REVISTA ÚRSULA

From Mother Nature to Modern Nature: Unleashed Animality and Disoriented Humanity in Sergio Galarza's *Paseador de perros*

De la Madre Naturaleza a la naturaleza moderna: animalidad desatada y humanidad desorientada en *Paseador de perros*, por Sergio Galarza

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RESUMEN: En *Paseador de perros* (2008), el escritor peruano Sergio Galarza crea una historia que problematiza el concepto de la ciudad como espacio paradigmático de desarrollo. El texto hace hincapié en la vida urbana como una experiencia de encarcelamiento simbólico en lugar de liberación, desafiando los principales argumentos del proceso civilizador: la necesidad de someter a la naturaleza y liberar a los humanos de lo salvaje afuera y dentro de ellos mismos. Este artículo destaca cómo el autor construye y explora las interacciones entre los personajes humanos y los animales en la historia, subrayando que sus experiencias en la ciudad más bien reflejan el salvajismo del mundo "incivilizado" en el que viven — un arreglo narrativo que fragua una crítica de la inhumanidad y explotación que caracterizan la vida urbana.

ABSTRACT: In *Paseador de perros* (2008), Peruvian writer Sergio Galarza crafts a story that problematizes the concept of the city as a paradigmatic space of development. The text emphasizes city life as an experience of symbolic imprisonment rather than liberation, challenging the main arguments of the civilizing process: the need to subjugate nature and liberate humans from the wild outside and within themselves. This article highlights how the author sets up and explores the interactions between the human and animal characters in the story, emphasizing that their experiences in the city rather reflect the savagery of the "uncivilized" world in which they live — a narrative structure that forges a critique of the inhumanity and exploitation that characterize urban life.

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Introduction: modernity, nature, and the tensions in between

Undeniably, the quest for modernity is a founding aspect of Latin America, shaping politics and social life in the countries of the region since their inception. In the permanent struggle to overcome backwardness and attain progress, the strife between civilization against nature is still a powerful metaphor to reflect on the history of the region. As such, the city continues to serve as the paramount reference of civilized life, as indicated by the massive human displacement to urban centers of Latin America in the past 50 years, and in fiction, by the predominantly urban literature of the same period. Mirroring reality, the literary city lures characters with promises of opportunities while also assailing them with physical and psychological degeneration. As a rule of thumb, the city of the 21st century, as depicted by contemporary Latin American writers such as Mexican Guillermo Arriaga, Puerto Rican Mayra Santos-Febres or Chilean Álvaro Bisama, is one where opportunities are scarce, where violence runs free, and where contrasts of all sorts abound[1]. Plots navigate the characters' distress as deeply reflexive narratives supersede a violent portrayal of urban life. This movement inward portrays the urban space as a site of symbolic imprisonment, thus challenging modernity as an experience of liberation. Marshall Berman argues that since Karl Marx it has been impossible to dissociate the possibilities attributed to modernity (and the city as its pinnacle) from the suffering caused by its palpable realities: "not only modern society is a cage, but all the people in it are shaped by its bars" (27).

In its goal to expel or control nature, the civilizing process sought to free humans from dangers related to the wild and anxieties regarding their own animality but ended up dehumanizing them. Quite often, in the literary city, characters will find in animality a powerful means of expressing their confusion and disillusionment. Steve Baker posits that this turn to the animal and animality in contemporary fiction signals the awareness that humans are not free agents in their sociocultural spaces, which assails the entrenched

[1] In *Aires de Familia* (2000), Mexican writer and critic Carlos Monsiváis claims that recent Latin American literary production focuses on the city, both as stage and as a character, as a telling metaphor of the enduring culture of hopelessness, dominated by savage capitalism and barbarism, that prevails in the region.

stereotypes that maintain human identity (26). The presence (or absence) of animals and the inhumane treatment of characters are some of the elements that form the yardstick of literary animality and conform to a critique of the rationale of modernity. This is the case of *Paseador de perros* (2008), the first novel written by Peruvian writer Sergio Galarza, in which the author employs an array of animal components to depict these struggles, such as plenty of pets, as hinted at in the title, and a wild animal that plays a crucial role in helping the protagonist better understand and partly overcome his human plight.

