University of the Sunshine Coast

Jay Kylie Ludowyke

Dead or alive?: the animism of artefact in literature

Abstract:

Writers commonly use animism to transform inanimate objects into assertive 'things', in possession of metaphysical qualities. In theorising the effects of applying literary animism to a real historical artefact, this study asserts that once enlivened, an artefact can die twice. It dies once with its real-world destruction and a second time when that destruction echoes through its literary thingness. The discussion is framed by examining the history of literary animism. This includes the eighteenth-century it-narrative with animal and object narrators, the transition to children's literature, and the resistance to animism that accompanies modern fiction, in this case, particularly Joanne Harris's *Blackberry Wine*. Further, it examines the alignment that has emerged between children's literature and true story as a basis for applying animism to artefacts in nonfiction, facilitating their dual-death.

Biographical note:

Jay Kylie Ludowyke is a Doctor of Creative Arts candidate at the University of the Sunshine Coast where she also teaches creative writing. She is the recipient of an Australian Postgraduate Award and her research focus is on creative nonfiction about historical artefacts. Her recent fiction has been shortlisted in the Great Novella Search and published in *Meniscus* and the *Visible Ink* anthology.

Introduction

Writers have long had a preoccupation with objects, real or imagined: from Aladdin's lamp to Pandora's box to the Pulitzer-prize-winning ekphrastic novel *The Goldfinch*, about the painting of the same name. According to Bill Brown's seminal work on Thing Theory, twentieth century literary examples are elevated from mere objects to *things*, after having asserted themselves, after they have changed the normative neutral relationship objects have with humans, as would happen when Aladdin rubs the lamp and Pandora opens the box (2003). While a normal object is perceived as inanimate, an assertive thing is metaphysical and 'social' and has a 'secret life' (Appadurai 2013; Blackwell 2007). While objects are inanimate and cannot die – since they were never alive – it stands to reason that if a literary thing can live, it can also die. But before this can occur, a writer must first bring the thing to life. Animism is the narrative technique used to effect this genesis.

Animism is a worldview where the material universe possesses a metaphysical essence and non-human entities have spirits. This includes plants and animals, but also inanimate objects, geographical features and natural elements, like rocks, caves, rivers, mountains, the wind or thunder (Lane 2011: 574). Animistic worldviews emerge in cultures who exist in harmony with nature, rather than those that are anthropocentric (Haviland 2000: 698). Many indigenous populations have a foundational belief in animism; it is not perceived as a religion, but as a way of life (Eck 2005). Animism is distinct from anthropomorphism, where non-human entities are given human form or characteristics. Where animism is the attribution of life or spiritual essence, anthropomorphism is the attribution of human-likeness (Guthrie 2001: 157). An animate entity need not act humanlike, but if it does it is also anthropomorphic.

In Western worldviews, the idea that the supernatural animates the material universe, beyond humans, often meets resistance. This is partially due to a colonial inheritance but also because Western culture lacks exposure to animistic worldviews. Modern human understanding of the material universe is shaped by lived experience, which does not perceptibly demonstrate evidence of a spiritual essence in rocks and trees and objects. Such views, in an age of science, reason and technology, are subject to scepticism.

This paper does not evaluate animism's merits as a worldview, but rather examines how writers have used literary animism to challenge the ontological status of objects. The influential essays in *The Secret Life of Things* (Blackwell 2007) inform a discussion about writers' appropriation of animism, from its ancient origins to its apex in eighteenth century it-narratives and transformation into children's literature. This provides a framework to examine the alignment between animism and true story as a basis for extrapolating how animism can be applied to historical artefacts (historical 'things'). Finally, a theoretical conclusion proposes that enacting a real, but no longer existent, historical artefact with literary animism affords it a dual-death. The first death is through its real-world destruction and the second is through the death of its thingness.

Literary animism's origins and it-narrative

Some of the earliest examples of animal narrators occur in the works of Aesop (620-564 BC), Ovid (BC 43-18 AD) and Apuleius (c. 124-170 AD) (Flint 1998: 212, 224). However, rather than possessing their own spirit, Flint says that early animal narrators tend to substitute for humans, parodying them (1998: 224). Only when the narrator is inanimate, or, more specifically, manufactured, do stories with 'speaking objects' change from parody to satire (Flint 1998). Then the object is not a human proxy, but a critical observer of humanity. This suggests that early animal narrators were anthropomorphic but not *genuinely* animistic, though later object narrators possessed both qualities. The change developed because the eighteenth century was an age that combined storytelling with concerted industrial production (Flint 1998: 212). So while the earliest inanimate narrators stem from Pythagoras's first century accounts of speaking rocks and trees, the mechanical age ushered in new inanimate narrators. These products of manufacture were commodities; circulating objects such as currency, hackney coaches, watches, corkscrews and feather quills (Douglas 2011: 65; Flint 1998: 215). Eighteenth century writers imbued them with a spiritual essence and the ability to communicate, and thus these animistic narrators evolved the genre called it-narrative.

