understand the oppositions between human and nonhuman, self and other, organic and inorganic, and natural and artificial. Additionally, it helps human to take the rights and interests of things that are different to human seriously.

In other words, posthumanism is a set of ideas that challenge the concept that humans are the only agents of the moral world. For posthumanism, placing humans at the top of the world no longer makes sense. Actually, human is interconnected with nonhuman beings. Suffice to say that posthumanism is an umbrella that technology and human-animal studies fall under. Technology, for example, testifies that human cannot survive without the assistance of computer and telecommunication. There exists another category of technologies, including robotics, machine intelligence, prosthetics, and genetic manipulation, which have significant long-term consequences. Boria Sax, an author recognized for his work on human-animal relationships, contends that these new inventions may appear to greatly enhance human power, but they also erode human independence and self-governance (86). For instance, it is evident that computers now play a role in making many of humanity's decisions. In addition, Robert Pepperell argues that the very technologies that humans are currently working to develop are undermining their perception of superiority over animals and their distinctive role in the world (2). This underscores the fact that other species prevent humans from maintaining their dominant role in the moral realm.

However, one of the characteristics that should be emphasized is that posthumanism does not aim to neglect the critical role of humans on the world. So, N. K. Hayles (1943-), an American postmodern critic, points out: “the posthumanism need not be [...] constructed as antihuman” (287). It is a strong evidence of the importance of otherness represented in human-animal relationships. Hence, Haraway explains this perspective that all “the species in question” (*When Species Meet*, 43). The question turns to answer how a human enters into a right relationship with nonhuman animals.

As the same time, posthumanists try to find challenges for the emergence of other species, such as the evolutionary process or technological advances, which may transcend, transform, and eliminate humanity. So, Wolfe sees that posthumanists: “are not just talking about a thematic of the decentering of the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates [...]; rather, [They] are also talking about how thinking confronts that thematics, what thought has to become in the face of those challenges” (xvi).

As previously mentioned, there are two trends associated with posthumanism: cyborgs, which are beings with both biomechatronic and organic body parts, representing techno posthumanism, and animal posthumanism. The former gives rise to cyberpunk and dystopian science fiction genres, while the latter contributes to the emergence of a novel genre known as animal or human-animal fiction, where animals are depicted as active participants or subjects. Braidotti labels how posthumanism “becoming-animal, becoming-earth, and becoming-machine” (66). This confirms that posthuman has a relationship with animal and technology. Braidotti adds: “Post-anthropocentrism displaces the notion of species hierarchy and of a single, common standard for ‘Man’ as the measure of all things” (67). This emphasizes the emergence of a new identity like animal identity.

Suffice to say that Wolfe pays her attention to change the place of animals outside the humanities. Thus, animal studies indicate major challenges to the traditional human subject. Hence, Wolfe points out: “what makes animal studies significant [...] is that it poses fundamental challenges [...] to a model of subjectivity and experience drawn from the liberal justice tradition and its central concept of rights, in which ethical standing and civic inclusion are predicated on rationality, autonomy, and agency”. Wolfe adds: “That agency, in turn, is taken to be expressive of the intentionality of one who is a member of what Kant called ‘the community of reasonable beings’—an intentionality that is taken to be more or less transparent to the subject itself” (127). Wolfe shows the limitation of the humanist model of subjectivity. So, the main purpose of human-animal studies is to reflect new lines of empathy and respect between both humans and nonhuman animals.

Most importantly, animal studies have the power to resist the supremacy of humanism by affecting the attitude and behavior of humans. In other words, animals are seen as a key participant in a challenge to humanism in one way or another. So, Jan Roffe and Hannah Stark emphasize that “if the human is seen as one among a huge number of species and billions of living beings, this provides a kind of antidote to

the endless spirals of self-inspection” (18). This is strong evidence that other entities play a role in making humans discover themselves among other entities.

Hence, human-animal studies emerged in the last 20 years. It focuses on the relationship between human and nonhuman animals. According to Margo DeMello

, an animal activist, “human-animal studies is not about studying animals per se. Rather, we study the interactions between humans and other animals” (5). It is obvious that human-animal studies explore the spaces that animals have in human social worlds and the interactions humans have with animals. Thus, by understanding the behaviors and emotional and mental processes of animals, people can understand how human interacts with animals.