The story is narrated in first person from a transatlantic perspective, blurring the alleged contrasts between the underdeveloped world (Latin America, Peru) and the so-called First World (Europe, Spain), further problematizing lingering colonial notions of European superiority. The protagonist, a Peruvian immigrant in Spain, becomes fully aware of his distressful conditions of life through animality, exemplifying Philip Armstrong's argument that human-animal narratives frequently concentrate on claustrophobic and denaturalized environments within which all sorts of life are captive and threatened (170). The protagonist eventually switches from dire hopelessness to a certain degree of empowerment, and, in this heuristic process, he also rescues some of the animals, showing that not only humans must be saved from modern society's mistreatment. In this literary assemblage, the animal and animality are representational devices alluding to a context of overt oppression. I argue that Galarza's extensive use of animal tropes provides the intensity and efficacy necessary to generate a plangent portrayal of the characters' loss of human dignity via a penetrating literary critique of the social outcomes of modernity.

Disrupting foundational dichotomies

Sergio Galarza was born in 1976 in Lima, Peru, and currently lives in Spain[2]. He has published six novels, and in 2010 was awarded the FNAC New Talent Prize for *Paseador de perros*. The novel amalgamates fictional and autobiographical notes since

[2] While much of the Latin American literature of displacement of the previous century is shaped by the experience of political exile, as is the case of Uruguayans Eduardo Galeano, Cristina Peri Rossi, and Argentine Juan Gelman, in the 21st century said literature is marked by various immigration experiences, including writers hoping to find better publishing opportunities in Europe. In the Peruvian case, historically several authors immigrated to Europe, temporarily or permanently, such as Julio Ramón Ribeyro in the previous century, and more recently, Sergio Galarza, Santiago Roncagliolo, and Ricardo Sumalavia.

the author, like the protagonist of his novel, moves from Lima to Madrid in search for a better life. The economic hardships that the character faces in Europe ruin his plans and change his colonized notion of the Spanish capital as the model that his home country unsuccessfully aspired to replicate.

In *Paseador de perros*, as the protagonist moves around the Spanish capital, he realizes that its progress is but a façade, which makes it harder for him to forget the tribulations of living in Lima, a city where, in his perception, animality reigns. Indeed, animalized descriptions of environments connect the present in Madrid to his vivid memories of Lima. The protagonist, whose name is unknown, remembers how hordes of soccer fans perpetrated acts of urban "savagery" in the Peruvian capital. In their outbursts of rage, they would attack everyone and everything after their team's defeat. In Madrid, the impression of being surrounded by an uncivilized atmosphere comes in more figuratively animal terms: "odiaba estar en una jaula, pero todos viajábamos por el mismo camino, como en el metro, apretándonos como animales subterráneos llamados usuarios, gusanos encerrados en una pesadilla de acero, vidrio y luces" (46). Animality is the axis of dialogue between the two cities, a readily intelligible marker of how inhospitable both have become. The analogy destabilizes center-periphery cartographies, as the protagonist's living conditions in Madrid end up being as adverse as those in Lima that he painstakingly had to endure[3]. The narrative twist is the asphyxiating experience of living in a space molded by historical assumptions of progress attributed to European cities that have long served as references to urbanization in Latin America.

The reality that the protagonist encounters, though, reveals that Madrid seems to collapse socially under the imbalances of modernity, dragging its inhabitants — native and foreign — in the process. For the latter, immigrant realities soon fall short of their heightened expectations. Urged to find work yet unable to locate the much-vaunted opportunities of the First World, the disoriented protagonist accepts an odd job as a dog walker and starts to live from hand to mouth. His girlfriend Laura, who had left Peru with him, will not find any job, which deepens her feelings of inadequacy in the new city and

[3] Literary critic and professor Gabriel Giorgi argues that, particularly since the 1960s, animals and animality appear in more uncommon forms in Latin American cultural production, fueled by an aesthetics that stress the precariousness of the human-animal divide. Once a foundational flaw that the postcolonial nations were unable to get rid of, animality is now reappropriated by artists and writers in an organic, affective, and political continuum between animals and humans (8). It is only consequent that, given its remarkable efficacy as a metaphor of social life, animality comes to incorporate colonizing nations, as in *Paseador de perros*.