Scholarship disagrees about how best to define it-narrative's generic boundaries. It has a clear relationship with epistolary and picaresque traditions, but differs from canonical texts due to its loose structure and lack of thematic coherence (Bellamy 2014: 117). Most it-narratives are framed by an account of how the object's story came to be published, in a convoluted process that absolves the object of the self-interests and financial gains that accompany publication. For example, the object tells its story to its current owner, who acts as scribe. The manuscript then passes between the scribe's family and acquaintances, one of whom sells it to another party, who publishes it (Flint 1998: 215). Such explanations frequently preface it-narratives and form part of the frame for what Bellamy calls interpolated narratives, where she is referring to hypodiegetic tales – tales within tales – that the object narrates about the people it encounters (2014: 123). As it can only relate each story so far as contact extends with each person, when contact ends – a coin changes hands – so too must that tale, resulting in 'narratives of irresolution' (Bellamy 2014: 123). Despite these difficulties pinpointing the genre's boundaries, the defining trait here is that it-narratives have either object narrators or animal narrators, or are about non-human characters (Bellamy 2014: 117).

The genesis it-narrative is Charles Gildon's 1709 *The Golden Spy,* where coins from different countries debate their nations' merits (Flint 1998: 212, 221). However, true genre popularity only arrived in 1760 with Charles Johnstone's *Chrysal: Or Adventures of a Guinea,* narrated by a gold guinea (Douglas 2011: 65). Upon reading *Chrysal* in 1770, Scottish novelist Henry Mackenzie likened it to 'looking on a collection of dry'd serpents; one trembles at the idea of life in creatures so mischievous to man' (ctd. in Lupton 2011: 47). Eighteenth-century writers employed various mechanisms to animate it-narrators. Often they held a reincarnated human spirit who endured 'miniature deaths' and shifted between forms (Blackwell 2014: 266), as in 'Remark on Dreaming', which tells of the 'transmigrations' of a soul as it

passes through assorted hosts, beginning with a gentleman's son killed by a fall from a horse, to an abused puppy, a bullfinch, beetle, worm, and ending in a flea (Hawkesworth 1823 [1752]; see also Bellamy 2014: 121). The human scribe hears the flea's voice, but does not know its source. Alternatively, the hand of the writer is 'mystically' inspired (Bellamy 2014: 119). However the mechanism, Mackenzie's response encapsulates the Cartesian dualism of it-narratives: their appeal was entrenched in the way they were 'phenomenologically disturbing experiments, proposing the possibility that something nonhuman could require its own form of consciousness' (Lupton 2011: 47).

It-narratives often used plots where an object narrator passed from hand to hand. As in *The Adventures of a Rupee* (1782), who encounters all social classes from impoverished sailor to royal princess, 'the protagonist can be found, lost, sold, given and exchanged and thus come into contact with very different social groups' (Bellamy 2014: 118). This allowed objects of circulation, like money, the most common narrator, to trespass across class boundaries that mandated social interaction in Britain's eighteenth century in a way that people could not (Douglas 2011: 66). For this reason, it-narratives are also called novels of circulation by those who consider the 'mechanism of distribution' rather than the 'character of the narrator or protagonist' as the genre's defining characteristic (Bellamy 2014: 117-9). There are two modes of circulation in it-narratives. Occasionally, the narrator is stationary and observes the circulation of disparate members of society who enter its sphere, as in the *Memoirs of the Shakespeare's Head in Covent Garden*[1] (1755) or *The Adventures of a Cotton Tree* (1836). Far more commonly, the object circulates amongst society. After currency, vehicles were the most common type of circulating narrator. Uniquely, the way in which a person enters a vehicle mirrors a common ability among these narrators to enter the minds of their passengers, as in *The Sedan* (1757), a vehicle capable of entering private residences and likewise divining a person's true inner character, and *The Travels of Monsieur Le Post-Chaise, Written by Himself* (1753) (Landreth 2013: 95, 106-7).

Sara Landreth (2013: 94) notes a scene in the latter, where M. Le Post-Chaise imagines a sexual encounter between its owner, Lord Travel, and a beautiful nun. As he imagines the interlude's impassioned conclusion he says: 'I was so much animated, that every Brace in me began to be in motion, and caus'd such a Disorder to my whole Composition, that I had lik'd to have shook out the Fore-Glass as I stood trembling. I sympathiz'd so much with his Lordship' (ctd. in Landreth 2013: 94). This scene demonstrates two significant elements that recur throughout it-narrative: animism and sexual commodification.

> For some eighteenth-century readers, M. Le Post-Chaise's experience of sympathetic 'animat[ion]' would suggest, perhaps blasphemously, that this particular vehicle is imbued with a soul. How else is an assemblage of material parts – oak panels, leather straps, silk upholstery – able to think or sympathise or narrate? (Landreth 2013: 94)

Landreth argues that vehicular it-narrative is a significant sub-genre which uses self-moving vehicles as metaphorical representations of a soul's vehicle, partaking in 'Enlightenment debates about the agency and location of the mind/soul' (2013: 114).