Consequently, the main purpose of human-animal studies is to show the interests, desires, and wants of animals. So, they are seen as subjects rather than objects. Peter Singer (1946-), known for *Animal Liberation*, argues humans to “bring nonhuman animals within our sphere of moral concern and cease to treat their lives as expendable for whatever trivial purposes we may have” (20). This raises the valuing and the revaluing of animals. Suffice to say that animals are seen as a social construction.

Additionally, human-animal studies advocate for addressing forms of discrimination known as 'speciesism' with the same level of scrutiny as feminism, racism, sexism, and queer theory. The term 'speciesism' emerged in the 1970s to describe the treatment of individuals from one species as morally superior to those from other species. As a result, the ideology of speciesism plays a crucial role in setting up barriers that create distinctions and divisions between the animal kingdom and human beings. Moreover, it represents a misguided belief and a form of discrimination against nonhuman animals who are not considered part of the human species. Therefore, humans hold a misguided belief in their own superiority over other species.

Actually, the term ‘speciesism’ was coined by Richard D. Dyder (1940-), an English animal rights advocate, at the end of 1970. Dyder defines speciesism as “a prejudice like sexism or racism. [...] I am against speciesism” (44). Dyder considers animals like humans although animals are different in their appearance from humans. For example, animals feel joy, anger, and fear like humans. Moreover, Dyder uses this term to describe “[t]he widespread discrimination that is practiced by man against the other species [...] speciesism and racism are both forms of prejudice that are based upon appearances [...]” (48). It is clear that this

term is used to describe human's superiority, belief, or discrimination against nonhuman animals. Additionally, this term 'speciesism' calls on humans to extend their concern about the rights of the nonhuman animals.

The idea of anthropocentrism is related to the phrase "speciesism." They are not synonymous terms. 'Anthropocentrism' refers to the point of view that humans are the primary or the only holder of moral standing. Thus, anthropocentrism is the belief that humans are the central entity in the universe. Oscar Horta, a Spanish animal activist, defines anthropocentrism as "the disadvantageous treatment or consideration of those who are not members of the human species. This notion must be conceptually distinguished from 'speciesism' and from misothery (aversion to nonhuman animals)" (243). It is clear that anthropocentrism prevents the question of nonhuman animals' subjectivity, considering that the subject is always humans because animals stand apart from rational thinking.

Consequently, human-animal studies focus on acknowledging the subjectivity of nonhuman beings, which is crucial for critiquing humanism. They also prioritize animal rights, rejecting the use of animals as mere symbols or metaphors for human experiences. John Simons argues that animals should not be seen as displaced metaphors for humans (6). This highlights the fact that human-animal studies aim to create spaces where nonhuman animals can coexist with humans, as humans tend to separate themselves from other species.

Furthermore, within the context of posthumanism and animal studies, attention is drawn to the suffering endured by animals. Josephine Donovan suggests that animal-standpoint critics may question the absence or disregard of animal suffering in texts, attributing such oversight to speciesist assumptions that condone such blindness (Tolstoy's *Animals*, 40). It becomes clear that previous critics have overlooked or minimized the suffering of animals, which is why animal-standpoint critics should recognize and tackle the presence and anguish of animals in literary works.

Furthermore, Kenneth. Shapiro and M. W. Copeland, the editors of the *Journal Society and Animal*, outline three key approaches that deserve emphasis in animal studies theory. The initial approach seeks to dismantle reductionist and disrespectful depictions of nonhuman animals. The second approach concentrates on assessing the extent to which the author presents the animal as an independent entity. The third approach involves examining human-animal relationships, with the critical objective being to comprehend the nature of that relationship and position it within the spectrum of possible relationships. This includes perceiving the animal as

a relatively equal partner in a shared world and a joint endeavor (345). This is strong evidence that human-animal studies aim at opening a question about the relationships between human and nonhuman animals.