contributes to the end of their relationship. Alone and emotionally stranded, in a misanthropic spin, the dog walker starts working with animals full-time. While for his Spanish boss that meant reliable cheap labor, capitalizing on the immigrants' lack of choices, for the protagonist it was a way to play down his misfortunes and a subterfuge to avoid human contact. Despite his unconscious intentions, the proximity to animals functions as a double-edged sword: on the one hand, he does not have to spend most of his time dealing with people in Madrid; on the other hand, it opens up a window into the pet owners' lives through which, against his will, he learns first-hand about their troubles.

As John Berger points out, pet keeping proliferated as a modern practice and indicates a withdrawal of humans into a private space characteristic of city life (12). In *Paseador de perros*, pets are a point of intersection between public and private environments, effectively concretizing their owners' seclusion from the city. While Spaniards in the novel desert public spaces, which are now occupied by their pets, Galarza anthropomorphizes Lima and Madrid to further manifest the contradictions of modernity. The two capitals resemble living beings affected by physical and psychological pathologies typically associated with urban life: "Madrid no posee el *look* caótico que caracteriza a Lima, pero también es una ciudad enferma. Madrid sufre de esquizofrenia, Alzheimer, párkinson, artritis, diabetes, depresión crónica y otras enfermedades" (61). The consequences of how Madrid and Lima disrupt their inhabitants' physical and mental health are brought to fruition by the correspondence between the sickly materiality of the cities and the pet owners' ailing bodies and minds. Initially, though, it is the dog walker's displacement around Madrid that shapes his bleak perception of the city.

The new urban fauna: pets and troubled humans

As the protagonist's job takes him to different neighborhoods, he observes the jumble of peoples and cultures in Madrid. He familiarizes himself with the diverse ethnic groups and the specific areas where they live, laying out a map of segregation in the capital. When he starts entering the pet owners' homes, yet another side of the social ills in Spanish society comes to the surface. All his clients are tormented by problems ranging from health to family issues, regardless of their economic status, and have become recluses, avoiding any contact with the city and its other dwellers. Their option to hire a

dog walker bluntly states the links and the rifts between private and social life, as pets become the only concrete evidence of their owners' public existence, symbols of an idealized life of flourishing urbanity where human nature would thrive, not wither.

In the case of Lima, the implementation of neoliberal politics across Latin America that took place starting in the 1980s intensified the relocation of large rural populations to major urban centers, with the unprecedented and unplanned urban sprawl being the result of a dramatic increase in poverty levels rather than a consequence of the availability of jobs or access to infrastructure (Davis 16). As a result, the chaotic urbanization of major Latin American cities has pushed increasing contingents of individuals to other countries, where they have aggravated xenophobic reactions, as expressed by one of the protagonist's clients in Spain: "empezó a quejarse de los inmigrantes, esa gente que no respeta nada [...] A los españoles no les gusta que lleguen tantos extraños a su país" (44).

Despite being an immigrant, the protagonist, too, starts to hold negative opinions about the other foreigners: "El bus se llenaba de rumanos, latinos, árabes y algunas excepciones españolas [...] era un contenedor de olores que invitaban al desmayo" (14). Julia Kristeva argues that, for western modernity, the abject represents the impure, the primitive, stigmatizing the Other and separating them from the realm of the civilized (20). With a biocentric tone, the Peruvian's disparaging judgments against immigrants from poorer countries, as if he did not come from one of them himself, reiterate that development is more than just a matter of economics, but also of how one is able to move away from nature in its uncontrolled, uncivilized expressions, such as giving off foul smells.

The haunting memories of Lima, the degrading conditions immigrants face in Madrid, the disgraceful lives some Spaniards have, his economic deprivation and social avoidance all come together to form the protagonist's debacle. As frustration mounts, he must readjust his parameters of civilization. Recalling Peruvian essayist Salazar Bondy's strong words, all of a sudden, the Peruvian capital no longer looks so horrible: "No entendía cómo podia arrepentirme de haber dejado Lima" (20). The protagonist's crisis gives an affective inflection to the global problematics of human displacement. Immigrants tend to idealize the experience of migration and, as a strategy to deal with unmet expectations, seek to find innovative forms of adaptation (Appadurai 31). One of

these strategies is the providential support of immigrant communities, but instead, the protagonist avoids creating bonds with other South American dog walkers and finds solace in his relationship with animals — the only beings he confesses to love and genuinely care about.