As such, vehicular narrators are written not only by means of animism, but become symbolic of it. The second trait highlighted is the prevalence of sexual content. Where a human body is a vehicle of the soul, in a consumerist society, it is also a commodity (Douglas 2011: 74). Where coaches, with their hidden interiors become voyeurs to the sexual exploits of their occupants (Landreth 2013: 106), monetary narrators cannot fail but to exchange hands through the purchase of the female body. Additionally, object narrators frequently represent female streetwalkers being circulated. Bonnie Blackwell convincingly establishes this allegory, citing evidence from the tales of a black coat, a sofa, an old shoe, and also *The History of Pompey the Little; or, the Life and Adventures of a Lapdog* (1751) which sees a spaniel, who 'though petted and spoiled like a kept woman … has a tendency to swap owners while wandering in the streets or the pleasure gardens' (Blackwell 2014: 270). Pompey the Little circulates as a 'token of love', but the speed with which he passes hands indicates the 'transience of love' and the commodification of love acts (Bellamy 2014: 127).

Animism transitions to children's literature

At the close of the eighteenth century, it-narrative was repurposed as children's literature (Blackwell 2014: 280). The transition also marked a century-long death knell in the easy acceptance of animism used to enact object narrators. With *The Adventures of a Pin Cushion* (1772), the first children's it-narrative, Mary Ann Kilner sought, at length, to relegate animism to the sole domain of the imagination (Blackwell 2014: 280). This is indicated in a verse on the title page:

> *Imagination* here supplies
> What nature's sparing hand denies;
> And by her magic powers dispense,
> To meanest objects thoughts and sense (Kilner 1788, emphasis added).

No longer a consumerist satire, enlightenment metaphor or sexual commodification allegory, it-narrative became a cautionary tale of what might happen if children did not behave, enacted through the use, but marginalisation, of animism; a precedent 'followed scrupulously by later it-novels' (Blackwell 2014: 280). The popularity of it-narrative in this guise solidified the transition, which was maintained throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

During that period, the animal narrator replaced the dominance of the object narrator. Examples include *Black Beauty* (1877), *Beautiful Joe* (1893) (based on a real dog), *Sable and White: The Autobiography of a Show Dog* (1894), *Pussy Meow: The Autobiography of a Cat* (1901), *Wind in the Willows* (1908), *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902) and the entire Potter corpus of twenty-three animal tales over three decades, *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) and *Charlotte's Web* (1952). Object narrators had not disappeared, as Hans Christian Anderson's (1805-1875) fairy tales attest with examples like 'The Steadfast Tin Soldier', but in discussing 'Machine Animism in Modern Children's Literature' in the 1960s, Joseph Schwarcz asserts that:

> inanimate objects as protagonists of tales can be found, before the latter half of the
> nineteenth century, only very rarely. In order to be the hero of the tale, the object has to

undergo a process of animation; it is shaped by technological processes so as to be useful to men, is perceived as an entity, and endowed out with 'life'; the leap fantasy has to take is much greater than in the anthropomorphization of talking beasts (1967: 78).

Schwarcz identifies several kinds of animistic machine stories, based on the degree of animism and autonomy displayed by the machine, and the narrative type; cautionary, didactic or heroic (1967). In the 1960s, he noted a nascent type of machine animism that, in the present, has become prolific: the 'androidal robot' (1967: 87). Scarecrow and Tin Man from *The Wizard of Oz* are forerunners, where the magic setting makes animism possible (Schwarcz 1967: 88). Today, robot narrators inhabit our world, a reflection of the transition from the mechanical to the technological age, where a sympathetic alliance exists between artificial intelligence, sentience, animism and modernity. Yet, more interesting than fictional robotic narrators are it-narrators that are real, and tell the truth.

Modern animism and artefact

In children's literature, an alignment has emerged between animism and true story. An object present during a notable historic event – an artefact – has, in the world of a child, become a suitable authority to mediate that event. There are two relevant children's books that have emerged from one such event, the loss of the *Titanic* in 1912. The sinking of this ocean liner remains the defining maritime disaster of the twentieth century and permeates popular culture. Both books mentioned here have an it-narrator telling the story of the ship's sinking, narrators that have subsequently become historical artefacts.

Pig on the Titanic: A True Story (Crew and Whatley 2005) is a traditional picture book combining word and image to create narrative. It tells of how *Titanic* passenger Edith Rosenbaum eased the fears of children in her lifeboat by playing her small music box, fashioned like a pig. Crew animates the music-box-pig, named for the song she plays[2], and she becomes a first person narrator: 'Oui oui! It's me, Maxixe. Of course I can play. So Miss Edith wound up my tail. Round and round it went … First I saw a little smile. Then I heard a giggle. My song had made the children laugh!' (2005: 22-4). Maxixe is a noteworthy it-narrator because, as a music-box-pig, she is at once both animal and object narrator.