Importantly, the representation of posthumanism in early 21st century novels is of a great political and cultural importance to transgress and exposes the attitude of future organized around the human subject and the structures of human privilege. Accordingly, literature plays an important role in exploration of human-animal relationship. According to Donovan, the goal of animal studies and animal-stand point criticism is to find literature in which animals are treated as subjects (Tolstoy's *Animals*, 50). This confirms that most of novels regard the humanist subject no longer the priority. In contract, they begin to facilitate more positive species relations, such as Yann Martel's *Life Of Pi* (2001) Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2008) , James Lever's *Me Cheeta* (2008), and W. Bruce Cameron's *A Dog's Purpose: A Novel For Humans* (2010).

Recently, however, the complex term "critical posthumanism" has begun to bring forth new insights in literary studies. This can easily be realized in a relevant collection of studies in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Posthumanism* (Herbrechter et al. 2020). It is an important reference work that explores the paradigm emerging from challenges to traditional humanism and the boundaries between the human and nonhuman. This comprehensive handbook examines the origins, transformations, and potential future developments of the posthumanist paradigm in various fields of the humanities. It emphasizes the posthuman as a concept, posthumanism as a social discourse, and posthumanization as an ongoing historical and ontological process, while also highlighting the interconnectedness between the humanities and sciences. The chapters in the volume engage with posthumanism in relation to specific subfields such as environmental humanities, health humanities, animal studies, and disability studies. Generally, the present volume also traces the historical representations and understandings of posthumanism over time. Furthermore, the contributions explore various genres and forms of expression, including autobiography, games, art, and film, as well as addressing topics like climate change, speciesism, anthropocentrism, and biopolitics. In summary, this handbook examines the impact of posthumanism across disciplines and areas of study.

Stefan Herbrechter is a prominent scholar known for his work on critical posthumanism. Critical posthumanism is an intellectual framework that challenges traditional notions of humanism and explores

the implications of emerging technologies and cultural shifts on our understanding of what it means to be human. Herbrechter's approach to critical posthumanism is characterized by a critical engagement with contemporary theories and practices related to technology, embodiment, subjectivity, and ethics. He argues that traditional humanism, which places human beings at the center of the universe, is no longer tenable given the rapid advancements in science and technology.

One of the key aspects of Herbrechter's critical posthumanism is the rejection of anthropocentrism, which is the belief in the inherent superiority or centrality of human beings. He argues that this view is limiting and fails to account for the complex entanglements between humans, non-human entities, and technological systems. Instead, he advocates for an understanding of the human as a dynamic and relational entity that emerges through interactions with its environment. Herbrechter also explores the role of technology in shaping our understanding of the human. He acknowledges the transformative potential of technologies such as artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and virtual reality, but also critically examines their implications. He raises questions about the ethical dimensions of technological advancements and the potential for power imbalances and social inequalities.

Critical Posthumanism raises important philosophical questions about what it means to be human, the role of technology in evolution and humanization, and the possibility, desirability, and necessity of a post-anthropocentric worldview. These questions are prompted by the contemporary crisis that challenges traditional anthropocentric and humanist values, such as the erosion of the concept of human nature, the effects of human activity on the planet, overpopulation, resource depletion, climate change, globalization, migration, terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, warfare, energy supply, social justice, wealth redistribution, the rise of digital media, and the development of artificial intelligence.

While Critical Posthumanism critiques the hype surrounding these issues, it should not be mistaken for a longing for an earlier version of humanity or a new humanism. Rather, it is part of a new theoretical paradigm that arises from the challenges to humanism and the blurring of boundaries between humans and nonhumans, calling for alternative ways of thinking.

Moving to the second part of this study, let us concentrate on W. Bruce Cameron's *A Dog's Purpose* and the potential for applying the paradigm of critical posthumanism to its literary message. This part's

major objective is to demonstrate how Cameron handles human-animal studies in his book. Additionally, this part seeks to identify human-animal studies as a critical field and illustrate how it relates to both anti-speciesism and posthumanism.

Additionally, the American writer Cameron (1960-) is the New York Times bestselling writer of *8 Simple Rules For Dating My Teenage Daughter* (2001), *The Dog Master* (2015), and *A Dog's Purpose series*. In 2011, the National Society of Newspaper Columnists named him as Columnist of the Year. He has written many novels such as *A Dog's Journey* (2012), *A Dog's Way Home* (2017), *A Dog's Promise* (2019), and *A Dog's courage* (2021).