Laura Brown posits that pet keeping is an "antidote to the alienation and commodification of modern urban life," oscillating in literature from kinship to difference, from affection to antithesis (20). Pets provide *urbanites* with a much-needed connection to nature that, in the civilizing process, they have come to reject and then to long for. In *Paseador de perros*, though, pets have lost their effect as sources of consolation, and even as mementos of a nostalgic past where Mother Nature was not demonized. The growing demand for dog walking services in the story and the circumstances in which they occur suggest that pets have turned into nothing but a token of humans' detachment from real life. Since pet owners do not interact with their animals in the novel, the pointlessness of having them indicates the disorientation and lack of fulfillment of human existence nowadays. Modernity and its symbols, like the pet, reveal that people have been relegated to the category of dispensable figures, relics of the failing ideals of humanity.

One of the dog walker's clients, Paula Boxer, epitomizes such human condition. She leaves the door unlocked for the protagonist to pick up her pet and never comes to meet him in person. Later in the novel, he is the first to find out that the woman had committed suicide. Paula's tragic end illustrates the collapse of modernization and its tenets: the claim to bring about an overall improvement of living standards disregards the essentials of human well-being. Paula dies after having probably lived a meaningless or unbearable life. All that is left is her dog, who finalizes the owner's process of deterritorialization. The animal now occupies the stage, urban and literary — the culmination of humans disappearing from the scene, despite the irony of the client's name itself.

In the civilizing process, animals were expelled from the city to wipe off nature, only to be readmitted afterwards strictly under human criteria of need and convenience, and most recently as a source of relief against the ills of civilization (Philo 59). Interestingly, as the pet owners in the novel stay home while their dogs stroll around the streets of Madrid, animal territories expand and subvert anthropocentric spaces of

stability. The literary animal reflects the disillusionment caused by modernity failing to elevate humankind toward unprecedented levels of development. The pet can no longer be a metonymy of human fulfillment, as the protagonist indicates with a reference to an acclaimed animal character: "Ninguna de las familias que he conocido es la de Lassie" (82). Instead, a new paradigm is put forth, one in which the animal survives the disintegration of the human figure. Furthermore, pets redefine a Cartesian hierarchy, since the human in the limelight, the dog walker, is expressly at their service: "Los perros, mis jefes reales" (40).

With the dogs taking over the streets of Madrid, paradoxically, the protagonist's life is suddenly filled with some purpose, while the senselessness of their owners' lives is gradually more evident. The *paseador* then becomes a makeshift shrink to several of his Spanish clients and juxtaposes his multiple duties in a suggestive equivalence: "recojo su mierda y la de sus dueños cuando me cuentan sus problemas" (26). As he follows such disgraceful stories around the city, and against his will, the protagonist unfolds a map of urban desolation that captures the dejection of the urban blight.

The wild in the city: nature and culture in conflict

It is with one of the recluse Spaniard families and their unusual pet that the protagonist will gain some empowerment. The dog walker accepts a challenge that his colleagues had turned down: to care for a pet raccoon. The animal, named Odo, is in a cage in the rich neighborhood of Pozuelo. Nevertheless, the protagonist will soon realize that not even wealth can prevent a family's disintegration in an already crumbling world.

Galarza is aware that the caged raccoon in an affluent urban district is a highly disruptive element. Deprived of its original habitats, this species has come to live near urban areas where it feeds on leftovers of human food. In the text, that reflects a fundamental incoherence: conceptually, and unlike traditional pets, wild and free animals do not belong in the city. Marian Scholtmeijer argues that "it is precisely their unfittingness that counts, for it addresses the dispossessed spirit of the city dweller, the human feeling of being likewise disowned by city life" (143). To function as a catalyst of the protagonist's deepening awareness, the author gradually strips away some of the racoon's animal characteristics: his humanization process runs parallel to society's

animalization of humans. For Odo, that meant aggression in a twofold mode: physical and ontological. The physical level is initially defined by the brutality of the confinement of a wild creature and then by the deliberate harm that the dog walker will inflict upon him. On the ontological level, not only is the animal character partly deprived of his own animality, but his textual existence is defined solely by his reiteration as an expedient to make a case for humankind.