A similar phenomenon occurs in *Polar: The Titanic Bear* (Spedden and McGaw 2002). This book animates a manufactured animal, a toy polar bear present in a different lifeboat to Maxixe. Daisy Corning Stone Spedden wrote the story as a 1913 Christmas present for her son, after both survived the disaster. It was published posthumously in 1992, after a resurgence of interest with the wreck's discovery in 1985. The book begins with Polar's 'creation' by the Steiff Company before he is sold at the iconic Schwartz Toy Bazaar in New York, and recounts his travels with the wealthy Spedden family through the Mediterranean. While the premise is Polar's autobiography, the *Titanic* disaster provides the climax. The alignment of animism and true story is particularly significant in this work. The original handwritten manuscript, now in the collection of The Titanic Museum, Massachusetts, was

entitled *My Story*, where 'My' refers to Polar, the first-person narrator. When published, it was located inside the book *Polar: The Titanic Bear,* which includes an introduction and an epilogue framing Spedden's story, and various paratextual elements. These include new, animistic illustrations, but principally a selection of primary source documents including family photographs, postcards, a steamer trunk sticker and a wireless telegraph ticket. The effect is curious. Unlike Kilner's insistence on it-narrative as imaginary, this book offers primary sources as evidence of the story's truth. These documents legitimise the animism of Polar in a way absent in most animistic children's literature, and align animism with nonfiction, seemingly – in modern Western society – polar opposites. Consider, for example, the resistance to animism present in general literature.

Novels that feature animal narrators are notorious for 'using the nonhuman perspective as an easy gimmick … relying on the grossest anthropomorphism, lapsing into … stereotypes about all species involved, and confirming a sense of humanity's ultimate superiority over other creatures' (Armbruster 2013: 18). This notoriety incites wariness in modern readers. However, there are examples of masterful it-narratives that feature animistic protagonists: *Animal Farm* (1945); *The Call of the Wild* (1903); *Watership Down* (1972); and, *The Metamorphosis* (1915)*,* where Gregor Sampsa is both human and animal. While successful animal narrators are less common than animal protagonists, they are not *un*common: as, for instance, in Red Peter, Kafka's ape in 'A Report to an Academy' (1917), Booker-nominated *Me Cheeta: The Autobiography* (2009), about the chimps in the Tarzan movies (based on a true story), and *New York Times* bestselling novel *The Art of Racing in the Rain* (2008) narrated by canine Enzo about his life with racing car driver Denny Swift (Armbruster 2013: 18). Popular fiction has also adopted the device in the humorous *Three Bags Full* (2005) about animistic crime-solving sheep and the *Chet and Bernie Mysteries* (2009-2015) where canine Chet narrates. Despite the popularity of some of these works, animal narration is a trope that still meets resistance:

> Today, literature that features talking animals garners little respect … Works that give voice to nonhuman animals are usually relegated to the category of "Kiddylit," and even serious writers risk contempt when they create a nonhuman narrator (Armbruster 2013: 15).

If resistance to animal narrators is significant, this is amplified for the infinitely rarer, modern object narrator. One marked example is Joanne Harris's (2001a) *Blackberry Wine*. The novel is narrated by a bottle of wine, a 1962 Fleurie from the Beaujolais region of France. Here, the object's narration also falls under the auspices of the novel's magical realism. However, the narrating wine is not the protagonist. It tells the story of Jay MacKintosh, a one-time-wonder author suffering from writer's block. The opening, as narrated by the Fleurie:

> Wine talks. Everyone knows that. Look around you. Ask the oracle at the street corner; the uninvited guest at the wedding feast; the holy fool. It talks. It ventriloquizes. It has a million voices. It unleashes the tongue, teasing out secrets you never meant to tell, secrets you never even knew … Take me, for instance. Fleurie, 1962. Last survivor of a crate of twelve, bottled and laid down the year Jay was born (Harris 2001a: 9-10).

The wine's animism becomes clear via the first-person narration. While these first-person reflections reappear, mostly the story occurs in omniscient narration, where the wine talks about Jay using third-person pronouns, and where the reader accesses Jay's thoughts, feelings and actions when apart from the Fleurie. This is significant because when *Blackberry Wine* was published in the United States (Harris 2001b), it was reconfigured to tell Jay's story entirely in third-person narration, with the wine no longer functioning as the storyteller. The Fleurie becomes as any other object in the text. This seems to signify resistance in certain markets to object animism. The amount of resistance encountered when it comes to imbuing inanimate objects with animism depends on the type of prose. In children's literature it is accepted. In fiction, as *Blackberry Wine* demonstrates, acceptance is not automatic, but is perhaps most at home in magical realist works. So what resistance might animism in nonfiction meet?

Nonfiction books written about real-life objects are called object biographies. They deliver an object's history, as it is understood, by considering its lifecycle of production, exchange and consumption, and its relationship with people and culture. This includes the metaphorical meanings people encode into objects (Gosden & Marshall 1999: 169; Kopytoff 2013: 66). The idea of the object biography is one that has previously co-existed with animism. In 1870, Annie Carrie wrote a children's science it-narrative entitled *Autobiographies of a Lump of Coal; a Grain of Salt; a Drop of Water; a Bit of Old Iron; a Piece of Flint*. It is a composite work where each 'thing' narrates a story to a group of children about the scientific life of the compound that it represents. The first autobiography opens with the children clustered hearthside, clamouring the eldest for a fairy tale. One of them exhorts another to stir the fire and 'break up that ugly, dark lump of Coal', to which the coal unexpectedly responds that if they let him lie on the cinders until he gets warm he will tell them a story 'which I think is as wonderful as any fairy tale can be, and that is — MY OWN HISTORY' (Carey 1870: 9, original emphasis). The animistic lump of coal then recounts his conversion from wood to carbon, discusses his chemical composition, his 'external qualities' including his black 'sub-metallic lustre', his role in industrialisation and his aspects of combustibility (Carey 1870: 10-9).