The researcher selects Cameron because he underlines the nonhuman animal's otherness in most of his works. At the same time, among Cameron's novels, the researcher picks up *A Dog's Purpose: A Novel For Humans* (2010) because it displays how animals are treated as subjects rather than objects by asserting their agency and recognizing their independence. Moreover, this novel was the winner of Pulitzer Prize and New York Times bestseller in 2012.

A Dog's Purpose: A Novel For Humans shows a dog's journey through four lives in which the dog, the protagonist and the narrator, looks for his purpose through each life. This special dog lives and dies several times, searching for his main purpose in life. In every life, dog has a new name and life. The novel also examines the love shared by dogs and their people from the dog's point of view.

Thus, the primary goal of this novel is to explain to human readers the significance of animals. In reality, the novel demonstrates that one of the primary goals of animal-centric critical analysis and human-animal studies is to validate humans' moral responsibility to nonhuman animals because they coexist in the same universe.

In an interview by Chuck Sambuchino, Camron states that what inspired him to write this novel is that “[He] met a dog who reminded [Him] so much of [His] very first dog[...] that [He] rode away convinced [He]'d just very possibly met the reincarnated version of [His] long lost friend. This sense stuck with [Him] for years, and [He] found [Himself] wondering what it would be like if dogs never died -- what would that look like from the dog's perspective?” (para. 8) It seems that Cameron's aim is to give a voice to the animal to express his/her point of view.

The narrator is a dog who tells his story in the first-person point of view. So, Cameron uses the first-person narrative voice to make readers believe that this is a true story. According to Lynda Birke, “Perhaps I, or

we, cannot really know their points of view [Animals], though that does not absolve us [Humans] of the responsibility of trying to think about them. I approach these questions from the perspective of someone who feels that bonds with various nonhumans are essential to my life” (1). It is clear that human-animal studies and animal-centric criticism help readers comprehend the significance of literature in both intellectual and moral existence. It is clear that human-animal studies and animal-centric criticism help readers comprehend the significance of literature in both intellectual and moral existence.

The novel's events are narrated from the perspective of an animal, enabling the animal's viewpoint to shape the reader's experience. Consequently, a dog recounts the tale, exploring the dynamics between humans and nonhuman animals. By adopting the animal's point of view, Cameron effectively enables the reader to embrace the dog's perspective and distance themselves from the human viewpoint. This prompts the reader to step outside their own humanity and instead concentrate on the needs, pain, and desires of other nonhuman animals.

Hence, one of the animal centric characteristics in *A Dog's Purpose* is the empathetic and the sensitivity eye in which Cameron displays the sufferings and feelings of nonhuman animals. This novel presents the voice of animals and the absence of the author's voice. Thus, this novel shows what Toby, the protagonist of *A Dog's Purpose*, as an animal feels and thinks. Suffice to say that this technique emphasizes Toby's subjectivity and diminishes human's subjectivity.

A Dog's Purpose introduces a feral puppy, Toby. As a young pup, he leads a hard life, which includes searching for food which his canine siblings, two brothers whose names Fast and Hungary, and a sister whose name Sister, in the forest. One day, Toby and his family are captured by men, who take them for the Yard, a home run by an elder woman, Senora. This home is for abounded dogs. So, Toby lives at the Yard with other dogs. It is natural that Toby recognizes his species when he is first born and he considers others as creatures or things. The first time Toby meets humans who come to capture him and his family. Toby says: “When the thing [Human] came into view striding along the creek bed, I felt Mother's fear ripple across her back. It was big, it stood on two legs, and an acrid smoke wafted from its mouth as it shambled toward us [Toby and his family]” (15). It is clear that Toby wonders the appearance of humans who stand on two legs because he is used to living with animals who stand on four legs.

Consequently, Toby has mixed feelings when he sees humans for the first time. On one side, he “was drawn to this creature [Human] [...]

preparing to bound out to greet it” (15). On the other side, Toby sees that his mother has a different view that “this was something [Human] to be feared, to be avoided at all costs” (15). This shows that Toby’s mother is aware of those humans’ behaviors. She knows that those humans are a source of threat for her puppies.