Odo was owned by a young man who immigrates to London after refusing to be handed down his family's business. Sorrowful, the father projects his disappointment and helplessness onto the raccoon: the animal in the cage embodies his failure to keep his only son near him. The father shields himself from reality in every way, and his only contact with the external world is through the newspapers where he reads about the rapid changes of life in Spain. Tellingly, the wild animal represents the very point of resistance between nature and culture, displaying the friction between the son's independence and meeting the family's expectations. The raccoon in *Paseador* inversely signals, at the full cost of the animal welfare, the son's insubordination, and the father's attempt to curb the son's nature.

The cage in/of the city

In the novel, urban characters experience interconnectedness in an ungenerous form as everyone is bound together in the captivity of the city. Against humankind's self-predatory practices, the dog walker turns to the animal — outside and inside. Something within the protagonist fights erasure and finds in the condition of the caged animal a sense of likeness and endurance. He becomes increasingly sympathetic to the caged racoon, caring for the animal's every need. Giving up on Odo would mean renouncing something inside the protagonist himself — something authentic, closer to his genuine nature and further away from the artificiality of the modern world.

In front of the cage, locking and unlocking the door to the animal and to the human worlds alike, the protagonist situates himself in the interstitial zone between modernity as the utmost expression of human intellect and nature as the realm of instinct and recalcitrance. However solid, the cage is but a thin line of separation profusely endowed with meanings: it is a space of confinement and transit, of dependence, defiance, and also

transformation. For Michel Foucault, the cage lays out the asymmetrical relation between victor and victim: "The cage is the simple figure of an unmediated division —subject utterly against object, power utterly against powerlessness" (59). Notwithstanding, in *Paseador de perros* the cage upsets such paradigmatic assemblage of power and leads the reader to reconsider who loses and who wins, whether who is effectively free is the protagonist outside or the animal, and if freedom in any form is achievable at all.

The early contacts between the protagonist and the raccoon are of mutual recognition and a display of latent and active powers. From a corner of the cage, Odo hisses at him, threatening to attack: "me petrificó de miedo" (32). It is unadvisable to keep a raccoon as a pet: they are difficult to be tamed and, even after being held captive for long, they show highly unpredictable behavior. At first the protagonist tries to build an amicable relationship, however, being both wild and humanized in the narrative, the animal resists it with aggressiveness. The pet sitter responds to Odo's hostility from his Foucauldian point of advantage: "Busqué cebarlo para ver si así le provocaba una depresión por sobrepeso" (71). Inflicting this kind of sadistic suffering would reinforce the humanization of the animal and its condition of an easy target for a cathartic and vengeful act of cruelty that the protagonist is incapable of directing at the social system itself.

Odo reacts by showing his claws, though, at the same time, he is cognizant of his dependence on the pet sitter and lets him do his job. It is through the raccoon's eyes, though, that the animal's confinement most profoundly speaks to the protagonist. Jonathan Burt observes that, when the animal character is not given an artificial voice in fiction, visual contact is the usual form of communication between human and animal characters (38). When Odo stares at the protagonist, and even when the raccoon's eyes seem lost in his "thoughts", he prompts the protagonist to reevaluate his own human condition. In this sense, Jacques Derrida considers the change from seen to seer key in this relationship with the animal as it deeply destabilizes "the humanity of man" and troubles humankind's push away from animality and nature (6)[4].