While modern object biographies do not enact animism, theoretically, applying literary animism to a real historical artefact would enliven the artefact as 'things' are enlivened in children's literature and prose fiction. This is perhaps best not done to the extent of sentience, as with the lump of coal and other it-narrators, as it would likely push nonfiction's boundaries too far if a writer wrote what an artefact thinks and feels or had it narrate its own true story. Certainly this is because of the resistance to animism mentioned at the outset, but also, how could a writer claim to know what an artefact ever thought or felt, and maintain the tenets of nonfiction? Artefacts cannot tell scribes their stories in the manner of fictional it-narrators. However, a considered use of literary animism could endow an artefact with a metaphysical vitality and esoteric dignity – a spirit – that underscores its relationship with the past, status as a *real* artefact, and own true story. Animism has the potential to embody artefact story in a way absent in object biography. It makes an artefact/object into a literary 'thing', and brings it to life. Not just on the page or in history, but in the reader's emotions.

The application of literary animism to historical artefacts has the potential to expand it-narrative into artefact-narrative.

Death of the artefact, death of the thing

Many of the it-narrators mentioned who, via animistic rendering, become assertive 'things' in these texts, also die. In *Blackberry Wine*, the Fleurie's death occurs when drunk in the final chapter. Thus with the death of the narrator, the story ends. In the animistic version, the protagonist ingests the narrator. The two merge and Jay becomes the vehicle for the Fleurie's soul. Is it then dead or alive? In eighteenth-century it-narrative death was mutable. In 'Remark on Dreaming', the disembodied voice dictating to the scribe and belonging to the flea whose soul transmutes between hosts after each one dies, is silenced when the unaware scribe notices the flea and kills it, in the flame of a candle (Hawkesworth 1823 [1752]: 29). *The Sedan,* that is capable of divining inner character, is similarly 'burned by a gang of drunken theatregoers' (Landreth 2013: 119). Here, the same mysticism that seemingly animates these objects allows them to exist either outside of physical form or to change into something else. The flea's spirit transfigures into a young woman who reproaches her scribe, the latest slayer of her physical form (Bellamy 2014: 122). The Sedan's 'vital spark' – his own words – 'is immortal' and 'even after his immolation, Mr Sedan continues to narrate a further one-hundred pages of his experiences, presumably in the form of this cinder spark' (Landreth 2013: 119). The coal in *Autobiographies of a Lump of Coal* notes as he 'dies' in the fire that he is merely changing atomic structure:

> [Heat] introduces all sorts of changes … my elements are obliged to seek out new friendships, which they do among themselves, but especially with the oxygen of the atmosphere. By degrees everything is so completely changed … that my existence as a Lump of Coal is terminated, and I disappear from your sight. Only pray remember this, that not an element of me is destroyed; that all that made me what I was, *still* exists, though invisible to you (Carey 1870: 20, original emphasis).

Shortly thereafter the coal delivers a 'final heroic soliloquy' (Collins 2004) as the heat splinters and combusts him, philosophising that 'nothing is ever really lost — nothing is ever actually destroyed' (Carey 1870: 23). As Paul Collins aptly says, there are many 'dying speeches in Victorian literature, all filled with fine sentiments. But none has ever matched this one: that we achieve immortality through the First Law of Thermodynamics' (2004).

Given the novelty of the animistic it-narrator in eighteenth-century society, it is unsurprising that when 'it' dies it often does not *really* die – unless it is an animal. Unlike objects, they cannot exist physically beyond biological life: Gregor Sampsa fades away into death. The betrayal and murder of Boxer in *Animal Farm* is heart wrenching. The lap-dog Pompey the Little 'was seized with a violent pthisic, and after a week's illness, departed this life on the second of *June*, 1749, and was gathered to the lap-dogs of antiquity' (Coventry 1761: 285). When Pompey died, he died. Yet, as a result of Pompey's elevation from animal/object to 'thing', he attains an enviable afterlife. He is immortalised by one of that age's 'greatest elegiac poets' who inscribes on an 'elegant marble monument':

> King of the garden, blooming rose!
> Which sprang'st from Venus' heavenly woes,
> When weeping for Adonis slain,
> Her pearly tears bedew'd the plain,
> Here now thy precious dews destil,
> Now mourn a greater beauty's ill;
> Ye lilies! hang your drooping head,
> Ye myrtles weep ! for Pompey dead;
> Light lie the turf upon his breast,
> Peace to his shade, and gentle rest (Coventry 1761: 286-7).