In this new life in the Yard, Toby experiences humans for the first time. He tries to adjust to this new environment. There, Senora adopts him. Toby loves his new world. At the Yard, he learns the importance of human for nonhuman animals. For Toby, “dogs who tried to live in the world without people—they became beaten down, defeated, starved” (28). This asserts that humans play a critical role in helping and taking care of nonhuman animals. So, at the forest, Toby learns to fear humans. But after moving to the Yard, he “loved the Yard, [He] wanted to belong to Senora” (33). Cameron asserts that neither humans nor nonhuman animals are the center of the world. Both share the world. Hence, Hayles asserts that “the posthuman does not really mean the end of humanity. It signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human [...] that fraction of humanity who has the wealth, power, and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual choices” (286). This addresses anti-humanist in which animals are sacrificed to humanist concepts of the human.

When Toby wakes up in the Yard, “[He] was instantly aware that there was something around [His] neck [...] [And] [His] stomach queasy and [His] underside very, very sore” (28). This reflects Toby’s reaction to be sterilized. At the same time, Toby talks about how the collar has made him feel humiliated and how he must endure “the indignity of an inspection of the sore area by every male [Dog] in the pack. Top Dog flipped [Him] over on [His] back with a not-so-gentle shove, and [He] lay[S] there in misery as first he and then the other males sniffed [Him] with undisguised contempt” (30). It is obvious that this novel also sheds light on animal relationships to other animals. Toby gets offended because other dogs sniff him. This incident makes Toby feel that he is outcast. Although Donovan asserts that there is no “aestheticizing animal cruelty” in the narrative (*Aestheticizing Animal Cruelty*, 202). On the contrary, Toby’s humiliation and suffering are because he feels as an animal. So, the dog’s suffering is portrayed for the reader to become aware of how humans oppress and hurt animals.

In the Yard, Senora learns Toby that “there are no bad dogs [...] just bad people. [Dogs] just need love” (35). This confirms that what animals need from humans is just love and protection. As Toby settles in the

yard, Animal Control officers close the Yard because of the questionable care the dogs receive and unhealthy sanitation practices. They euthanize Toby and other dogs.

Toby believes that his life's work is to keep his human owner, Senora, safe and content because it was his first experience as a stray dog. Toby therefore finishes his first life at the Yard by cheering up Senora.

Thus, when the Yard is locked for hygiene issues, the dogs are sent to the vet and they live inside a cage. Then, Toby is in a state of shock that he recalls his previous life, wondering what his purpose in life is. He decides to escape and begin a new adventure in the outside world because he has a feeling "that as a dog there was something [He] was supposed to do?" (43). So, in every life of Toby's journey to fulfill his purpose he does not have the choice to choose his own life.

Afterwards, Toby experiences a second rebirth when he is picked up by a truck driver while running alongside the road. The trucker gives him a new name, Fella, and Fella realizes that his " life would be what [Other humans] decided it would be" (47). He understands that he can become whatever humans want him to be, highlighting the control that humans have over nonhuman animals. However, during the journey, the truck driver stops at a bar, leaving Fella locked in the car for hours, causing him to suffer from heat exhaustion.

Fortunately, a compassionate woman comes across Fella and breaks the car window to rescue him. Fella describes himself as weak and defenseless as the woman lifts him up, but she cares for him and provides water. This incident shows two contrasting human-animal relationships: the neglectful behavior of the man who left Fella in the car and the caring actions of the woman who saved him.

The woman introduces Fella to her son, Ethan, and together they rename him Bailey. Bailey forms a deep bond with Ethan, becoming an inseparable part of each other's lives. Bailey describes the love between them as strong and emphasizes their mutual importance to one another. Bailey asserts that "the flow of love between us [Toby and Ethan] was so strong," (52) and "we are the centre of each other's world" (56). Bailey adapts to Ethan's routines and accompanies him to his grandparents' farm. Bailey takes pride in being a well-behaved dog and supports and protects Ethan through life's challenges.

At the same time, *A Dog's Purpose* also explores human-human relationships through the perspective of the dog. Ethan has a neighbor named Todd, who is often excluded socially. Bailey notices Todd's psychological suffering and becomes aware of his jealousy towards Ethan. One day, after Ethan and Bailey win a race against Todd, Todd

attempts to poison Bailey out of spite for Ethan's happiness. However, Bailey senses the danger and manages to escape, recalling his mother's warning to be cautious around humans.