[4] Jacques Derrida was the first modern philosopher to address the question of the animal from a radically different perspective. He criticizes the fact that humankind has comprised all kinds of nonhuman living creatures under the label "animal", erasing their peculiarities. What Western philosophical tradition has done, argues Derrida, is to define what man is and man's position in the animal kingdom against this all-embracing concept of the animal, privileging the fact that humans can reason and communicate verbally. The change from being the object seen to the agent who sees, then, challenges human's monopoly of the

The eloquent visual dialogue between the pet and the sitter effects a change in the perception of self and otherness. Western culture emphasizes the animal as the antithesis of being civilized and rational, as the primordial Other without which the notion of human self would be unsustainable to begin with. *Par excellence,* humans are creatures capable of recreating the world around them, and who express the need to overcome the limitations of a nature shared, to a lesser or greater degree, with all other animals. Humans acknowledge the need to control their instincts and to mobilize such energies to enhance their individual and collective experience. Despite such power and abilities, humans are incapable of setting themselves free from their own culturally-created systems of production of life. The protagonist realizes that his most human feelings and expectations do not matter to the world around him: as free as he appears to be in contrast with the racoon, the protagonist, too, is the caged being who can expect nothing more than a daily share of food and water.

It would be unfeasible to establish an affectionate relationship between the animal and the protagonist here. It is not that the animal is undeserving of love, but, given the raccoon's nature, keeping it as a pet would perpetuate an act of violence. Besides, in the plot that would mean subjecting the wild to the "civilized" completely, leaving the human character devoid of any means to palliate his disheartening situation. The raccoon cannot act like one of the dogs in the text either, since a conceptual distance must be preserved so that it can later be abated — and canine pets are too close to humans. As Nigel Rothfels contends, to be an effective trope, the animal figure in fiction requires a skillful combination of applying the human-animal relational logic as well as subverting it (109).

Once the pet-sitting relationship is underway, the protagonist starts perceiving the animal as a being with greater needs. He ponders over Odo's occasional silence: "quizá pensaba que no era un simple limpiador sino su prócer de la independencia" (32). Civilization's dependence on the animal — an organic resource, psychological consolation, a canvas on which to project humanity's self-reflections — limits the sitter's possibilities of intervention. He does not consider freeing Odo: his dependence on the animal is material and, above all, representational, like for the rest of humankind. The

thoughtful act of seeing. Confronted by the animal seer, humans grapple with the upsetting realization that not being able to talk indeed does not mean being incapable of thinking. A visual dialogue takes place and overrides the fact that animals cannot speak (a human language), forcing man to admit that they may really be capable of reasoning, and, most importantly, showing humankind's uneasiness about what they *might* be thinking.

cage materializes and reminds him of these rigid cultural structures, functioning as a mirror, as the protagonist increasingly recognizes himself in a situation like that of the raccoon. Both characters must conform to the ruling hierarchy, where neither of them is at the top. And both are subjugated to the civilizing process, each in their own way: the animal remains in its primeval position of utility, while humans like the *paseador* move down to the infrahuman category of unwanted migrants.

Mourning the animal loss: the empty mirror

According to Scholtmeijer, wild animals are particularly apt to be used in moral judgments against the tenets of civilization (97). As a partially humanized character, Odo embodies the demise of the human species. Burdened by such semantic charge, the raccoon counterattacks. In a slip-up, while the *paseador* is cleaning the cage one day, Odo jumps and clings fiercely to his neck. The Foucauldian paradigm is bound to collapse, as the protagonist finds himself threatened by the animal blowing forcefully in his ear. The most absolute powerlessness, until now represented in the animal, switches sides in the protagonist's despairing account: "Para qué tanto viaje si me va a matar un mapache, me lamenté" (30). What happens next restores the original condition of the defeated: the animal refrains from biting his sitter and jumps back to his cage, resigned. From an anthropological stance, the animal salvation founders at exactly this point. The protagonist has to accept the animal's decision not to attack or escape — oddly enough, it is the will of the wild to perish. Nonetheless, the animal's attitude exerts epistemological violence on the core values of humanity: why leave the cage and wander around a world that has evolved only to become too savage even for a wild creature?

Galarza's next diegetic movement abides by cultural expectations: execute yet one more sacrifice of a non-human being. The sitter's routine is interrupted when he comes to the house in Pozuelo, and the father informs him that the raccoon has escaped. The protagonist knows that it is a made-up excuse: "La jaula está vacía y limpia, como si un sicario hubiese borrado las huellas del delito" (106). Right before the protagonist's eyes, the empty and clean cage suggests the uselessness of his own sacrifices for a modernity that gives him little to nothing in return, and how anybody's presence can be wiped off easily. The erasure also reiterates that there is no point in preserving anyone's history, for

the only story to be told is that of human worthlessness. The open door of the cage ignites the realization that a similar destiny looms ahead for the protagonist.