Additionally, Pompey is elevated from thing, to monarch, to artefact and, thereafter, God.

> He lay in state three days after his death, and her ladyship, at first, took a resolution of having him embalmed, but as her physicians informed her the art was lost, she was obliged to give over that chimerical project ; otherwise, our posterity might have seen him, some centuries hence, erected in a public library at a university ; and who knows but some antiquary of profound erudition, might have undertaken to prove, with quotations from a thousand authors, that he was formerly the *Egyptian Anubis?* (Coventry 1761: 285-6).

Notwithstanding the hyperbole – he is after all a lap-dog – Pompey as a thing manifests an all-too-human desire for immortality, in the form of legacy. As further evidence, consider that this it-narrative is entitled *A History of Pompey*, and the narrator refers to Pompey as a 'hero' and himself as the 'biographer' (Coventry 1761: 287-8).

The biographer of an artefact already has an object with a real legacy. If they wrote that artefact as animistic, theoretically, they would transform it from object/artefact to emotionally resonant 'thing'. This transition to thing is potentially more significant with artefacts than it is with everyday objects because artefacts function as ontological signifiers through their associations between the past and the present. These historical associations enable artefacts to be encoded with metaphorical meaning during object-viewer interactions (Pearce 1994: 19). For example, an artefact in a museum elicits a viewer's emotions in a manner similar to the way a souvenir evokes nostalgia. Museums call this the 'power of the real thing' (Pearce 1994: 19-20).

Writers leverage the power of the real thing in their works, as attested to by Maxixe and Polar, because a real thing is arguably more able to evoke empathy than a fictional thing. In *A Theory of Narrative Empathy,* Suzanne Keen defines empathy as 'a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect' (2006: 208) where one person feels the same emotion they believe someone else to be feeling. The neurological and psychological mechanisms behind empathy suggest that mirroring others' emotions contributes to effective functioning within social contexts, which itself contributes to survival (Keen 2006: 212). But empathy is not elicited solely in response to other people. Art evokes an aesthetic empathy 'which in its strongest form … describes a projective fusing with an object – which may be another person or an animal, but may also be a fictional character made of words, or even, in some accounts, inanimate

things such as landscapes, artworks, or geological features' (Keen 2006: 213). A comparison between two it-narrators, the fictional Black Beauty and the real Beautiful Joe, demonstrates the difference in how narrative empathy operates between a fictional thing and a real thing.

Anne Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877) has been called the 'most significant anticruelty novel of all time' (Bekoff and Meaney 2013: 313). As never before, its nineteenth-century readership collectively empathised with the plight of horses, embodied through the experiences of Black Beauty, the text's fictional narrator. Beauty was a gelding who was likely inspired by 'Bess', a beautiful black horse owned by the Sewell family, though only loosely as her life included none of those trials and mistreatments that Beauty endured (Smiley qtd. in Norris 2012). Pulitzer-prizewinning author Jane Smiley writes in a forward to Penguin's 2011 edition, 'What I got was what every reader of *Black Beauty* gets: an experience of almost uncanny empathy that went so deep into my memory that even now, after fifty years, I almost cannot read Anna Sewell's novel or think of it without tearing up' (in Sewell 2011: x). *Black Beauty* shows that 'the world is full of beings who should not be treated like objects' (Smiley in Norris 2012).

A similar public response occurred with (Margaret) Marshall Saunders' *Beautiful Joe* (1893), a text whose real canine narrator was abused as a puppy. Among other disgraces, the puppy's ears and tail were cut off. *Beautiful Joe* is a 'fictionalised account of actual events' where some details were changed (for example, a setting change from Meaford, Ontario to fictional Fairport, Maine) to comply with the rules of a literary competition sponsored by the American Humane Education Society (Davis 2016: 65). They sought to publish an 'American version of *Black Beauty*', since that text's focus on 'England's landed aristocracy and working-class cabbies rendered it distinctly foreign' (Davis 2016: 65). *Beautiful Joe* won the society's competition, with one of the judges calling it 'a stream of sympathy that flowed from the heart' (Butterworth in Saunders 1893). It became the first Canadian book to sell over one million copies, with millions more sold worldwide, and it was subsequently translated into fourteen languages (Beautiful Joe Heritage Society 2016).

The reception to *Black Beauty* (which was also widely translated) demonstrates the ability of it-narrators to elicit narrative empathy, to the extent that the text impelled changes to animal cruelty legislation in the United States. However, the relationship that exists in the real world between a person and an empathic onlooker does not exist as strongly between a fictional character and a reader, since instinctive empathetic responses can be stifled by the rationalisation that the character is in fact *not real* (Keen 2006: 212). So while the extent of the narrative empathy evoked by *Black Beauty* is undisputed, to some readers *Beautiful Joe* is all the more empathetically powerful because Joe was real.