Bailey senses Todd's animosity towards Ethan when he sees the way Todd looks at Ethan and Hannah, Ethan's girlfriend. Bailey detects a dark emotion emanating from Todd, something he has never felt from anyone before. Bailey realizes that nonhuman animals possess an understanding of human emotions. Later, Todd ignites Ethan's residence, resulting in Ethan suffering significant leg injuries and being burdened with a permanent limp. Bailey experiences deep remorse for not being able to safeguard Ethan, as Bailey firmly believes that protecting Ethan is the primary purpose of their existence. Driven by a strong desire for retribution, Bailey assists the authorities in locating Todd, leading to Todd's subsequent arrest and imprisonment.

Bailey remains by Ethan's side as his parents go through a divorce, and as a result, Ethan spends his final year of high school living on his grandparents' farm. Later, Ethan and his girlfriend, Hannah, end their relationship. When Ethan heads off to college after a decade, Bailey, feeling adrift without him, only gets to see Ethan during holiday visits. As a result, Bailey becomes withdrawn and ill. Therefore, he spends most his days sleeping. He gets depressed because he cannot imagine his life without Ethan. Bailey often dreams of Ethan to the point that he hates those dreams. Ethan's mother knows that Bailey is in pain. So, Ethan's mother and grandparents decide to put him to sleep. The vet euthanizes Bailey giving him a shot to ease his pain, thereby ending Bailey's second experience who dies of a broken heart.

Ending Bailey's second life with his second owner Ethan, he knows that his purpose is "to love [Ethan], and be with him, to make him happy, [He] didn't want to cause him any unhappiness" (130). Bailey wants to be with Ethan to make him happy. For Bailey, "[Ethan's] happiness made [Him] happy" (119). It is clear that Bailey feels that he has fulfilled his purpose in life after years of devotion to Ethan.

Bailey is reborn as a female German, a type of dogs, and she is adopted by a female German police officer, Jakob. She renames the dog Ellie. When Ellie awakes up again in a new female life, she finds that her journey is not finished. Ellie has more to realize. Ellie works as a rescue and search canine. She does her best to adjust to her new life as female Ellie; this life is different from her past life as Bailey. Ellie asserts: "A dog's job was to do what people want" (153). It is clear that nonhuman animals do not have the chance to live the life they want.

In her life with Ethan, Ellie learns new tricks and her purpose is to be Ethan's side as he grows up. Ellie believes that she has fulfilled her purpose, but she finds out she still looks for a new purpose. Ellie asks: "if that was the case, why was I now Ellie? Could a dog have more than one purpose?" (135) On the contrary, with Jakob, Ellie has to learn new rules; she learns how to climb up a slide and how to save people.

Thus, Jakob and Ellie work in fighting crimes. On one mission, Ellie and Jakob rescue a girl who has been kidnapped. Then, the kidnapper shoots Jakob who steps away from duty. Therefore, Jakob gives Ellie to her friend Maya. Maya and Ellie work together. Ellie, for example, saves an old woman who still alive in the wake of an earthquake. Ellie is happy because she feels "[An old woman's] fear turn to hope" (168). Maya takes care of Ellie even her death of aging. Thus, Ellie's purpose in her third life is to save children from being lost because she works as a rescue dog.

Ellie comes back as a male black Labrador, a type of dogs, retriever. He is adopted by female Wendi who renames him Bear. Wendi leaves Bear alone for several times and forgets to feed him. For Bear, "life with Wendi, has no purpose whatsoever" (190). Therefore, Bear becomes frustrated and full of energy that he barks for hours. He cannot live with Wendi because her apartment does not allow dogs. After receiving a letter saying Bear needs a better environment. So, Wendi gives him to her mother, who lives with an alcoholic boyfriend, Victor. Victor drives Bear to a remote road, abandoning him. Bear "didn't feel free; [He] didn't feel full of life. [He] felt sad and guilty [Because] he had no purpose, no direction" (198). This reflects that Bear's sole purpose in life is to be with humans and to live among and serve humans. In other words, this emphasizes that the role of human-animal studies is to consider the humanist subject as valuable, and to abandon the humanist subject entirely is seen as failure.