Steve Baker postulates that "cagedness is an effect of art, a means of rendering the animal evident" (129). If the cage in the novel presents the war against animality or civilization against nature, then Odo's absence could be viewed as a triumph of the modern mind. However, the supremacy of the rational world must be taken with a grain of salt, since it extensively relies on unequal social structures and forms of exploitation to be sustained — the survival of the fittest defines the general run of humankind, with every man for himself. The dark irony of the novel is that humans need the animals to fully comprehend the disjunction between the sublime ideals of modern society and the political and economic realities of alienation and segregation. It is a tale of two cities, but not Lima and Madrid, rather the actual one where humans live and the imagined one in which they have come to believe as a species. Odo's absence announces that humankind is now left to its own devices, after having taken for granted the value-laden resource of the animal.

When the animal disappears, humankind's speciesist reliance on constellating meanings around it — a mode of self-awareness and self-realization — is halted, and everything human suddenly is in disarray. The main lesson to be learned, and possibly the most critical point where the human-animal equivalence fails, is as follows: unlike that of the animal, man's animality obeys an economy of excess. Animal violence is condensed, sufficient, punctual; human violence is diffused, disproportional, and disguised. Animal aggression is justifiable in itself; human aggression — particularly against humans themselves — has to be understood socially. Crime, hunger, exploitation, and marginalization can be interpreted as such, indicating the internal fissures of the human species, and posing complex moral issues to its project of modernity.

Conclusion

In *Paseador de perros*, encapsulating the savagery of the "uncivilized" world, Galarza reorders the continuities and discontinuities between humans and animals to fashion a critique of the societal values that modern society represents. The harried urban life suggests that civilization's urge to progress ignores the conspicuously predatory

practices that it has generated and that affect all living creatures. In this sense, the author skillfully builds a narrative in which the alignment of humans and animals reveals the outright exploitation of both, whether for practical or symbolic purposes.

After losing his animal mirror, the protagonist decides to move to France. Significantly, as a *flanêur* of the animalities embodied in the city, the protagonist expects to be able to identify new situations of imprisonment, hopefully relying on what proved indispensable to decode human contradictions: "me pregunto si en París habrá mapaches" (107). His very condition of social precariousness made it easier to take an escape route, now that Odo was gone and he had no one else to care for in Madrid. He knows that humans, regardless of social class, and animals, tame and wild, are the thrall of a living ecosystem that unremittingly defines itself as modern and civilized, without due regard to being humane. The protagonist has no sentiments about saving humankind and rather seeks to prolong his own survival, reiterating social disconnect as yet another paradox of urban life.

What is perhaps the protagonist's only genuine act of compassion will come at the end of the narrative, and once again will contradict any expectation of sympathy for other humans. One of his clients is a lady whose dying husband insisted on keeping three stray dogs in their apartment. She decides to put them to sleep as she is now alone, awaiting a hospital call. The dog walker then unexpectedly shows up to take the dogs for a last walk. At sunset, he unleashes the three dogs. They start running, flying in the face of modernity as they go against traffic, while drivers honk their horns and blink their headlights.

Saving the three dogs, at least temporarily, stresses the innocence and defenselessness of animals, and how even pets are victimized as it strikes humans' fancy. Against all odds, a new form of relationship between humans and animals is also generated — one in which mutual support is the path to liberation. The novel ends with an empowering alliance of exploited living creatures against humans-turned-to-machines: faceless drivers managing to preserve the order of the city. A minor disturbance to the traffic cannot dislodge modern humans from the center of the world they have created, but it warns about the deleterious pace of dehumanization that underlies modernity. As if illuminated by the headlights, the symbols in the novel are superimposed, and the cage left behind can be taken to function as Plato's cave. Humans believe to be in full control of nature, opening and closing the cage of modernity in an ontological operation of

entering and leaving animality at their own will, backed up by the corrupt logic of the civilizing process. But that is an awakening moment, and just a deceiving effect of shadows after all.

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