One of the few things to evoke narrative empathy more strongly than the abuse of something real, is its death. Unlike many of the eighteenth century it-narrators, none of the real it-narrators discussed here die within their texts since these were written while their narrators were still 'alive'. Joe died years later, after finding a happy life with kind new owners. Sadly, no-one knows what befell Polar the bear after his young

owner died in 1915 (Spedden and McGaw 2002: 62) and Maxixe the music-box-pig became part of the collection of the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. Artefacts like Maxixe are fragile, which is one of the reasons that museums take such care with their preservation, however, a great many artefacts live a vulnerable existence outside of the protective walls of museums[3].

The real world destruction of artefacts is common and occurs most frequently in the name of progress or as a by-product of religious intolerance or war. It is as though by destroying an artefact the metaphorical meaning that it holds and the cultural heritage that it represents is also destroyed. There are examples of deliberate artefact destruction throughout history. During the eighteenth Egyptian dynasty cartouches and statues that depicted Queen Hatshepsut (1507-1458 BC) were destroyed in an attempt to erase her rule from history (Priewe, Reichel and Sarfraz 2015) and when Constantinople was sacked in the middles ages, among the priceless artefacts that were melted into coins was a fourth-century BCE colossal bronze statue of Hercules (Grafton, Most and Settis 2010: 152). The Third Reich's looting during the Second World War is legendary. Tens of thousands of artefacts are still missing or were destroyed, including modernist works that were labelled 'degenerate art' – pieces by artists like Picasso, Dali and Van Gogh. Artefact destruction is just as common today. In 2010 in Nevada, sacred Native American petroglyphs were defaced with a paintball gun (McMurdo 2011). During a single day in 2013, contractors building a new metro line razed five ancient Chinese tombs that predated the Qin dynasty (221-206 BC) (Caixiong 2013). In 2015, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) destroyed several 2000-year-old world heritage sites in Palmyra, including the Arch of Triumph, the Temple of Bel and the Temple of Baalshamin. The United Nations said that the 'true intent' of this 'systematic destruction' was to deprive the Syrian culture of their knowledge, identity and history, and called these acts of destruction a 'new war crime' (Bokova in UNESCO 2015).

If any of these artefacts became the focus of an artefact-narrative they would undergo a dual-death. The first death is historical fact: the artefact's real-life destruction, which carries varying degrees of emotional weight depending on an individual's connection to it, which may be religious or cultural or exist simply because some things speak to us more than others. The second death is at the hands of the writer. It is the death of the thing; the animate entity. The artefact's real-life destruction precipitates, in the artefact-narrative, the simultaneous death of the thing for the reader, since, having been enacted with a degree of animism commensurate to nonfiction, when an artefact dies physically, it dies spiritually, also.

Consider some precious object. A 1946 Indian Chief. A first edition *To Kill a Mockingbird.* An eighteenth-century escritoire. A third-generation pocket watch. A cherished wedding ring. How would its owner feel were it destroyed? Connections exist between individuals and things because people impose subjective value on them. Artefacts, in particular, accumulate meaning and value as time passes because they represent a cultural understanding of the past. Writers can use literary animism to highlight the subjective value of an artefact, certainly more so than with a fictional it-narrator, because the artefact is real, and the power of the real thing, and its death, is unassailable.

Endnotes

1. The Shakespeare's Head refers to a public house, not a bust.

2. When *Pig on the Titanic* was published in 2005 it was widely believed that the music box, long broken, played The Maxixe (Ma-sheesh). In 2013, The National Maritime Museum instituted a temporary patch to play and record the tune and subsequently determined that it was actually 'La Sorella March' (Royal Museums Greenwich 2013).

3. While safeguarding cultural heritage is a noble pursuit, too often museums function as citadels of colonialism and storehouses of dislocated culture.

Works cited

Appadurai, Arjun (ed) 2013 *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective* Cambridge: Cambridge UP

Armbruster, Karla 2013 'What do we want from talking animals? Reflections on literary representations of animal voices and minds' in M DeMello (ed) *Speaking for animals: animal autobiographical writing* New York: Routledge, 17-34

Beautiful Joe Heritage Society 2016 *Margaret Marshall Saunders – the storyteller and a woman ahead of her time*, at http://www.beautifuljoe.org/all-about-joe/the-story-teller (accessed 12 May 2016)

Bekoff, Marc and Carron Meaney 2013 *Encyclopedia of animal rights and animal welfare* New York: Taylor & Francis

Bellamy, Liz 2014 'It-narrators and circulation: Defining a subgenre' in M Blackwell (ed) *The secret life of things: animals, objects, and it-narratives in eighteenth-century England* Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 117-46

Blackwell, Bonnie 2014 'Corkscrews and courtesans: Sex and death in circulation novels' in M Blackwell (ed) *The secret life of things: animals, objects, and it-narratives in eighteenth-century England* Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 265-91

Blackwell, Mark (ed) 2007 *The secret life of things: animals, objects, and it-narratives in eighteenth-century England* Lewisburg: Bucknell UP

Brown, Bill 2003 'Thing theory' *Critical Inquiry* 28 (1), 1-22

Caixiong, Zheng 2013 'Developers raze ancient tombs' *China Daily USA* 17 June, at http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-06/17/content_16630051.htm (accessed 12 May 2016)