However, Bear knows this road. In his life as Bailey, he is once on the road with Ethan. Moreover, he learns how to scent. So, Toby uses this skill, recognizing the scent that back to Ethan's farm. Ethan becomes an old man and lives alone in the family's farm. He takes Toby and renames him Buddy.

Buddy accomplishes a heartwarming reunion between Ethan and his long-lost love, Hannah, who comes to live with Ethan on the farm. Consequently, Buddy dedicates himself to ensuring Ethan's happiness, noticing that the sorrow that burdened Ethan has vanished, replaced by a tranquil and uplifting joy. Buddy points out that "the pain in my boy [Ethan] was gone, replaced by a serene, uplifting happiness" (226).

Buddy rescues Ethan “not from the pond but from the sinking despair of his own life” (227). Buddy saves Ethan, not from physical danger like he did in the pond incident, but from the depths of despair that consumed his life. Throughout Buddy's fourth life, his purpose becomes prominently emphasized, underscoring the moral that even after death, there are still numerous purposes left to fulfill. Buddy firmly asserts that his fascination with human beings stems from the unbreakable connection between their destinies and his own.

Suffice to say that that Buddy's life purpose is to be a constant companion and loyal partner to his owners, always occupying the front seat in each of his different lives. Buddy's role extends beyond simply sitting next to his owners; he actively shares in the journey of life with them. Buddy comes to the realization that his multiple lives serve a profound purpose: to acquire essential skills and lessons that will enable him to ultimately save Ethan from the overwhelming despair that engulfs his existence, rather than just rescuing him from physical danger like the incident in the pond. This solidifies the fact that Buddy's purpose is intertwined with living alongside Ethan. In the end, Buddy passes away, and the reader's attention is more drawn to the profound grief experienced by the dog rather than the human's death. Buddy says:

As for me: I loyally remained right where I was remembering the very first time I had ever seen the boy [Ethan] and then just now, the very last time-and all the times in between. The deep aching grief I knew I would feel would come soon enough, but at that moment mostly what I felt was peace, secure in the knowledge that by living my life the way I had, everything had come down to this moment. I had fulfilled my purpose. (230-1)

This confirms that Buddy is sure that he has fulfilled his purpose as a nonhuman animal during his journey in searching for his purpose in life through different eventful lives.

Therefore, Cameron's novel, *A Dog's Purpose*, affirms the shared existence of animals and humans in the world. Donovan recognizes that animals possess consciousness and agency, being subjects rather than mere objects. They have identifiable desires and needs, many of which overlap with those of human beings. This reaffirms the notion that nonhuman animals coexist with humans in the world (‘Aestheticizing Animal Cruelty’ 204).

It becomes evident why Cameron chose the subtitle "*A Novel For Humans*" for his book. Through *A Dog's Purpose*, humans are prompted to reflect upon their own humanity, questioning the perceived barriers between humans and nonhuman animals, and redefining the concepts of humanity and animality. It is important to note that the primary objective of human-animal studies and the animal standpoint theory is to encourage and emphasize the need for humans to reconsider the essential role animals play in shaping their moral lives. In this regard, the dog in the novel assumes a significant role in the lives of his owners. Cameron effectively portrays the animal not as a mere pet confined to the household, but as a vital presence that profoundly influences the lives of its human companions.

To conclude, adopting a critical posthumanist approach, the novel *A Dog's Purpose* has been demonstrated to prompt readers to view nonhuman animals as deserving of respect and equal rights. That is to say, the dog, in the novel, sees that his role or purpose in life is to protect Ethan and be with him until he grows up. He is the hero dog who saves many lives. At the same time, Toby learns about companionship and love; he feels that he truly achieves his purpose in life. In this way, Cameron's *A Dog's Purpose* asserts the subjecting and agency of nonhuman animals in their world as well as their human's world. Cameron adopts the nonhuman animals' point of view to confirm their consciousness, feelings, and experiences. Thus, nonhuman species are equal to the human species. Additionally, this novel emphasizes that the voice of the animals is essential for understanding what it means to be humans and makes them realize their behavior and practices against other species, nonhuman animals.

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