Carey, Annie 1870 *Autobiographies of a lump of coal; a grain of salt; a drop of water; a bit of old iron; a piece of flint* London: Cassell, Petter and Galpin, at https://books.google.com.au/books?id=JIcDAAAAQAAJ (accessed 10 May 2016)

Collins, Paul 2004 'You and your dumb friends: how autobiographies of animals and inanimate objects reveal the human capacity for empathy and decency' *The Believer* March, at http://www.believermag.com/issues/200403/?read=article_collins (accessed 10 May 2016)

Coventry, Francis 1761 *The history of Pompey the Little; or, the life and adventures of a lap-dog* (4 edn) London: R and J Dodsley, at http://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hn6dfp (accessed 12 December 2015)

Crew, Gary and Bruce Whatley 2005 *Pig on the Titanic: a true story* Australia: HarperCollins

Davis, Janet 2016 *The gospel of kindness: animal welfare and the making of modern America* USA: Oxford University Press

Douglas, Aileen 2011 'Britannia's rule and the it-narrator' *Eighteenth-century fiction* 6 (1), 65-82

Eck, Diana 2005 *Native American religious and cultural freedom: an introductory essay* The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, at http://pluralism.org/reports/view/176 (accessed 3 October 2015)

Flint, Christopher 1998 'Speaking objects: the circulation of stories in eighteenth-century prose fiction' *PMLA* 113 (2), 212-26

Gosden, Chris and Yvonne Marshall 1999 'The cultural biography of objects' *World Archaeology* 31 (2), 169-78

Grafton, Anthony, Glenn Most and Salvatore Settis 2010 *The classical tradition* Massachusetts: Harvard UP

Guthrie, Stewart 2001 'Rethinking animism' *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7 (1), 156-7

Harris, Joanne 2001a *Blackberry wine* Canada: Random House

Harris, Joanne 2001b *Blackberry wine* New York: Harper Collins

Haviland, William 2000 *Anthropology* (9 edn) Orlando: Harcourt College

Hawkesworth, John 1823 [1752] 'Remark on dreaming: various transmigrations related by a flea' *The Adventurer* (1) London: J. Richardson, at https://books.google.com.au/books?id=QXdHAAAAIAAJ (accessed 5 December 2015)

Keen, Suzanne 2006 'A theory of narrative empathy' *Narrative* 14 (3), 207-36

Kilner, Mary Anne 1788 *The adventures of a pincushion: designed chiefly for the use of young ladies* London: Isaiah Thomas, at https://books.google.com.au/books?id=dTxWAAAAcAAJ (accessed 22 November 2015)

Kopytoff, Igor 2013 'The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process' in A Appadurai (ed) *The social life of things: commodities in cultural perspective* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 64-90

Landreth, Sara 2013 'The vehicle of the soul: motion and emotion in vehicular it-narratives' *Eighteenth-century fiction* 26 (1), 93-120

Lupton, Christina 2011 *Knowing books: the consciousness of mediation in eighteenth-century Britain* Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P

McMurdo, Doug 2011 'Man sentenced to prison, fined for defacing petroglyph panels' *Las Vegas Review-Journal* 22 August, at http://www.reviewjournal.com/news/crime-courts/man-sentenced-prison-fined-defacing-petroglyph-panels (accessed 13 May 2016)

Norris, Michele 2012, *How 'Black Beauty' changed the way we see horses* National Public Radio, 2 November: at http://www.npr.org/2012/11/02/163971063/how-black-beauty-changed-the-way-we-see-horses (accessed 10 May 2016)

Pearce, Susan 1994 'Objects as meaning; or narrating the past' in S Pearce (ed) *Interpreting objects and collections* London: Routledge, 19-29

Priewe, Sascha, Clemens Reichel and Sheeza Sarfraz 2015 'Erasing history: ancient artefacts destroyed' *Royal Ontario Museum Blog*, at https://http://www.rom.on.ca/en/blog/erasing-history-ancient-artifacts-destroyed (accessed 12 May 2016)

Royal Museums Greenwich 2013 'Thanks for naming that tune!' *Royal Museums Greenwich blog*, at http://www.rmg.co.uk/discover/behind-the-scenes/blog/thanks-naming-tune (accessed 15 September 2015)

Saunders, Margaret Marshall 1893 'Beautiful Joe: An autobiography' Philadelphia: The Griffith and Rowland P, at http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/saunders/joe/joe.html (accessed 12 May 2016)

Schwarcz, Joseph 1967 'Machine animism in modern children's literature' *The Library Quarterly* 37 (1), 78-95

Sewell, Anna 2011 [1877] 'Foreword' *Black Beauty* London: Penguin

Spedden, Daisy Corning Stone and Laurie McGaw 2002 *Polar: the Titanic bear* Canada: Madison

UNESCO 2015 *Director-general Irina Bokova firmly condemns the destruction of Palmyra's ancient Temple of Baalshamin, Syria*, at http://en.unesco.org/news/director-general-irina-bokova-firmly-condemns-destruction-palmyra-s-ancient-temple-baalshamin (accessed 13 May 2016)